

Author

1. The Apostle Paul(1:1)

Date

1. sometime in AD 60
2. Paul is writing from Rome during his imprisonment. Thus, this letter is grouped with Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians as one of Paul's "Prison Epistles".

Audience and Occasion

1. Paul is writing to Philemon, a member of the church at Colossae.
2. A reconstruction based on the evidence suggests that a slave of Philemon by the name of Onesimus has run away from Philemon, perhaps even having stolen.
3. This slave has found Paul in Rome and, hearing the gospel from Paul, believed (vs 10)
4. It is unknown if he was looking for Paul or, if so, why.
5. Now Paul is sending him back to Philemon with the request that Philemon receive him as a Christian brother rather than a slave.
6. Paul is, effectively, asking Philemon to give Onesimus his freedom and also hinting that he would like Onesimus back to help him in his ministry.

Outline

- I. Salutation (1-3)
- II. Thanksgiving (4-7)
- III. The Plea for Onesimus (8-22)
 - A. Paul's Return of Onesimus (8-16)
 1. The Person of Onesimus Introduced (8-10)
 2. The Value of Onesimus Assessed (11)
 3. The Freedom of Onesimus Suggested (12-16)
 - B. Philemon's Reception of Onesimus (17-22)
 1. The Basis: Paul as Cosigner for Onesimus (17-21)
 2. The Hope: Paul as Guest of Philemon (22)
- IV. Final Greetings (23-25)

Onesimus

1. Onesimus means "useful" in Greek. Therefore, it appears as though Paul is making a playful pun on the name in Philemon 11 where he says that now that he is a brother in Christ Onesimus is "indeed useful".
2. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch in the early second century, wrote a letter to the Church in Ephesus (about AD 107) in which he refers to Onesimus as the Bishop of Ephesus. This may well be the same person – from slave, to brother, to bishop.

Audience and Occasion (cont'd)

1. Philemon was apparently converted under Paul's ministry (vs 19), but Paul had not been to Colossae.
2. Therefore, either Paul is suggesting a longer chain of cause and effect (Philemon was converted under the ministry of someone converted under Paul's ministry) or Philemon was under Paul's ministry somewhere other than Colossae.
3. Most scholars assume the latter given the personal nature of the letter.

Key Themes

1. The power of the gospel to transform identity and relationship.
2. Paul's pastoral example – this is how we should all, pastors especially, approach the "iron sharpening iron" aspect of Christian relationship.
3. Paul has the authority to command in this situation, but rather than command he makes gospel arguments for what is right.
4. A key application is not only for pastors in serving parishioners but for parents in raising children. "Because I said so" may have its place, but is a rather blunt instrument.
5. Love is the watch word (vs 8-9)
6. Slavery and the Gospel

Paul's Epistle to...

PHILEMON

Outline from Dan Wallace, bible.org

Book Recommendations:

1. *Colossians, Philemon* by David Garland (NIVAC)
2. *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* by Kent Hughes (PtW)
3. *ESV Expository Commentary (vol 11) Ephesians-Philemon* by Iain Duguid

Philemon Study Guide

Basics

Author: Paul

Date: c. AD 60

Original Audience: Philemon*

Major Section: Pauline Epistles

Philemon Outline

1. Salutation (1-3)
2. Thanksgiving (4-7)
3. The Plea for Onesimus (8-22)
 - a. Paul's Return of Onesimus (8-16)
 - b. Philemon's Reception of Onesimus (17-22)
4. Final Greetings (23-25)

Recommended Commentaries

1. *Colossians, Philemon* by David Garland (The NIV Application Commentary)
2. *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* by Kent Hughes (Preach the Word series)
3. *Ephesians-Philemon* by Iain Duguid (ESV Expository Commentary, Vol 11)

*as well as Apphia, Archippus, and the church in Philemon's house