

MORE THAN A SLAVE
PREACH THROUGH THE BIBLE: PHILEMON
Philemon 16

I. BACKGROUND

❖ **LATE PAULINE CHRONOLOGY**

- First Missionary Journey—47-49 AD
- Second Missionary Journey—49-52 AD
- Third Missionary Journey—52-57 AD
- To Jerusalem—arrested—57 AD
- To Caesarea—house arrest—57-59 AD
- Journey to Rome—59 AD
- First Roman Imprisonment in Rome—60-62

Colossians
Philemon
Ephesians
Philippians

- Fourth Missionary Journey—62-64/7
- Second Roman Imprisonment—64/7-68
- Martyrdom in Rome—AD 64-68

II. COMPOSITION

A. PAULINE AUTHORSHIP

1. ATTRIBUTED IN TEXT—**1:1**
 - Along with *Timothy our brother*
2. ALL SCHOLARS ACCEPT PAULINE AUTHORSHIP

B. DATE AND PLACE OF ORIGIN

1. DURING IMPRISONMENT
 - Four references to Paul's being in prison—see **vv 9, 10 13, 23**
2. THREE POSSIBLE SITES/DATES FOR IMPRISONMENT
 - a. Ephesus—55 AD—during Third Missionary Journey

b. Caesarea –58 AD—temporary custody—on way to Rome

c. Rome—60-62 AD—the **most likely** choice

3. ONE OF FOUR ‘PRISON EPISTLES’

- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- Philemon

4. SEVEN FELLOW PRISONERS WITH PAUL

a. **Onesimus**—**v10**—a slave—the subject of this letter to Philemon

b. **Timothy**—**v1**

- Before 4th Missionary Journey—when Paul left him in Ephesus

c. **Epaphras**—*my fellow prisoner*—**v 23**

1. Probably a native of Colossae

- Converted by Paul when he was in Ephesus?—on 3rd Missionary Journey

2. Mentioned in **Col 1:7**—as a *fellow servant* with Paul

3. Also in **Col 4:12**—he sent greetings with Paul to Colossae

- Suggests Colossians and Philemon were written about the same time

d. **Mark**—*fellow worker*—**v24**

1. Probably John Mark—cousin of Barnabas—and author of Gospel

2. Mentioned in **Col 4:10**—Paul said Mark might visit Colossae

3. Later—probably joined Paul in his second imprisonment

- **II Tim 4:11**—Paul instructed Timothy to bring Mark with him

e. **Luke**—*fellow worker*—**v24**

- At beginning of Paul’s 2nd imprisonment—only Luke was with him—**II Tim 4:11**

f. **Aristarchus**—*fellow worker*—**v24**

1. Greek Macedonian from Thessalonica—**Acts 27:2**

2. Seized by Ephesian mob during Paul’s 3rd Missionary Journey—**Acts 19:29**

3. Accompanied Paul from Greece to Asia [then Jerusalem?]**—Acts 20:4**

4. Sailed with Paul from Caesarea toward Rome—**Acts 27:2**

5. Sent greetings with Paul to Colossians—*fellow prisoner*—Col 4:10

g. Demas—*fellow worker*—v24

1. Sent greetings to Colossae—Col 4:14

2. Later abandoned Paul

➤ II Tim 4:10—*because he loved the world*—he went to Thessalonica

C. NATURE OF LETTER

1. PAUL'S MOST PERSONAL LETTER

a. Not *strictly* personal—i.e. not from just one person to another single person

1. **From** Paul *and Timothy our brother*—v1

2. Paul sends greetings **from**—five other persons—vv23-24

3. He writes **to**—more than one person—v2

➤ *Apphia our sister*—possibly Philemon's wife

➤ *Archippus our fellow soldier*—possibly Philemon's son

➤ *and to the church in your house*

b. But **language** is *most* personal

1. Paul speaks exclusively in first person—**35 times** in 25 verses!

➤ **15 times**—he says “*I*”

➤ **20 times**—he says “*me, my, mine*”

2. He uses plural first person only once

➤ *Timothy our brother*—v1

➤ Refers to fellow workers/prisoners—v23-24—with first person *my*

3. He addresses Philemon *directly*

➤ Third person singular—“*you*”—**28 times** in 25 verses!

