

A LOOK AT THE BOOK PHILEMON

Ralph Porter

Author and Date

Philemon claims to have been written by Paul.

Significant proof for rejecting Paul's authorship has never been presented,
--except as it is identified with Colossians.

Although tradition does not argue strongly in its favor,
that is more due to the book's brevity and failure to attract attention,
than to serious objections.

It is best to accept it at face value.

Date assigned to Philemon is parallel to other prison epistles: about A.D. 60.

Historical Background

Philemon was a convert of Paul's in Colosse.

Leader in church which met in his home.

Onesimus was one of his slaves who ran away, taking some of Philemon's possessions.

Rome provided natural place to disappear.

While in Rome, Onesimus crossed paths with Paul,
listened to gospel,
trusted in Christ.

He became a useful helper to Paul.

Paul felt it wouldn't be fair to Philemon to keep him there.

When he had the opportunity to send a letter to the church,
he sent Onesimus,
along with a letter to Philemon, explaining what had happened.

Purpose and Theme

Letter written to convince Philemon to forgive Onesimus and receive him as a brother in Christ.

Message is a reminder of the change God made in his own life
and the debt which he owed Paul.

Purpose and message extend beyond immediate context:
demonstrate how all Christians should be willing to forgive each other when we're offended,
because of what Christ has done for us.

Organization

Develops as a normal letter.

After initial greeting, . . . 1-3

. . . Paul describes the reasons for his gratefulness for Philemon 4-7

Bulk of letter contains an appeal for forgiveness for Onesimus 8-21

Personal matters: 22-25

Expresses his hope to be released soon and to visit them 22

Concludes with personal greeting (23-24) and benediction (25)

INITIAL GREETING 1-3

After the normal greeting to Philemon and the church which meets in their house, . . .

Authors 1a

Recipients 1b-2

Greeting 3

THANKSGIVING FOR PHILEMON 4-7

GRATITUDE FOR HIS FAITH AND LOVE 4-5

His thanksgiving

Paul expresses a word of thanksgiving

Because of his **faith** in Christ

Because of his obvious **love** for all his brothers and sisters in Christ

=> v. 7

Paul is going to go on and ask Philemon to build on that love by showing love even for Onesimus, the run-away slave.

But he is grateful for the love he has already shown for others.

PETITION FOR EFFECTIVE SHARING OF HIS FAITH 6

Paul's Prayer for Philemon

Here is one individual for whom Paul prayed.

How did he pray for this average layman in the church?

What did he ask God for Him?

His prayer:

That you may be active in sharing your faith
So that you fully comprehend every good thing we have in Christ

Parallel to Ephesians 3

In Ephesians 1 he begins by telling us what a great job God has done

In summary, he has given us every spiritual blessing

There, and in Colossians, he tells us *WE LACK NOTHING!*

In Ephesians 3 he prays: *That we might understand just how great God's love is for us.*

How do we come to really understand how much God has done for us?

He prays that we may be active in sharing our faith.

It's as we share our faith with those that don't know Him that we come to fully realize what a good thing we have in Christ!

Bill Hull: "Christians lose their edge and their excitement about Christ when we stop sharing our faith."

JOY BECAUSE OF HIS ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE SAINTS 7**APPEAL TO PHILEMON 8-21****MOTIVATION FROM LOVE 8-16**

On the basis of the love Philemon was accustomed to demonstrate toward the saints,

Paul asks for a more difficult demonstration of love for his brethren in Christ.

This time he asks him to forgive Onesimus and receive him back.

Refusal to use force 8

Paul reminds him that he could order him to receive Onesimus,
but he doesn't want to use force.

He prefers to use love as a motivation.

Appeal to love 9-16

Love for a new brother 9-11

In the belief that Onesimus really has changed,
he asks Philemon to give him a chance.

Onesimus => "*useful*"--notice play on change from "useless" to "useful" v.11

Love for an old friend 12-16

If Philemon isn't willing to accept him for his own sake,
Paul will accept love for him as a motive to try Onesimus,
as long as it's spontaneous rather than forced.

Paul's consideration for Philemon 12-14

Paul would have liked to have Onesimus stay with him, as his own helper,
but didn't want to do it behind Philemon's back or without his permission.

Paul's confidence in Onesimus 15-16

He is confident they will all *profit* from Onesimus' changed life.

APPEAL FOR SUBSTITUTION 17-20

The final appeal is to accept him as a substitute.

In Paul's place 17

"Receive him as you would receive me!"

On Paul's bill 18-20

Any unpaid debts or offenses should be charged to Paul.

He will take the risk himself because he believes in Onesimus.

Debt applied 18

Formal I.O.U. 19a

Philemon's debt 19b

Exhortation to be *useful* 20

v. 20 *"that I may have some benefit"* [<= onaimen]

CONFIDENCE CONCERNING RESPONSE 21

Paul expresses his confidence that Philemon will respond positively to his request.

His obedience 21a

His generosity 21b

PERSONAL MATTERS 22-25

The letter closes with several personal matters.

Plan to visit 22

Paul expects to be released soon and asks them to prepare a room for him. [veiled threat ?]

Greetings from co-workers 23-24

He communicates the greetings from his co-workers.

Concluding benediction 25

He concludes with a benediction.

What lessons does the book of Philemon teach us for our lives today?