

# Philemon

**Authorship:** This epistle was written by the apostle Paul while he was in prison (Perhaps while he was under house arrest in Rome).

**Date:** If the letter to Philemon was written from Rome a likely date would fall in the early AD 60's.

**Place in Canon:** New Testament – Prison Epistle.

**Genre:** Letter

**Unique Features:** This is the only New Testament letter that Paul addressed to an individual, Philemon. He was most likely a prominent member of the church at Colosse who owned slaves. It is interesting that some of the early church Fathers referred to a bishop in Asia Minor named Onesimus who may or may not have been the one mentioned in this letter.

**Background & Historical Situation:** It appears that while Paul was in prison that Onesimus, the runaway slave of Philemon, was arrested and placed in the same prison as Paul. Onesimus received Christ under the influence of Paul. Paul wrote this letter for the benefit of Onesimus as he is sent back to Philemon his owner.

**Purpose:** Slavery was very common in the Roman empire during the first century and even Christians owned slaves. It was not viewed as the same injustice which has taken place in American history. Slavery was not a specific issue that Paul addressed. This letter was a personal note written to urge Philemon to accept Onesimus back but not as a captured runaway slave but as a new brother in the Lord. Paul manipulates Philemon in a good way in order for the reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus to take place.

**Key Passage:** V. 15-16.

**Outline:**

- I. Greeting (1-3)
- II. Commendations of Philemon (4-7)
- III. Intercession for Onesimus (8-22)
- IV. Salutations and Benediction (23-25)

**Structure:** Apart from the Greetings and Salutations/Benediction there appears to be a twofold division. In verses 1-7 there is Paul's appreciation of Philemon expressed. In verses 8-25 there is Paul's appeal for Onesimus.

**Sources:**

Elwell, Walter A. and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998).