➤ Only twice—he uses plural third person—vv 22, 25

c. Paul also writes this letter *with my own hand*—v19

3. PAUL'S SHORTEST LETTER

❖ 25 VERSES—430 WORDS

- a. Paul's longest letters are 17 times longer
 - **I Corinthians**—437 verses (**17x**)—9462 words (**22x**)
 - **Romans**—433 verses (**17x**)—9422 words (**22x**)
- b. Third shortest book in New Testament—and Bible
 - **III John**—294 words—14 verses
 - **II John**—298 words—13 verses
 - **Shortest OT** book is **Obadiah**—669 words—21 verses

D. DELIVERY

1. POSSIBLY AT THE SAME TIME AS PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS
2. IF SO—PROBABLY DELIVERED BY ONESIMUS HIMSELF—WITH TYCHICUS

Col 4:7-9—*As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.*

III. CIRCUMSTANCES

A. RECIPIENT—PHILEMON

1. MEMBER—AND LEADER?—OF HOUSE-CHURCH IN COLOSSAE
2. WEALTHY?
 - He owned slaves—like Onesimus
 - He owned a house—large enough for the church to meet there
3. PROBABLY ONE OF PAUL'S CONVERTS
 - **v19**—*you owe to me even your own self as well*

B. SUBJECT—ONESIMUS

1. PHILEMON'S SLAVE—IN COLOSSAE
 - a. Traditional view
 - A non-believer—who stole money from Philemon

b. Alternative view

- A believer—who had a financial disagreement with Philemon—or owed him money

2. NAME MEANS—‘USEFUL’

- Play on words in **v11**—*but now is useful both to you and to me*

3. RUNWAY SLAVE

a. Converted by Paul in Rome

- **v10**—*my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment*

b. Had made himself ‘useful’ to Paul and his ministry—**v11**

c. Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon—**v12**

d. Paul intercedes with Philemon for him—**vv 10, 15-17**

C. BACKGROUND ISSUE—SLAVERY

1. SLAVERY IN THE FIRST CENTURY

a. **Common-place** part of first century culture

b. **Not based on race**—but social or ethnic condition

1. **Social** condition—indebted persons who sold themselves into slavery

2. **Ethnic** condition—captives of nations defeated by Rome

c. **Old Testament** regulated slavery in Israel

1. Distinction between two classes of slaves

a. **Gentile** slaves—captured in battle

b. **Jewish** slaves—who sold themselves or children to pay debts

2. Regulations regarding Jewish slaves—**Ex 21:2-6**

a. After 6 years’ service—a male Jewish slave was to be set free

- ▲ But his children by a female slave remained the master’s property

b. If man wished to stay after six years—he could remain a slave

- ▲ He would be marked by mutilation of the ear (organ of obedience)

2. PAUL’S POSITION

a. Conversant and compliant with Roman and Jewish law

b. He never explicitly condemned slavery as an institution

c. He approved of the master-slave relationship in his household code

- Eph 5:5-9
- Col 3:25-4:1
- Titus 2:9-10

3. NEW TESTAMENT POSITION

○ Never *explicitly* condemns slavery as an institution—or calls for its abolition

4. ROMAN LAW

- a. **Runaway slaves**—a crime punishable by death
- b. **Paul's obligation**—required to return Onesimus to his owner, Philemon

V. PURPOSES AND MAIN THEME

A. PURPOSES

1. TO INTERCEDE FOR PHILEMON
2. TO ASK PHILEMON TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR PAUL'S VISIT TO COLOSSAE

B. MAIN THEME—TRANSFORMED IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIP

- In Christ—our **identity** and **relationships** are transformed
- They are no longer just *social* identities [slaves]—and relationships [master/slave]
- We have a new **kingdom** identity and relationship—**God's family** [brothers in Christ]

VI. OUTLINE/ORGANIZATION

Greetings—1-3

Thanksgiving and Prayer—4-7

Paul's Plea for Onesimus—8-21

Final Request, Greetings, Benediction—22-25

VI. BIBLICAL TEXT

Philemon 16—*no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother*

VII. EXPOSITION

A. PAUL'S APPEAL TO PHILEMON

1. HIS TACTFUL AND SENSITIVE APPROACH
 - a. Paul could have exercised his apostolic authority

1. His *confidence in Christ*—v 8

- a. Literally—“boldness in Christ”—enough to speak out confidently—with authority
- b. Based on—two things
 - ▲ His **apostolic** office—chosen by Christ to exercise authority
 - ▲ Feeling certain about God’s will in the matter—by the Holy Spirit

2. Paul felt he had the authority—*to order you to do what is proper*

b. Instead

1. He made an **appeal**—*παρακαλεω*—urged/exhorted him

- This is a godly method—through the **paraclete**—[Holy Spirit]—He exhorts

2. **Appeal**—based on six things

a. For the sake of **love**—*αγαπη*—v9

b. Philemon’s **sympathy** for Paul’s situation—aged and imprisoned—v9

c. Onesimus’s **personal** situation—v10

1. He had become a **Christian**

- ◇ *my child whom I have begotten* (v10)—*beloved brother* (v16)

2. He was **practically useful**—to both Paul and Philemon—(v11)

d. Desire **not to compel** Philemon—v14

- ▲ Giving Philemon opportunity to act voluntarily—magnanimously
- ▲ And—thus—save face with fellow Colossians

e. Paul’s **relationship** with Philemon—he exercises personal privilege—based on:

