

Philemon

Summary

In this brief, one chapter letter, Paul writes a heartfelt appeal to Philemon to have mercy on Onesimus. One of Philemon's slaves, Onesimus, ran away, but later became a Christian after hearing the apostle Paul preach the gospel. Having received Christ, Onesimus is compelled to go back to Philemon and make amends. In the ancient world, the law allowed a slave to be punished if they ran away, so Paul appeals to Philemon quite sincerely. Paul lets him know that he trusts his discretion, accepts his decision, and offers to repay Onesimus' debt. Paul is crystal clear that he fully expects Philemon will forgive Onesimus and welcome him into the family of Christians as a free man. The existence of this letter in the Bible leads us to the conclusion that Onesimus was indeed forgiven, though there is no definitive statement to that effect.

Author

The apostle Paul wrote this short letter to Philemon, a believer in Colosse, who, along with many others in that time, was a slave owner. Paul writes this personal appeal to ask that Onesimus, one of Philemon's slaves who had wronged Philemon, be accepted as a Christian brother and treated as such.

Date

The date given by most scholars for the letter to Philemon is typically dated around A.D. 62, written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

Primary Characters

The apostle Paul (Philemon 1)

Philemon, slave owner of Onesimus (Philemon 1)

Onesimus, slave of Philemon (Philemon 1)

Historical Moments

Paul's Imprisonment in Rome (Philemon 1)

Paul Writes the Letter to Philemon (Philemon 1)

Major Theological Themes

All Are One in Christ Jesus - Paul's reference to Onesimus as a brother or partner in Christ provided a framework to break down the barriers of class and position prevalent in the ancient culture. In this letter, Paul acts on his words in Galatians 3:28, *there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* Jesus Christ came not only for the Jewish people but for every person who will ever walk the face of the earth.

Lessons Learned from Philemon

Leadership Is Delicate - The structure of this letter provides much for us to learn in terms of how to handle difficult situations. Paul affirms and validates Philemon as a fellow believer in Christ, one who has been faithful to the church. There is no doubt about Paul's desired outcome was freedom for Onesimus, but he leaves that decision to Philemon and shows great faith and trust in God by his sincere words.