

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION TO PHILEMON

A. Author

1. This is a letter from the apostle Paul to Philemon and the church at Colossae.
2. It is supported internally by three references to Paul in the letter.
 - a. Philemon 1, *Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker.* (ESV)
 - b. Philemon 9, *yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus -* (ESV)
 - c. Philemon 19, *I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it - to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.* (ESV)
3. It is supported externally by consistent tradition with no support for authorship by another writer.
 - a. Church fathers who supported canonicity of this letter included Ignatius, Tertullian, Origen and Eusebius.
 - b. It was also included in the canon of Marcion and in the Muratorian fragment.
4. There is a close association with Colossians. Both letters mention Archippus, Epaphras, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, note Colossians 4:10, 12, 14, 17.
5. Timothy was probably mentioned as a way to confirm his agreement with what Paul would say in the letter.

B. Date of Writing

1. It was written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, sometime between 60-62 A.D.
2. It was one of Paul's four Prison Epistles which includes Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians.

C. Recipients

1. It was primarily written to Philemon, a wealthy slave owner who was a member of the church in Colossae.
2. The letter was intended to be read by the church since Paul wanted his appeal to Philemon to be known by all.

D. Theology of the Letter to Philemon includes

1. The love of God for all classes of people.
2. The centrality or lordship of Christ in all aspects of life.
3. Christian leaders are not to force their will on other believers.
4. The importance of the local church as a family.
5. The impact of salvation on every part of one's life.

E. An outline of the Letter to Philemon

1. Greeting (1-3)
 - a. From Paul and Timothy (1a)
 - b. To Philemon and the church at Colossae (1b-2)
 - c. A salutation (3)
2. Thanksgiving and prayer (4-7)
 - a. Paul's thanksgiving for the Colossians (4-5)
 - b. Paul's prayer for them (6)
 - c. Paul's testimony of Philemon's love for Paul and other believers (7)
3. Paul's appeal for Onesimus (8-21)
 - a. His plea to Philemon (8-11)
 - 1) It is a plea not a command (8-9)
 - 2) It is on behalf of his spiritual son (10-11)
 - b. His reason for returning Onesimus to Philemon (12-16)
 - 1) It was difficult for Paul to part with Onesimus (12-13)
 - 2) Paul believed it was right for Philemon to make the right decision concerning Onesimus (14)
 - 3) Paul wanted Onesimus to see what God had done in the life of Philemon (15-16)

- c. His request concerning Onesimus (17-21)
 - 1) Paul asked that Philemon receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul (17)
 - 2) Paul offered to repay in debt owed Philemon by Onesimus (18-19)
 - 3) Paul wanted Philemon to demonstrate his appreciation for Paul (20)
 - 4) Paul was confident that Philemon would do what was right (21)
- 4. Conclusion (22-25)
 - a. Paul's personal request (22)
 - b. Greetings from fellow workers (23-24)
 - c. Paul's benediction (25)