Not only in this letter to Philemon, but also to the whole church at Colossae, Paul commends Onesimus. He does this, having exhorted the slave masters to grant justice to their slaves, knowing there is a greater Master in heaven (Col 4). This would not be lost on Philemon.

The letter to Philemon is nearly 2000 years old. It is not unique in this, because we can read a great many letters of that time which have come down to us by some means.

This letter to Philemon is special because it so beautifully portrays mature Christian attitudes and relationships. It also exemplifies the peace and reconciliation between men that the gospel of Christ brings about.

There are three special ideas that this letter exemplifies for us...

1. **Voluntary Goodness**

Paul could order Philemon to welcome back Onesimus unpunished, nevertheless he leaves it to Philemon's own free will (Phm 1:8-9,14,21).

One person may do something because he is obligated, another because he is rewarded, another in order to graciously give.

We would all recognise the latter as the most noble. It is not wrong for Christians to be moved by the fear of God's wrath, but it is nobler to be moved by his grace and love. Paul wanted Philemon to be so moved.

2. **Accepting Providence**

Paul saw God working things out for Onesimus (Phm 1:15) and through prayers even for himself (Phm 1:22). The spirit of dog-eat-dog and self-congratulation, is so common among people of the world.

However, that is not the spirit of the mature Christian. The mature Christian looks for God's providence, and accepts whatever answers God grants.

3. **Helping the Helpless**

Today people fight for their rights, while all around them people are downtrodden and helpless.

Paul owed nothing to Onesimus, but he was willing to write a promissory note for an unspecified amount, taking upon himself the debt that Onesimus could not pay (Phm 1:18-19). He must have been conscious, as he did so, that when he was helpless Christ had died for him (Rom 5:6).

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**Paul's Letter to Philemon**

1:1-3 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our beloved fellow worker, to the beloved Apphia, to Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the assembly in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:4-7 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, hearing of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; that the fellowship of your faith may become effective, in the knowledge of every good thing which is in us in Christ Jesus. For we have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

1:8-9 Therefore though I have all boldness in Christ to command you that which is appropriate, yet for love's sake I rather beg, being such a one as Paul, the aged, but also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

1:10-16 I beg you for my child, whom I have become the father of in my chains, Onesimus, who once was useless to you, but now is useful to you and to me. I am sending him back. Therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, whom I desired to.