

Philemon

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, . . . the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Letter of Saint Paul to Philemon using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Paul and His Letters* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don’t miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church’s criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God’s unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church’s living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit’s guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you’ll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§] And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||} and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all th tioning,¹⁵ that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven . . . earth . . . under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

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Prepare

Read the Introduction to Philemon, paying particular attention to the *Purpose* and *Themes and Characteristics* of the book. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Philemon to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Philemon, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Philemon as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.



For Understanding

Philemon v. 9

- Why does Paul refer to himself in this verse as an elderly man?

- Why is the Greek word for “elderly man” translated “ambassador” here?

Philemon v. 11

- What wordplay is Paul making on Onesimus’ name?

- What indicates that Onesimus is ready to live up to his name?

Philemon v. 16

- With what kind of dilemma is Philemon faced?

- In Paul’s mind, what is Philemon’s recommended option? Why?

Philemon vv. 23–24

- What evidence suggests that the letter to Philemon was written at the same time and from the same place as Colossians?
- What evidence indicates that Paul sent these letters to believers in the same region (Asia Minor)?



For Application

Philemon vv. 4–7

- How often have you been verbally encouraged by fellow Catholics in the practice of your faith?
- What has been the effect of being (or not being) so encouraged?
- How often have you given this sort of encouragement?

Philemon vv. 8–9

- In a family or professional relationship, what is the point of saying, “I could *tell* you to do this, but I’d prefer to *ask* you to do it”?

Philemon

- What does the speaker hope to gain? (Hint: Compare vv. 14 and 21.) How might this approach communicate respect for the one addressed?

Philemon vv. 10–13

- What is the risk that Paul and Onesimus are both taking with Philemon?

- What kind of confidence in God are they showing?

- What kinds of spiritual risks are you willing to take in situations where the outcome is both unknown and critical?

Philemon vv. 18–19

- Think about the saying, “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.” Keeping in mind what Jesus says about how often we must forgive wrongs (for example, in Mt 18:22 or Lk 17:4), how Christian a saying is this?

- Would you be willing to vouch for the reformed character of someone who admitted to you that he had wronged the person to whom you are talking?

Reflect

After reading and reflecting on this chapter, I hear the Lord saying to me:

My prayer response to him:



Review and Respond

To complete your study of Philemon, prayerfully read it straight through, focusing on the biblical text alone. What stands out to you?

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. What is your response to him?