



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Letter of St. Paul to Philemon

Chapter 1

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Introduction

Authorship

- St. Paul (1, 9, 19)

Recipient

- Philemon was a member of the church at Colossi (1, 2, and Col 4:17), and a very hospitable one at that (1, 2, 5, 7)
- He was one of St. Paul's own converts (19)
- Apphia was his wife, and Archippus his son (1, 2)



Introduction

- Onesimus had been one of Philemon's slaves (16), who had run away (15)
- He traveled to Rome where he found St. Paul and was converted to Christ (10)
- He had become very dear to St. Paul, and was proving to be very useful (11-13)
- St. Paul did not think it right to keep Onesimus in Rome, and was sending him back to Philemon (12-14)



Introduction

- This letter to Philemon is an appeal for him to receive Onesimus now as a brother in Christ, and for him to forgive Onesimus if he had done any wrong (15-21)

Date and Place

- If the epistle to Philemon was written about the time Colossians were written, then it was written during St. Paul's imprisonment at Rome, sometime during the period of 61-63 A.D.



Introduction

- It was written from Rome, about the same time the epistle to the Colossians was written:
 1. Like the epistle to the Colossians, the epistle to Philemon was written when Paul was in chains (1,10,13,23)
 2. Timothy joined St. Paul in both epistles (1; Col 1:1)
 3. Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke joined in the salutation of both (23,24; Col 4:10-14)
 4. Onesimus was one of the messengers by whom the epistle to the Colossians was sent (Col 4:7-9)



Introduction

4. Archippus, to whom this epistle is partially addressed (2), is also addressed in Colossians (Col 4:17)

Purpose

- Primarily to secure forgiveness for Onesimus
- To provide from himself a place of lodging after his release from imprisonment

Outline

- Greeting (1-3), Philemon's Love and Faith (4-7), The Plea for Onesimus (8-16), Philemon's Obedience Encouraged (17-22), Farewell (23-25)



Greeting (1-3)

- A prisoner at Rome
- The first words are an appeal to the sympathy of Philemon.
- He refers to his chains five times in this letter (1,9,10,13,23)
- Two other Epistles of the Captivity name Timothy in the first verse (Phil 1:1 Col 1:1)
- Philemon evidently lived in Colossi, but St. Paul had never been there

Greeting (1-3)



- He probably converted him in Ephesus, the capital of the province, during his long sojourn there
- Apphia: Supposed to have been Philemon's wife
- Archippus: he was Philemon's son
- He was a servant in the church (Col 4:17)
- The church in your house: As the early church had no houses of worship, they met in private houses
- Grace: would remind him of God's mercy

Philemon's Love and Faith (4-7)



- Philemon was a source of joy to the heart of St. Paul, making him thanking God because of his godly life
- Sharing of faith: the duties of charity which are given to the saints, and flow from his faith
- Thus all men may perceive how rich you are in Christ and give glory to God on your behalf
- St. Paul is referring in v. 7 to the news came to him of the state of the church at Colossi (Col 1:7)

The Plea for Onesimus (8-16)



- As an apostle and being encouraged by your faith, and since you are my son in Christ, I have the right to command you that which is befitting
- But I do not want to come with commands, but as beseeching for love's sake
- Paul the aged: Attempting to touch Philemon, he reminds him that he is an old, scarred veteran of Christ, who has grown aged in His service
- And now he is a prisoner suffering for His Lord



The Plea for Onesimus (8-16)

- While a prisoner, he had converted Onesimus
- It is possible that Epaphras met Onesimus in Rome, and brought him to St. Paul
- He may not only have been a restless, discontented servant, but in addition, he ran away
- But now such a change has taken place in him
- He has served St. Paul in his bonds well, and will also serve Philemon well

The Plea for Onesimus (8-16)



- I am so much attached to him, so to be unkind to him would wound my own very heart
- Would gladly have kept him with me to render for me the service you would to give me
- He wished, if such a service was rendered, it might be with Philemon's free consent
- Perhaps his departure was providential, to lead to his conversion, to give you a faithful helper, and to keep him forever



The Plea for Onesimus (8-16)

- Now his relation is changed
- He is more than a servant, a Christian brother, beloved, especially to me (Phm 1:12)
- He has both temporal, fleshly relations to you (those of master and servant), and besides is your brother in Christ
- Both ties ought to bind him to you
- The gospel held Christian masters responsible for the moral and physical welfare of their servants

Philemon's Obedience Encouraged (17-22)



- Christian fellow-laborers are partners
- Then receive him, as you would me
- If he defrauded you (Onesimus had robbed Philemon)
- If you hold this wrong against him, here is my written bond that I will repay it
- Here is a reminder that Philemon owed his salvation to St. Paul, a reminder which would prevent him from putting in a claim against him

Philemon's Obedience Encouraged (17-22)



- Let me have joy of you in the Lord by learning that you have granted all I ask in this letter
- This letter is written in full confidence that even more than I ask will be granted
- Perhaps this is a hint that Philemon might grant Onesimus his freedom
- All the letters of the first imprisonment express confidence that he will be set at liberty
- St. Paul visited Asia again and perhaps Colossi



Farewell (23-25)

- Epaphras: probably founded the Colossian church
- My fellow prisoner: he shared St. Paul's imprisonment by becoming his companion
- Mark: St. Mark the Evangelist
- Aristarchus: A Macedonian (Acts 27:2)
- Demas: was mentioned in (2 Ti 4:10)
- Lucas: St. Luke the evangelist (Col 4:14)
- These are all mentioned in (Col 4:10,14)



Conclusion

- Why does St. Paul refer to himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus?
- Who, possibly, are Apphia and Archippus?
- What is a good example of this family's devotion to Christ?
- What does Paul call Onesimus? What does it mean?
- How had becoming a Christian changed Onesimus?
- What did St. Paul see as the "possible" reason for this turn of events?
- How could Philemon do more than what Paul had asked of him?