

Introduction to NT Books

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XVI. The Book of Philemon

A. The Authorship of Philemon

1. The External Evidence: Again, early patristics attested to Pauline authorship, including Ignatius, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius.
2. The Internal Evidence: Paul repeated his name thrice (vv. 1, 9, 19), said he was a prisoner of Christ's (vv. 1, 9), and alluded to being "*the aged*"¹ (v. 9).

B. The Date of Philemon: this apparently was one of the Prison Epistles along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, and written around AD 60-61.

C. The Purpose of Philemon

1. He commended Philemon for his love and ministry towards the saints (vv. 1-7).
2. He encouraged Philemon to restore his run-away slave Onesimus (8-21).
3. He implored Philemon to prepare for Paul's soon visit (vv. 22-25).

D. The Characteristics of Philemon

1. Onesimus was an escapee from Philemon who apparently stole some of his goods (vv. 17-18).
2. Apparently, Onesimus ended up in Paul's presence and was born-again through Paul's preaching (v. 10; Acts 28:30-31).
3. After being saved, Onesimus ministered to and with Paul (vv. 11-13).
4. Paul knew Onesimus needed to be returned to his original master (vv. 13-14).
5. Paul also recognized that Onesimus now had a new relationship with Philemon which would impact them forever (v. 15).
6. Apparently Paul was going to send him back with Tychicus, who was to deliver the *Epistles of Ephesians* and *Colossians* (Eph. 6:21-22 and Col. 4:7-9²).
7. The doctrines of forgiveness and imputation received practical manifestation in this short *Epistle*:
 - a. Sinners need to be forgiven and received into back into fellowship with the offended one (vv. 12, 17; Eph. 4:32).
 - b. Onesimus' sins against Philemon were to be put on Paul's account (vv. 17-18).³
8. None of the biblical writers ever attacked the institution of slavery (cf. Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22 ff.; I Cor. 7:21-22), or tried to bring about correction to political or social ills directly. The early Christians attempted to change society spiritually,

¹The noun πρεσβύτερος is *tris legomena*, found also in Lk. 1:18 and Tit. 2:2. The Spanish *Reina-Valera* translated the Greek as *anciano*. In AD 61, Paul was probably in his early 60's.

²"Tychicus... With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here" (Col. 4:7, 9).

³Paul pictured Christ, Philemon the Heavenly Father, and Onesimus the sinner, in this little drama of redemption.

believing that spiritual change would affect social change (Tit. 1:11-12). However, Paul suggested a personal consideration from Philemon about his newly saved slave Onesimus—“*do more than I say*” (vv. 16, 21).

9. Philemon was the apparent pastor of the church in his house (vv. 1-2). Archippus, perhaps his son, was also a member.

a. Their church may have been in Laodicea (Col. 4:15).

b. Archippus may have become new pastor at Colosse since Epaphras left the church and visited Paul (Col. 1:7; 4:17).

c. The “*epistle from Laodicea*” may have been the *Epistle to Philemon*

(Col. 4:16).