



Philemon - 1 chapter

Title:

The Epistle to Philemon – because this letter was written to his friend Philemon, who was part of the church in Colossae (the same church as the Epistle to the Colossians). Philemon is the shortest book in the New Testament.

Author:

Written by Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul was a strict Pharisee in Jerusalem until he had a revelation of Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul spent the rest of his life as a missionary proclaiming Jesus to Gentiles around the Mediterranean. Paul wrote 13 of the Books of the New Testament.

Occasion and Purpose:

Paul knew Philemon and somehow was influential in his salvation. Philemon had a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus ran away and probably stole from Philemon in the process. Onesimus somehow made his way to Rome and happened to meet up with Paul, who was in prison. Onesimus was converted and very helpful to Paul. Since Paul was sending a letter to the Colossian church, he sent Onesimus back to Philemon, along with this letter.

Paul needed to send Onesimus back, for his own protection, but also to do what is right by Philemon. But he did not want to send him back to slavery and punishment. So, he sent a letter advocating for Onesimus to be forgiven and received as a Christian brother.

Themes:

1. **Forgiveness** – This book shows that the Christian ethic of forgiveness actually works in the real world. Philemon had every legal right to punish Onesimus, but he did not carry it out. Rather, he forgave him. This happened because Paul didn't turn him in to be executed, but sent him back to be reconciled and forgiven by the master he had harmed. Onesimus was possibly the same person later mentioned by that name as the bishop of the Ephesian church.
2. **Relativizing Slavery** – In this letter, Paul has done better than demanding the overturning of slavery. If Paul would have insisted on outlawing slavery that minute, it would have done absolutely no good, and likely would have been counter-productive. So Paul worked to get master and slave both saved, making them brothers instead of master and slave. This raised the slave to the level of fully human, as part of the same class and community, which is the truth that ultimately led to the overturning of slavery around the world.
3. **Personal Appeal** – Paul could have pulled rank and commanded Philemon to do what he was told. But rather Paul emphasized how much they shared together and asked Philemon to do what is right, based on their relationship. Paul wanted Philemon to voluntarily do what he ought to do from the heart because he was convinced it was the right thing to do, and not because he was forced to do it.

Summary:

Paul was sending Onesimus, a runaway slave, back to Philemon. But first Paul reminded Philemon of their shared love and partnership in ministry. Paul thanked Philemon for always doing what is right and expressed confidence that he would continue to do so. Then Paul asked for a deeply personal favor on behalf of someone who had become very dear to Paul and valuable to him. Only then did Paul mention Onesimus and appeal to Philemon to forgive him, receive him as a brother in Christ, and send him back to Paul to continue assisting him in ministry. Paul promised to make up for any harm that Onesimus had done in the past, and expressed hope to soon see Philemon in person.

Organization:

1-3 Introduction/Salutation	
4-7 Thanksgiving & Prayer	
8-21 Appeal for Onesimus	
	8-11 Not a command, but an appeal
	12-16 Send him back as a brother, not as a slave
	17-21 Welcome him and charge it to my account
22-25 Conclusion	

Key Verses:

vv. 8-9, 12-14, 15-18, 21