

# Philemon

**AUTHOR:** Paul

**TIME WRITTEN:** **AUTHOR:** Paul

**TIME WRITTEN:** A.D. 60 or 61 from Rome

**POSITION IN THE BIBLE:**

- 57th Book in the Bible
- 18th book in the New Testament
- 13th of 21 epistle books
- 7th of Paul's 13 books
- 56 have preceded it. 9 to follow it.

**CHAPTERS:** 1

**VERSES:** 25

**WORDS:** 445

**KEY WORD:** Christian Forgiveness

**TWO KEY VERSES:**

1. **Philemon 16-17** - "No longer as a slave but more than a slave-- a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me."

## **OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PHILEMON**

1. Does Christian brotherly love really work, even in situations of extraordinary tension and difficulty?
  - a. Will it work, for example, between a prominent slave owner and one of his runaway slaves?
  - b. Paul has no doubt that real Christian brotherly love does work.
  - c. He writes a brief letter to Philemon, his beloved brother and fellow worker, on behalf of Onesimus—
    1. A deserter.
    2. A thief.
    3. A formerly worthless slave.
    4. But now Philemon's brother in Christ.
  - d. With much tact and tenderness, Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back with the same gentleness with which he would receive Paul himself.
  - e. Any debt Onesimus owes, Paul promises to make good.
  - f. Knowing Philemon, Paul is confident that brotherly love and forgiveness will carry the day.

2. Like 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, this epistle is addressed to an individual, but unlike the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon is also addressed to a family and a church. verse 2
3. Putting this epistle in perspective:
  - a. It appears that a slave named Onesimus had robbed or in some other way wronged his master Philemon and had escaped.
  - b. He had made his way from Colosse to Rome where he had found relatively safety among the masses in the imperial city and capital of the Roman Empire.
  - c. Somehow Onesimus had come into contact with the apostle Paul.
    1. It is possible that Onesimus had even sought out Paul for help.
    2. Onesimus no doubt had heard Philemon speak of Paul.
  - d. Paul led Onesimus to Christ. verse 10.
  - e. Although Onesimus had become a real asset to Paul, both knew that, as a Christian, Onesimus had a responsibility to return to Philemon.
  - f. That day came when Paul wrote his epistle to the Colossians.
    1. Tychicus was the bearer of that letter.
    2. Paul decided to send Onesimus along with Tychicus to Colosse, (Colossians 4:7-9; Philemon 12, knowing that it would be safer in view of slave-catchers, to send Onesimus with a companion.
4. Philemon is one of the four Prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians being the other three).
  - a. The time frame for the Book of the Colossians serves for the Book of Philemon as well.
  - b. It was written in A.D. 60 or 61 and dispatched at the same time as Colossians during Paul's Roman imprisonment. verses 2, 9-10, 13, 23
  - c. **Philemon 22** reflects Paul's confident hope of release: "prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you."
5. Who was Philemon?
  - a. Philemon was a resident of Colosse. Colossians 4:9, 17; Philemon 1-2
  - b. He was a convert of Paul (Philemon 19), perhaps through an encounter with Paul in Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey.
  - c. Philemon's house was large enough to serve as the meeting place for the church there. verse 2
  - d. He was benevolent to others. verses 5-7
  - e. Evidently his son Archippus held a position of leadership in the church at Colosse. Colossians 4:17; Philemon 2
  - f. Philemon may have had other slaves in addition to Onesimus, and he was not alone as a slaveholder among the Colossian believers. Colossians 4:1
  - g. Thus, this letter and his response, would provide guidelines for other master-slave relationships.

6. According to Roman law, runaway slaves such as Onesimus could be severely punished to condemned to a violent death.
7. It is doubtful that Onesimus would have returned to Philemon even with this letter if he had not become a Christian.
8. The Book of Philemon, Paul's only one-chapter book, develops the transition from bondage to brotherhood that is brought about by Christian love and forgiveness.
  - a. Just as Philemon was shown mercy through the grace of Christ, so he must graciously forgive his repentant runaway who has returned as a brother in Christ.
  - b. Paul writes this letter as a personal appeal that brother Philemon receive brother Onesimus even as he would receive Paul.
9. The letters is also addressed to other Christians in Philemon's circle, because Paul wants it to have an impact on the Colossians church as a whole.

## **SUMMARY OF PHILEMON**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

- A. The briefest of Paul's epistles (only 334 words in the Greek text and 445 in the KJV) is a model of courtesy, discretion, and loving concern for the forgiveness of one who would otherwise face the sentence of death.
- B. The two letters (Colossians and Philemon) arrived at the same time.
- C. There are three major sections in the book:
  1. Prayer of Thanksgiving for Philemon. (1-7)
  2. Petition of Paul for Onesimus. (8-16)
  3. Promise of Paul to Philemon. (17-25)

### **PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING FOR PHILEMON. (verses 1-7)**

- A. Writing this letter as a "prisoner of Christ Jesus," Paul addresses it personally to:
  1. Philemon - A Christian leader at Colosse.
  2. Apphia - Apparently Philemon's wife.
  3. Archippus - Evidently Philemon's son and also a leader in the church in Colosse.
  4. The church that meets in Philemon's house.
- B. The main body of this compact letter begins with a prayer of thanksgiving for philemon's faith and love.

### **PETITION OF PAUL FOR ONESIMUS. (verses 8-16)**

- A. Basing his appeal on Philemon's character, Paul refuses to command Philemon to pardon and receive Onesimus.
  - 1. Instead, Paul seeks to persuade his friend of his Christian responsibility to forgive even as he was forgiven by Christ.
  - 2. Paul urges Philemon not to punish Onesimus but to receive him "no longer as a slave" but as "a beloved brother." verse 16

**PROMISE OF PAUL TO PHILEMON. (verses 17-27)**

- A. Paul places Onesimus's debt on his account, but then reminds Philemon of the greater spiritual debt Philemon himself owes as a convert to Christ. verses 17-19
- B. Paul closes this effective epistle with a hopeful request (v. 22), greetings from his companions (verses 23-24), and a benediction. v. 25
- C. The fact that it was preserved would seem to indicate Philemon's favorable response to Paul's pleas.