

Paul Writes Philemon



When: *The winter of A.D. 62 or spring of A.D. 63*
From Where: Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30-31)

Synopsis

- One of four epistles written by Paul while in his first Roman imprisonment
- The shortest letter of all the 13 N.T. epistles penned by Paul
- A personal letter to one individual
 - The only letter of the 10 “journey epistles” not addressed to a local church
- Three times Paul refers to himself as a “prisoner” (vv. 1, 9-10, 13)
- Carried by Tychicus along with the letters to Ephesus & Colossae
 - Not stated as in **Ephesians & Colossians**
 - However, given Paul identifies Onesimus as from Colossae (Col. 4:7-9), this is the most logical and certain assumption to make
- Possibly, Paul had converted Philemon even though he had never been to Colossae
 - Philemon “owed Paul his own life” (v. 19)
- Timothy also mentioned in this letter...he had joined Paul in prison at Rome (v. 1; cp. Col. 1:1)
- Paul sends a heart-felt appeal to Philemon re: Onesimus
 - Onesimus was Philemon’s slave who had run away, come into contact with Paul at Rome, and was converted by the imprisoned apostle (vv. 10-14, 16-17)
 - A story of Divine providence (v. 15a)
 - A story of brotherly love & forgiveness (vv. 8-9, 12, 15b-18)
- Only here (v. 22) and in **Phil. 1:19-20, 25-26** do we have information telling us Paul’s expectations re: his release from Roman imprisonment

Outline

Paul sends his opening greetings & exhortations (vv. 1-7)

- To Philemon, Apphia & Archippus, and the church in their house (vv. 1-2; cp. Col. 4:17)
- Gratitude & prayer for Philemon’s faithfulness (vv. 4-5, 7)

Paul makes his personal appeal re: Onesimus (vv. 8-20)

- He could “order” or “command”...but rather, he “appeals for love’s sake” (vv. 8-9)

The Two Treatises

Lesson 61

Outline (cont.)

- He had “begotten” Onesimus in prison, but was sending him back (vv. 10-14)
 - A runaway slave was “useless”...now a brother, he had been “useful to Paul” and would prove to be useful to Philemon, his lawful master
- An admission that Divine providence works in ways often hard to see & understand (vv. 15-16)
 - Even an inspired apostle could not say for certain why Onesimus had run away to Rome
 - Philemon is told his relationship with Onesimus has changed “...forever”
- An attempt to fully persuade Philemon to receive Onesimus back without problems (vv. 17-20)
 - *“If you regard me as a partner, accept him as you would accept me.”*
 - *“If he has wronged you in any way, put that to my account.”*
 - *“You owe to me your own self as well.”*

Paul gives his closing personal remarks & final exhortations (vv. 21-25)

- He had confidence Philemon would do as he requested...even more (v. 21)
- He requests Philemon to prepare a room for him...he plans a visit after he is released (v. 22)
- Greetings from other brethren and a final word of encouragement (vv. 23-25)