

PHILEMON

Lesson 1

Paul's Letter to Philemon

In this lesson we will take a brief look at a short, but powerful, book in the New Testament: Paul's letter to Philemon. It was written between 62 and 63 AD. Philemon, Timothy, and Titus were all contemporaries. It is likely that Philemon came to know Christ as his personal savior while Paul, Timothy, and Titus were all working together in Ephesus getting that church established; Paul also used this opportunity to train Titus. We believe that this is the most likely case; as Philemon was a wealthy man from the town of Colossae, a community close enough to Ephesus that he would have had many opportunities to visit this seaport town and hear Paul proclaim the Gospel. See Acts 19:10.

We can observe from Paul's letter to him that Philemon has a church in his home; and that Paul asks him to prepare a guest room for him. These facts, plus the fact that Onesimus was one of Philemon's slaves, indicates that Philemon was a wealthy man who owned property. He was also a man of influence in the community, as "head of a numerous household." We can infer as well from Paul's letter that Philemon was a man of exceptional character who "refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people."

From a quick study of Paul's letter, we can not only deduce a lot regarding Philemon and Onesimus, but we can also learn what it means to be a forgiving Christian.

Read Philemon—it's only a single chapter of 25 verses—and consider the following questions:

1. On what basis can we assume that Philemon and Onesimus were from Colossae? (See Colossians 4:9-17.)
2. Paul was not alone in his work and ministry; he had many who worked with him. Who were they? (See Philemon verses 1-2 and verse 23.)
3. Why is this letter included in the Bible? I personally believe that there are three reasons (and perhaps even more). Please note below what you believe these reasons to be. Consider Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 18:21-22, and Galatians 3:26-29.
4. What happened that caused Onesimus to run away? (See Phm. verse 18.)

5. What does Paul tell Philemon in his letter, i.e., what does Paul request that Philemon do?

Again, from this short but pithy letter, we can glean much insight into Christian forgiveness. I pray that you will spend some time reflecting on this lesson and considering how it can help you grow in your walk with Jesus.

Thanks for your faithfulness in studying God's Holy Word.

In Christ,

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