**Metadata**

* + Philemon is the first of four letters Paul is believed to have written while imprisoned in Rome (cf. Acts 28:16, 30-31). The other three were his letters to the Colossians, Ephesians and Philippians.
  + It is the only strictly private letter in the entire New Testament. *(His letters to Timothy & Titus dealt with matters concerning the whole church, as did John’s personal letters, 2 & 3 John).*
  + Internal evidence suggests that Philemon, Ephesians and Colossians were written, and then sent for delivery at the same time. (cf. Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:7-9; Philemon 10-12).
  + Most probably the letter to Philemon was delivered by Tychicus, and Onesimus himself.
  + Philemon was a slave owner, and may have been wealthy *(cf. 2, & 5-7, which may have reference to benevolence on his part).*
  + It is probable that Paul was responsible for Philemon’s conversion to Christ (19).
  + Apphia (2) is believed to be Philemon’s wife, and Archippus (2) perhaps his son, and himself a gospel preacher (cf. Colossians 4:17).
  + Though a unique letter, the canonicity of the epistle has never been in question.

**Concise Outline of Book**

(from Marshall Patton’s commentary, pages 531-532)

1. **Salutation (1-3)**
2. **Prayer and Thanksgiving for Philemon (4-7)**
   1. Philemon’s love and faith (4-6)
   2. Saint’s refreshed by Philemon (7)
3. **The Appeal for Onesimus (8-21f)**
   1. Paul beseeches rather than enjoins (8-9)
   2. Onesimus, Paul’s son in the gospel (10)
   3. Once unprofitable, but now a profitable servant (11-16)
   4. Debt of Onesimus assumed by Paul (17-21)
4. **Request for Lodging and Greetings (22-24)**
5. **Benediction (25)**

**Paul’s Purpose in Writing Philemon**

* Paul had converted Onesimus (a slave who had deserted Philemon), and felt a great love for, and responsibility to him.
* Righteousness and honesty demanded Onesimus return to Philemon. The letter consists of a beautiful appeal by Paul on Onesimus’ behalf - to facilitate his return, and his good treatment from Philemon.

**Book Synopsis**

1. Paul’s petition to his brother and friend Philemon was based in the concept of love and Christian duty.
2. The letter serves as a wonderful example of how brethren should approach one another when the potential for conflict exists.
3. The letter also gives insight regarding the institution of slavery, which has implications in our nation. Consider these words from Adam Clarke: “This epistle is the Biblical answer to the question of slavery. Here we have no law of outward compulsion to forbid slavery but a gospel spirit of love which so changes the heart that slavery automatically withers and becomes impossible.” This concept will be discussed in greater detail in the study of the letter itself.
4. Paul’s appeal is for Philemon to receive Onesimus back with love and forgiveness, treating him as *“a beloved brother.”*

**Suggested Memory Work**

**(14)**, *“But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.”*

**(15-16)**, *“For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him 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.”*

**(17-18)**, *“If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.”*

**(20)**, *“Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.”*

**Difficult Passages**

* There are different views of the phrase, *“the church in your house”* (2).
* A distinction must be made between flattery and praise (4-7, 21). Discuss the contention some might make that Paul is being manipulative (perceived negatively) (cf. 8-9, 13-17, 21).
* It is necessary to reconcile the apostle Paul’s willingness to return a slave to a slave owner with the commonly held view that slavery is immoral. How can this be done?

**Doctrinal Considerations**

* Compare and contrast Paul’s description of himself as a *“prisoner of Christ Jesus”* (1), with other self-descriptions in his letters (cf. *“bondservant”* Romans 1:1).
* Christian hospitality (4-7, 22)
* **Christian duty (8-14, 17, 21)**
* Redemption alters every aspect of our lives (Onesimus as example) (10-11, 15-17)
* Paul’s view of providence (15-16)
* Christian sacrifice (12-14, 18-19)
* **The Christian’s view of slavery (entire epistle)**

**Practical Considerations**

* Hospitality is an indication of a Christian’s faithfulness (4-7, 21-22)
* Paul’s example of continual prayers on behalf of others is worthy of emulation (4-7, cf. Philemon as well, 22).
* Appeals on behalf of others can be made not only to God, but to others (10).
* Philemon is worthy of emulation as a refresher of hearts (7,20).
* Consider the wisdom of appealing to a brother rather than commanding a brother (8-9).

**Questions to Consider**

* What did Paul mean when he wrote Philemon, *“not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides”*?
* Consider ways you could refresh the hearts of your brethren.
* Which is better, to do something because of compulsion, or voluntarily (14)? Is God pleased if our only motivation for obedience is necessity?

**Student Questions**

*(Use the rest of this page to prepare questions and comments for class discussion. Since this is not a “verse by verse” study, make sure that all your questions concerning the text are answered).*