

INTRODUCTION TO PHILEMON

- I. Authorship, authenticity, origin and date.
 - A. To the present, it has been assumed that Paul was the author of this letter by the vast majority of theologians.
 - B. Paul mentions himself by name 3x in the epistle (Phlm.1,9,19).
 - C. Only extreme negative critics have challenged his authorship that was not called into question as a forgery until 4th Century AD.
 - D. Early Christians such as Jerome (c. 340-420 AD) and Augustine (c.400 AD) attested to its Pauline authenticity in defense.
 - E. It was accepted as early as Marcion's canon (Luke + Paul's writings) 144 A.D. as one of ten Pauline epistles.
 - F. It was recognized in the Muratorian fragment (canon) c.170 AD which is the foundation for the universally excepted 27 books of the NT.
 - G. The letter is one of Paul's prison epistles in the group of Colossians and Ephesians c.61-63 AD during his first imprisonment in Rome.
 - H. The mention of Onesimus and Archippus in both Colossians and Philemon (Co.4:9,17; Phlm.2,10) ties the two epistles together.
 - I. That Philemon was a member of the Colossian church (Phlm.1,2), the letter would have been delivered by Tychicus along with the Colossian and Ephesian epistles (Eph.6:21; Col.4:7).
 - J. The epistle is Paul's briefest having only 335 words in the original Greek text.
 - K. However, this does not relegate the letter to a private correspondence, but has both theological and doctrinal teaching intended in its context.
 - L. This is insinuated as the letter acknowledges other believers to include the Colossian church in the opening address expecting certain edification on their part as derived from the epistle.

- II. Recipient and occasion for writing.
 - A. The epistle is addressed "to Philemon" (Phlm.1) as an individual (as with 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus) and hence known as "*Pros Philemona*".
 - B. His house was large enough to host the Colossian church (Phlm.2) and he was a slave owner suggesting one of prosperity.
 - C. As a slave owner, he had the right under Roman law to demand severe punishment or even death for recalcitrant slaves.
 - D. Otherwise, Philemon was known as benevolent to believers (Phlm.5-7) and regarded as sound in the faith (Phlm.8) along with Archippus who was the present overseer of the Colossian church (Col.4:17 cf.Phlm.2).
 - E. It appears that a slave named Onesimus that belonged to Philemon had wronged him in some way and ran away.
 - F. He ended up in Rome and eventually came into contact with Paul.
 - G. Some suggest that he may have even sought out the Apostle for help having heard Philemon speak of Paul.
 - H. Paul subsequently evangelized Onesimus who under the circumstances attached himself to Paul's ministry and served him in his imprisonment.
 - I. Paul recognized that the right thing to do was to return Onesimus to Philemon.
 - J. That day came when Paul wrote and then delivered his epistle to the Colossians.

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- K. He arrived with Tychicus (Col.4:7-9 cp. Phlm.12) as validation to his conversion and doctrinal desire to now do what was right before God.
 - L. Paul pens his letter as an advocate for Onesimus appealing to Philemon to forgive and accept back Onesimus as a brother in Christ (Phlm.10).
- III. The theological analogy of Philemon.
- A. The forgiveness that the believer finds in Christ is beautifully portrayed by analogy in Philemon.
 - B. Onesimus, guilty of great offense (Phlm.11,18), is mediated by Paul (Phlm.10:17).
 - C. Paul lays aside his rights (cf.Phlm.8) and becomes Onesimus's substitute by assuming his debt (Phlm.18:19a).
 - D. By Philemon's gracious act, Onesimus is expected to be restored and placed in a new relationship (Phlm.15,16).
 - E. In the analogy, we are as Onesimus.
 - F. Paul's advocacy before Philemon is parallel to Christ's work before the Father. Cp.1Cor.11:1
 - G. Onesimus was condemned by law, but saved by grace.
- IV. The teaching and lesson of Philemon in application.
- A. It answers the question, "Does Christian brotherly love really work, even in situations of extraordinary tension and difficulty?"
 - B. The example used in the letter to answer that question is between a prominent slave owner and one of his runaway slaves.
 - C. Paul has certain expectation that reconciliation is not only a must, but will find success through the principle of grace orientation.
 - D. Just as Philemon was shown mercy by the grace of God, so must he graciously forgive his repentant runaway slave who has returned as a brother in Christ.
 - E. Onesimus has met Christ's demand for forgiveness via repentance evidenced by his return with Tychicus. Cp.Luk.17:3-4
 - F. While Paul offers to pay any outstanding debt by Onesimus to Philemon, Philemon is reminded of his own debt to Paul (Phlm.19b).
 - G. He is to draw upon this grace afforded him in the past to apply towards Onesimus.
 - H. Onesimus is to be regarded as an equal spiritually with opportunity to fulfill the POG just as any believer oriented to BD. Phlm.16 cf.Col.3:9-15
 - I. The letter teaches that spiritual principles supersede the physical. Cf. Col.4:1
 - J. Phlm.16,17 visualizes this principle in theme: *"No longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me."*
- V. The outline for Philemon: Introduction vss.1-3; thanksgiving vss.4-7; Paul's appeal for Onesimus vss.8-21; Conclusion vss.22-25 *Review the Doctrine of Slavery*