

PHILEMON

A personal letter to Philemon intended to be read to the entire church that meets in Philemon's home in the city of Colossae. It was sent at the same time as Colossians, which includes instruction on the relationship between slaves and masters here on earth: Col. 3:22-25

Theme: The power of the gospel to transform lives and to impact human relationships.

Background: Apparently either during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus, or because of Epaphras bringing the gospel to Colossae, Philemon believed and was saved. He began serving the cause of Christ in the Colossian community, opening his home for a group of Christians to meet there regularly.

Possibly having stolen money or property, a bondservant of Philemon named Onesimus fled to Rome. He somehow came into contact with the apostle Paul and became a Christian. Paul knew that Onesimus's fugitive status, severed relationship, and wrongdoing against his master needed to be addressed. Paul wrote this letter as an appeal to Philemon to appreciate the transformation that has occurred in Onesimus's life and to receive him back not merely as a bondservant but as a "beloved brother".

Literary Feature: This letter is considered a masterpiece of persuasion. Paul begins by building rapport and goodwill with his reader, he then lays out the facts in a way that will be convincing, and finally he appeals to the emotional fact of the matter. Paul's letter provides a framework for us as we build relationships and mediate disputes.

Aside from general greetings, why do you suppose this letter was written to the recipients mentioned?

From the first two verses alone, what information do you have about this man Philemon?

From v.8, what is the word "therefore"(NIV) in Paul's plea for Onesimus *there for*? (Luke 6:32)

v.8-9 - What *could* Paul have done in this matter? What does Paul do instead?

v.13-14 - What had Paul wished to do with Onesimus? Why had Paul refrained from doing what he wished?

v.15-16 - What did Paul see as the "possible" reason for this turn of events? (Esther 4:14)

v.17 -Upon what basis does Paul ask Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would Paul himself?

(John 15:14-15, Gal 3:28)

v.22 – How might Paul's request here tactfully induce Philemon to honor his request for Onesimus?

What applications can we take from this letter regarding the behavior of each man?

Paul _____

Philemon _____

Onesimus _____

In what way does this interaction between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus reflect what Jesus did with the Father on our behalf?