

**BOOK OF PHILEMON**

1. This is the shortest epistle. It is also the only epistle that Paul wrote about a single individual. Usually, he would write to a church or to individuals about a church.
2. Philemon was a rich Roman citizen in Colossae. The Colossian church was started by Epaphras. Philemon was saved when Epaphras preached to him. Subsequently, Philemon became a church leader, and he ministered to a house church in his own premise.
3. What was the reason for Paul writing this letter to Philemon?
  - a) Philemon had a slave, Onesimus, who ran away. During those days, when a slave ran away, it was either because the slave was bad or he had a bad master. Philemon might have been a bad master before he was converted or Onesimus could have been a bad slave before conversion.
  - b) Onesimus ran to Rome, a large city where he could easily hide, unlike in a village where people could identify him easily. He met Paul when Paul was under house arrest. Onesimus might have been seeking God and Paul was well known during the time of his house arrest! Onesimus was saved and he became a changed man.
  - c) Paul wanted him to return to Philemon even though Paul needed Onesimus' help while under house arrest. Paul wanted him to reconcile with his master, Philemon. Onesimus was sent back by Paul to Philemon with this letter written by Paul to Philemon. Slaves who ran away were usually crucified during the Roman Empire or had the word "fugitive" branded on their foreheads.
4. There is only one chapter in the book of Philemon.
  - a) Philemon 1:1-7. As a Christian, Philemon was well-liked by many. He refreshed the hearts of the saints (see verse 7) as he was wealthy and willing to help the poor Christians.
  - b) Philemon 1:8-16.
    - i. Paul appealed to Philemon rather than adopt a commanding approach towards him. Onesimus was dear to Paul and was like a son to him. Paul could have commanded Philemon to let Onesimus remain with him in his house arrest. Instead, Paul appealed to Philemon to receive Onesimus as a "brother" and not a "slave". Slaves, during Roman times, had never been accepted as a brother. 2/3 of the people in Rome were slaves at that time.
    - ii. Paul did not encourage the rebellion of slaves. We are not to engage in outward warfare but to seek internal and lasting change of the heart. Paul reasoned that since Philemon could help the poor Christians, he appealed to Philemon to internally change his heart to accept Onesimus as a brother-in-Christ. See Romans 15:7. Christians must learn to accept others regardless of their class as brothers in their heart and hug them as brothers-in-Christ.
    - iii. Paul wanted Onesimus to be a good and useful person to Philemon. Colossians 3 says that there is no slave or free man in Christ (see also 1 Corinthians 12:13). Onesimus might have stolen some money from

Philemon to run to Rome, otherwise, he would have no money to travel that far.

- c) Philemon 1:17-21. Paul was willing to recompense for whatever Onesimus could have stolen. We, too, are also like slaves who ran away from God. Jesus called us back and paid the debt of our sins so that we can be reconciled to God and become useful to God. This is the Gospel message. Paul did for Onesimus what Christ did for him.

What is the key message in this book of Philemon?

We are to receive all believers as brothers-in-Christ regardless of their past or present state. In Christ, the Church is one entity. We ought to change our heart to love, and not to just tolerate others who are different from us!