

The Letter to Philemon

*. Who wrote the letter?

Paul is stated as the author in the opening words of the letter.

*. When was it written?

This letter was written about 60-62 AD while Paul was in prison in Rome (as described in Acts 28). Apparently, he wrote this letter as well as the letters to the Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians during this same time period.

*. Why was it written?

Onesimus, a runaway slave, encountered Paul while Paul was in prison in Rome. During this encounter, Paul led Onesimus to make a decision to follow after Christ. Paul also discovered that Onesimus' master (Philemon) was a member of the church at Colossae. As one reads carefully the letter, it is apparent that Paul had been influential in Philemon's life and perhaps led him into a relationship with Christ.

Out of obligation, Paul is returning Onesimus to his master, Philemon, with this letter. In the letter, he entreats Philemon to receive him back, to forgive him for running away, and to accept him as a brother in Christ. Paul also encourages Philemon to allow Onesimus to help Paul in the ministry.

Tradition indicates that Onesimus went on to become the leader of the church in Antioch. In addition, he was perhaps responsible for helping to collect the letters of Paul which was one of the steps to these letters being included in the New Testament. One can imagine the immense gratitude that Onesimus would have for Paul and for his writings.

*. What is the main topic?

Christ transforms a person from a slave to a brother; from one who is "useless" to one who is "useful." [Note that the name Onesimus name means "useful".]

The Letter to Philemon

¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker, ² and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; ⁶ *and I pray* that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. ⁷ For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. ⁸ Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do* what is proper, ⁹ yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, ¹¹ who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. ¹² I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart, ¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴ but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. ¹⁵ For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever, ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ If then you regard me a partner, accept him as *you would* me. ¹⁸ But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). ²⁰ Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. ²² At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you. ²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, ²⁴ *as do* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.