

The Book of Philemon

Introduction

- ❖ The briefest of Paul's epistles (only 334 words in the Greek text) demonstrates Paul's courtesy and discretion when He might have invoked His authority.
 - ❖ Paul shows concern for the forgiveness of one (Onesimus) who could face severe consequences.
 - ❖ On whom does Philemon's forgiveness of Onesimus have impact? Why?
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Author

- ❖ General consensus recognizes Philemon as the work of Paul.
- ❖ It is supported externally by consistent tradition and internally by three references to Paul (vv. 1, 9, 19).

Date

- ❖ Philemon is one of the four "Prison Epistles" (Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians were the others). It was written in AD 60 or 61 and dispatched at the same time as Colossians during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Philemon 22 reflects Paul's hope of release from captivity.

Background of Letter

- ❖ It appears that a slave named Onesimus ran away from his master and escaped to Rome. Somehow, Onesimus came into contact with Paul, who taught him Christ. Paul, knowing that Onesimus had a legal responsibility to return to Philemon, he sends Onesimus back with Tychicus to Colosse carrying the epistle to Philemon as well as the letter to the Colossians.

- ❖ Philemon was a resident of Colosse and a convert of Paul (v. 19). Philemon's house was large enough to serve as a meeting place for the church there (v. 2). He was benevolent to other believers (vv. 5–7), and his son Archippus evidently held a position of leadership in the church (Col. 4:17; Philem. 2). Philemon was not alone as a slave owner among the Colossian believers (Col. 4:1). Thus, this letter provided guidelines for other master-slave relationships.

Outline of Philemon

- ❖ I. The Prayer of Thanksgiving for Philemon 1–7
- ❖ II. The Petition of Paul for Onesimus 8–16
- ❖ III. The Promise of Paul to Philemon 17–25

Questions - Philemon 1:1-25

1. To whom is the letter addressed? Why?
2. Why did Paul mention this brother in his prayers? (4-9)
3. Why did Paul not command Philemon what to do? (8-9)
4. Does this mean Philemon could rightly refuse Paul's plea?
5. How did Paul describe his relationship with Onesimus? (10-11)
6. How could Paul beget Onesimus while in chains? (see Acts 28:30)
7. Why did Paul send Onesimus back even though he helped him? (12-16)
8. How was Philemon to greet Onesimus when he returned? (17)
9. What was Paul willing to do for Onesimus and Philemon? (18-19)
10. Of what debt did Paul remind Philemon? (19)
11. What response from Philemon did Paul anticipate? (20-21) Why?
12. What was Paul anticipating? (22)