

Philemon

Introduction

The smallest of Paul's prison letters presents a significant lesson on forgiveness. It was written to Philemon in Colosse, who was a leader of the church there. It was delivered to Philemon at the same time as the letter to the Colossian church. It is also interesting to note Paul's play on words that are associated with the name Onesimus.

Col. 4:7-18

1. List the names of people that Paul greeted or noted in his letter to the Colossian Church. Indicate who they are and how many of them are also listed or noted in the letter to Philemon.

Philemon 1:1-25

1. What does Paul's letter to Philemon tell us about him?
 - a. What was Philemon's relationship to the Colossian church?
 - b. What concerns did Paul express for Philemon and the church that met in his home? What were his prayers for them about?
 - c. What effect did the Colossian church have on Paul? Why?
2. What was Paul's relationship to Onesimus?
 - a. What does Onesimus mean?
 - b. Who was Onesimus?
 - c. How was Onesimus useless to Philemon?
 - d. What change had taken place in Onesimus between the times he ran away from Philemon and when Paul wrote this letter?
3. What reasons could Paul have had to keep Onesimus with him in Rome?
 - a. What were Paul's needs in Rome?
 - b. What could have been the consequences for Onesimus returning to Philemon? What were Philemon's rights?
 - c. What risks did Paul make with his decision to send Onesimus back to Philemon in Colosse?
4. Exactly what were Paul's purposes for writing this letter?
 - a. For Philemon
 - b. For Onesimus
 - c. For the Colossian Church
 - d. For Paul
 - e. For the Gospel
5. In a class-structured society such as in Colosse, what significant point did Paul make by referring to the slave, Onesimus, as a "brother?" (See Gal. 3:26-29)
6. What would forgiveness mean to Onesimus?
7. What would forgiveness mean to Philemon?
8. What would forgiveness mean to the Colossian church?
9. How would forgiveness by Philemon show the truth of the Gospel to others in Colosse?

10. How do we know that Onesimus returned to Colosse? What evidence is there that indicates that Onesimus was accepted and forgiven? How can you explain Onesimus' willingness to risk everything by returning to Philemon?
11. What was Paul's argument for Philemon to receive and accept Onesimus?
 - a. How did Paul exercise his authority?
 - b. Why did Paul remind Philemon of his debt to Paul and the Gospel?
 - c. How did Paul show a Christ-like attitude to Philemon?
12. What is the importance of forgiveness?
 - a. What are the consequences of withholding forgiveness?
 - b. Why are we Christians obligated to forgive?
 - c. Who has forgiven you? What were the benefits you received for forgiveness?
 - d. How does the act of forgiveness fulfill Jesus' command to love one another?