- ▲ Mutual respect—*If then you regard me a partner*—v17
- ▲ Philemon’s debt to Paul—*you owe to me even your own self*—v19

f. Paul’s **relationship** with Onesimus

- ▲ His **sense of duty**—to mentor/help/intercede—for his ‘child’ in the ministry

2. CONTENT AND RATIONALE OF PAUL’S APPEAL

- I did what was right—I sent Onesimus back to you—v12
- I wanted to keep Onesimus—to help me in prison—v13
- But did not act without your consent—v14

- Because I don't want to force you—v14
 - Instead—I want you to do this good thing—voluntarily—v 14
- Maybe this is why you were separated temporarily—v 15
 - So that you could receive him back permanently—v15
 - Now have much **more**—not a slave—but a loving [and useful] brother—v16
- So—if you respect me as a partner [in ministry]—v17
 - Accept him—just as you would accept me—v17
- I will be fair—I will pay you whatever debt he owes—v18
 - I certify this with my own hand
- Remember our relationship—you owe me!—v19
- You can pay me back by refreshing my heart in Christ—v20

B. PRINCIPLES IN PAUL'S APPEAL

1. HELPING FELLOW CHRISTIANS

- a. We **should help** fellow Christians in difficult circumstances
- b. It is **appropriate to network** and use existing relationships to help them
- c. We should be **sensitive** to how we do this—not imposing or compelling others to act
- d. We should be **transparent** about our motives—and clear about the action we seek
- e. We should be **fair** and do what is **right**
- f. We must be guided by our **conscience** and leadership of the **Holy Spirit**

2. CHANGE OF IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIP

- a. When we become Christians—we are transformed

1. Our **identity** changes

- We are no longer the old 'self'
- We become **new creatures**
- We are now 'in Christ'
- And this new identity should drive all we are—say—and do
- We have **more to offer—more than the old self**

2. Our **relationships** change

- We are **God's children**—part of His family
- So we are beloved **brothers/sisters** of other Christians
- With a new **dignity**—on equal footing with everyone else
- With new **responsibilities**—that go with the new family

3. OLD RELATIONSHIPS AND OBLIGATIONS

- a. We retain old relationships—with family, work, and community
- b. If we have wronged someone—we must make it right—we have even more reason to do so!
- c. If we owe anyone—we must make amends—those obligations still stand
- d. Our social status and place in the world—probably will not improve
 - In some cultures—cause more difficulties—or persecution!
- e. But our new identity—should enable us to contribute more—and perform better

C. CONTEXTUALIZING THE TEXT

1. THE NEW TESTAMENT DID NOT EXPLICITLY CONDEMN SLAVERY

2. PAUL WAS NOT CONSCIOUSLY MAKING A CASE FOR ABOLISHING SLAVERY

- a. This letter should not be used for that purpose
- b. Instead—it tells Christians how to **identify** other Christians
 - Not based on their secular identity—*no longer a slave*
 - But on their identity in Christ—and relationship in God’s family—*beloved brother*
- c. Instead—it tells Christians how to **treat** other Christians
 - With *mutual* dignity—fairness
- d. *Possibly* Paul was *implying* that Philemon should free Onesimus
 1. To do a ‘good’ thing—*so your goodness would not be . . . by compulsion*—v14
 2. To see Onesimus—*no longer as a slave*—v16
 3. To accept Onesimus—*as you would me*—v17—[Paul was a free man]
- e. But Paul never *ordered* him to free Onesimus—though Paul had apostolic authority (v8)

3. THE BIBLE LAYS THE IMPLIED BASIS FOR ABOLISHING SLAVERY

- a. All humans are **created** in the image of God
- b. God’s **provisionally cares** for everyone equitably
 - His sun rises on the evil and the good
 - He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous
- c. He commands us to **love our neighbor** as ourselves

- And ‘Samaritans’ can be good neighbors!
- d. God desires **all persons to be saved**—i.e. to come into His kingdom
- So *everyone* would come into His **kingdom**
 - The result: everyone would enjoy the same dignity/status as kingdom-people
- e. Kingdom people are **free**
- They have come to know the **Truth**—and the Truth has made them **free!**
- f. Kingdom people are **no longer slaves**
- Jesus said, “*I no longer call you slaves . . . but I have called you friends*”
- g. Kingdom people are not identified or divided by social, ethnic, or gender distinctions

I Cor 12:13—*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews of Greeks, **whether slaves or free**, and were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

Gal 3:27-8—*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is **neither slave nor free man**, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Col 3:11—[they have put on a new self that is being renewed by their Creator] *a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised; barbarian, Scythian, **slave and freeman**, but Christ is all, and in all.*