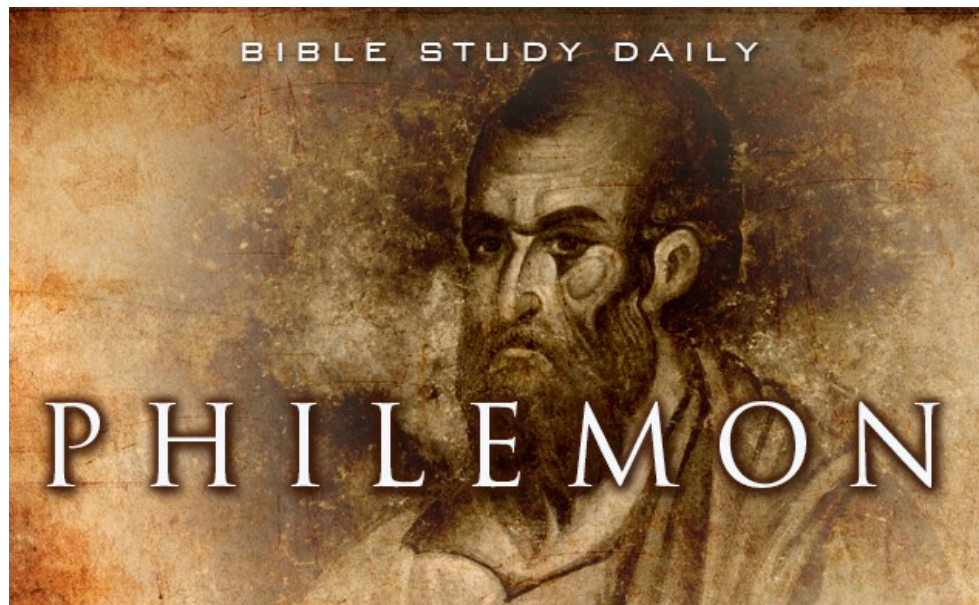




BIBLE STUDY DAILY



This document contains the introduction to the book of Philemon as well as my study notes for the book.

Name

The title “Philemon ” comes from the intended audience designated in 1:1b, “To Philemon our dear friend and coworker.” The the body of the epistle makes it clear that Paul’s intended audience is Philemon, his wife Apphia, his son Archippus, and the members of his household.

Author

Paul explicitly claims authorship of Philemon in 1:1, 1:9, and 1:19. Almost all scholars accept Pauline authorship based on his claim, and the similarities to other Pauline letters.

Many early church fathers provide external evidence of Pauline authorship, including: Ignatius, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius.

Note: Pauline authorship of the pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) remained unchallenged until the early 1800’s when liberal scholar J.E.C. Schmidt denied they were authentic to Paul. None of Schmidt’s claim’s supporting his argument of non-Pauline authorship holds up under scrutiny.

Genre

Epistle

Literary Form

The epistle to the Philemon is a private personal letter in which he pleads for a runaway slave named Onesimus.

Time Frame

Most conservative scholars include Titus in the group of prison epistles (Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Titus) written about A.D. 60-61 during the two-year period Paul was being held in a Roman prison.


Emphasis

Philemon was a Colossian believer ([Colossians 4:17](#)) whom Paul had converted (v. 19). Philemon’s slave, Onesimus had run away and made it to Rome where he attended to Paul while Paul was in prison. Paul also witnessed to Onesimus who became a believer.

Paul felt it best for Onesimus to return to his master. Paul sent him back to Philemon with this letter as an appeal to treat him not as a runaway slave but as a brother in Christ.

Outline

- Greeting and salutation (1:1-3)
- Thanksgiving and prayer for Philemon (14-7)

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- Paul's appeal on behalf of Onesimus (1:8-20)
 - Concluding plans and greetings (1:21-25)

What I Noticed Today (Philemon)

Philemon 1

In verses 1-3 Paul opens the letter in the usual matter: he introduces himself as author (Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus), indicates his intended audience (Philemon, Apphia his wife, and Archippus their son, and the church meeting in their home), and a greeting (grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ).


Note: This is the only letter in which Paul refers to himself as a “prisoner of Christ.” He also does not refer to himself as an apostle, probably because this letter is more personal carrying a personal request rather than being doctrinal in nature.

In verses 4-7 Paul expresses thanksgiving for Philemon:

- I always thank God for you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and faith toward Jesus.
- I pray your participation in the faith will be productive. (Sharing the faith will lead to a deeper understanding of his spiritual blessings.)
- I have great joy and encouragement from your love, because the saints have been refreshed by you.

In verses 8-21 Paul issues an appeal on behalf of Onesimus:

- “For this reason” (some translations, “Therefore”) relates back to the love and faith of Philemon in verses 4-7).
- I could command you to do what is right, says Paul, instead I appeal to you based on love.
- I appeal to you on behalf of my son (in the faith) Onesimus (Onesimus means “useful”).
- I fathered him while in chains (Onesimus attended to Paul while Paul was in prison and accepted Christ).
- Once he was useless to you, now he is useful to both of us (Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his master, Philemon). Now that he is a brother in Christ, Onesimus is useful to both Paul and Philemon.
- I wanted to keep him here with me in prison, but I did not want to do anything without your consent so I am sending him back to you (this implies Onesimus was also the bearer of the letter).
- Perhaps he was separated from you for a time so that you could get him back permanently, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ.

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- If you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would me.
 - If he has wronged you, or owes you anything charge it to my account.
 - I Paul, write this with my own hand and will repay it (even though you owe me your own self).
 - The restoration of Onesimus would bring joy and refreshment to Paul. Since Paul is confident of Philemon's obedience he writes knowing Philemon will do even more than he asks.

Note: Paul is making a contract by stating he is writing this himself. He also intimates that Philemon had come to Christ (you owe me your very life) because of Paul's testimony and presentation of the gospel.

In verse 22 Paul asks Philemon to prepare a room for him because he plans to come and visit, for through your prayers I hope to be restored to you.

Note: The suggestion that he planned to come and visit might be Paul's subtle way of spurring Philemon to act quickly in response to the letter. The "your" and "you" of verse 22 are plural referring back to the intended audience in verse 2.

In verse 23-25 Paul extends the usual greeting from those with him in Rome and prays for the grace of the Lord be with Philemon's spirit.

Some further thoughts for consideration:

- *The letter to Philemon depicts the restoration of a slave who is now a brother in Christ. The man who was once a runaway slave, had become a spiritual son to Paul, and brother to his master Philemon. In a way it is a picture of our own Christian lives; we were once slaves to sin, now through faith in Christ our sins are washed away, we are restored, adopted as sons into God's family, and spiritual brothers.*