

Philemon Notes

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Introduction:

Paul – He is writing this letter at about 60 AD from Rome while under house arrest. He will write this letter to Philemon and send it by the hand of Onesimus. (Col. 4:9)

- Colossians and Philemon were written at the same time and delivered by the same person. (Compare Col. 4:7-9 and Philemon 23-24.)

Philemon – He is a convert of Paul (v. 19) who lives and hosts a house church in Colosse. He's also the slave owner of Onesimus, who has robbed and run away from Philemon.

Onesimus – He is the slave, who somehow came to meet Paul and receive Jesus while Paul was held in prison in Rome (v. 10). This letter is written to restore Onesimus to Philemon, not as a slave, but now as a brother in Christ.

- There were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. Slaves were treated very harshly in an attempt to stop any possible rebellion of the slaves.
- The typical price for a slave in the Roman Empire was 500 denarii. (A denarius was a typical day's wage.)
- Runaway slaves were often executed. Other runaways were branded with an "F" on their foreheads for being fugitives.

Chapter 1:

1:1 – "prisoner" – Paul is under house arrest in Rome before his first trial.

- "of Christ Jesus" – Paul knew that every circumstance in his life was ultimately between him and Jesus.
- "Philemon" – means "the loving one."

1:2 – "Apphia" – Most likely Philemon's wife.

- "Archippus" – Possibly Philemon and Apphia's son.
- "fellow soldier" – Archippus fought for the sake of the gospel alongside Paul and Philemon. (Col. 4:17)
- "the church in your house" – As the Church grew under the Roman Empire, it often met in houses.
 - Paul used public meeting places like synagogues and schools for the gatherings of the Church.
 - The function is more important than the form. Does the location(s) allow for an Acts 2:42 church?

1:4 – "thank my God" – Philemon lived his life in a way that could make Paul thankful.

- The basis of this letter is relationship. Relationship with God and relationship with one another.
- Christian relationship takes time, communication, mutual investment, trust, and commitment to one another; but most of all, it takes two people personally seeking Jesus. (1 John 1:4)
- "in my prayers" – Men of God are men of prayer.

- 1:5 – “toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints” – Loving God and loving others...in the right order.
- “all” – This even includes a runaway slave named Onesimus.
- 1:6 – “sharing” – (Greek “koinonia”) Lit. “all things common.”
- “the acknowledgement of every good thing which is in you” – This is the essence of growth in the Christian’s life. Not getting more, but working out what has already been placed in us through faith in Jesus Christ. (Phil. 2:12-13)
- 1:7 – “hearts” – Lit. “bowels, intestines.”
- 1:8 – “command you” – Jesus told us not to lord it over others as the Gentiles do.
- “fitting” – Paul has already determined what is right in this situation.
 - The New Testament, while not directly confronting the institution of slavery, clearly communicates that it is better to be free. (1 Cor. 7:21)
 - Paul dealt with slavery one person at a time. He didn’t picket, rally, or write a book or an encyclical. He wrote this letter to free this man.
 - The method is as important as the result. Paul could make Philemon release Onesimus, but that would be the wrong way to get Philemon to do the right thing.
- 1:9 – “appeal” – (Greek “parakaleo”) Lit. “comfort, exhort.”
- Paul will not take away the freedom of Philemon as Philemon had done to Onesimus.
 - “the aged” – Paul is likely in his late 50’s or early 60’s as he writes this.
 - “also a prisoner” – Philemon has suffered at the loss of Onesimus. But Paul reminds Philemon that there are some in the body of Christ suffering more than he is. This allows us to maintain perspective when dealing with our own loss.
- 1:10 – “begotten while in my chains” – Paul led Onesimus to Jesus while he was imprisoned.
- 1:11 – “profitable” – Onesimus means “profitable.” (Col. 4:9)
- 1:12 – “I am sending him back” – Paul is forcing Philemon and Onesimus to deal with this situation.
- “my own heart” – Paul communicates this with emotion and compassion.
- 1:13 – “on your behalf” – Onesimus can serve Paul in Philemon’s place.
- “minister to me in my chains” – Paul has given up some things for the Gospel too.
- 1:14 – “not be by compulsion” – God does not motivate by pressure or obligation, as man often does.
- Any attempt to demand submission to a man directly contradicts the heart of God that would lead us to Him directly. (2 Cor. 1:24; 1 Pet. 5:2; Rev. 2:6)
 - “but voluntary” – Paul is asking Philemon to voluntarily surrender Onesimus to the work of God with Paul.
 - Paul will not subvert the “normal” relations of life for the “greater” work of serving God...as the Pharisees were doing in Matt. 15:3-7.
- 1:15 – “perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose” – God has a way of making the worst situations turn out for the best.
- “perhaps” – Paul is very gracious in proposing the will of God in these circumstances.

- 1:17 – “partner” – (Greek “koinonia”) Lit. “all things common.” (v. 6)
- “receive him as you would me” – Paul is asking Philemon to forgive Onesimus.
 - Philemon would have rights in that culture to execute Onesimus.
- 1:18 – “my account” – Paul is willing to cover whatever loss Philemon will take by releasing Onesimus.
- 1:19 – “writing with my own hand” – Likely written in large letters.
- “you owe me even your own self” – This may mean that Paul led Philemon to the Lord in the first place.
- 1:21 – “Having confidence in your obedience” – That is the presumptive close.
- 1:22 – “I shall be granted to you” – Paul’s future visit to Philemon would make sure Onesimus actually returned to Philemon as well as made Philemon realize he would have to deal with the consequences of his decision before Paul in the near future.
- 1:23 – “Epaphras” – Likely the pastor of the church at Colosse. (Col. 1:7; 4:12)
- 1:24 – “Mark” – Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11.
- “Aristarchus” – Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2; Col. 4:10.
 - “Demas” – He is last mentioned in 2 Tim. 4:10.
 - “Luke” – Col. 4:14.
- 1:25 – “Amen” – We are not told how this matter resolved, but we do know that in 110 AD the bishop of the city of Ephesus was a man named Onesimus. If Onesimus was in his early 20’s at the time of the writing of Philemon, then he would be around 70 years old in 110 AD.
- Roman record tell us this Onesimus was stoned to death in Rome by the Emperor Trajan.