

# Philemon

## Introduction:

- I. The epistle of Philemon was written by the apostle Paul and is the shortest of his thirteen letters.
  - A. It was written from Rome during Paul's first imprisonment.
    1. This would date the letter to sometime between 60 to 62 AD.
    2. This would also be about the same time as the writing of other "prison epistles" (Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians).
  - B. The letter was written to Philemon, a fellow Christian living in Colossae, who was also the owner of a slave known as Onesimus.
    1. Onesimus had run away from his master and fled to Rome.
      - a. To finance his journey, Onesimus apparently stole something from his master (Philemon 18), or at the very least, caused his master to lose the money somehow.
    2. During this time Paul was under "house arrest" in Rome and was permitted to receive visitors while waiting to appeal his case to Caesar (Acts 28:16-31).
      - a. Onesimus joined other disciples who were caring for Paul at his private rented quarters during his first imprisonment.
      - b. Apparently, while caring for Paul, Onesimus was taught the gospel and became a Christian.
      - c. Following his conversion, Onesimus was convinced of the need to return to his master.
    3. Paul's letter to Philemon was hand-delivered by the runaway slave.
      - a. Paul urged Philemon to accept Onesimus back in the spirit of forgiveness, and more importantly, to accept Onesimus back as a fellow brother in Christ.

**Review Questions:**

**I. Greeting and Salutation (vs 1-3)**

1. What significance do you see in Paul calling himself "a prisoner of Christ Jesus?" (v 1)
2. What two meanings could be drawn from Paul's statement to Philemon about "the church in your house?" (v 2)

**II. Commendation (vs 4-7)**

1. Explain the significance of the following characteristics Paul found in the life of Philemon.
  - a. Love:
  - b. Faith:
  - c. Acknowledgement (knowledge) of every good thing:
  - d. Refreshes the hearts of the saints:

**III. Appeal (vs 8-21)**

1. Why did Paul appeal to Philemon to receive Onesimus rather than command him to receive the runaway slave? (v 9)
2. In what ways was Paul able to call Onesimus "my son... whom I have begotten while in my chains?" (v 10)
3. According to Paul, how was Onesimus "profitable (useful) both to you and to me"? (v 11) Paul used a play on words in verse 11 when he said Onesimus was once "unprofitable" but is now "profitable." Look up these words in a Greek-English dictionary and explain Paul's meaning.
4. Paul said he was sending Onesimus back. In doing so, Philemon was to receive Onesimus as though he was receiving Paul's "own heart." (v 12) Explain.
5. Paul seems to believe there may be a reason why Onesimus left his master and fled to Paul. (vs 15-16) What could the reason (or reasons) be?

6. Explain how Philemon was to receive Onesimus back as a brother "both in the flesh and in the Lord." (v 16)
7. What does Paul mean by the words "put that on my account?" (v 18)
8. What did Philemon owe Paul? (v 19)
9. Explain how Paul's heart would be refreshed in the Lord. (vs 20-21)

#### **IV. Conclusion and Benediction (vs 22-25)**

1. What was Paul's final request, and in what subtle way does he tell Philemon how he should receive Onesimus?
2. Look up the following persons in a Bible dictionary and give a brief description of each:
  - a. Onesimus:
  - b. Epaphras:
  - c. Mark:
  - d. Aristarchus:
  - e. Demas:
  - f. Luke: