PHILEMON

Philemon
Key Verse:

INTRODUCTION TO PHILEMON

Paul wrote four letters during his first imprisonment in Rome, around 60 AD: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon. The man Philemon, to whom this letter was addressed, was a leader in the church of Colosse. This church was the fruit of Paul's ministry in the hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus, for it was through his two+ year ministry there that Epaphras was converted and sent out to pioneer Colosse.

Paul sent this letter, along with Colossians, by Onesimus and Tychicus. Onesimus, whose name means "useful", had been a slave in the home of Philemon, but he had run away. In Rome, he met Paul--and he met Jesus. What must he do? The enslavement of one human being by another is surely against God's law of love. But Christianity is not so much concerned about changing the structures of society as about changing men who live within the structures of all kinds of societies. Paul sent Onesimus back to his master. Paul did not attack the institution of slavery; rather, he challenged Philemon to welcome his runaway slave (who could have received a death sentence) as a brother. When Jesus rules the heart of a person, he cannot continue doing something that displeases God.

ONESIMUS BECOMES A USEFUL MAN

Philemon 1-11 (Sun.) Nov. 12

Key Verse: 11

1. You have refreshed the saints

Paul wrote this letter to Philemon and his wife, leaders in the church in Colosse. The church met in their home, and they were known for their faith, love and generosity. Paul prayed that he might be active in sharing his faith. The purpose of this letter, however, concerned a man named Onesimus. Onesimus was a runaway slave from the household of Philemon.

2. A useless man becomes useful (8-14)

"Onesimus" means "useful." But Onesimus had been worse than useless to Philemon. Perhaps he had stolen something and run away. Perhaps he was rebellious at being a slave and was searching for freedom. He met Paul, a truly free man in chains. Then he met Jesus and discovered what real freedom is. He became a useful man. Paul called him, "my son." He was a spiritual son, born to Paul when he was in chains.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the grace of Jesus, which made this useless sinner a useful child of God.

One Word: A useless man made useful

I AM SENDING HIM BACK TO YOU

Philemon 12-25 (Mon.) Nov. 13

Key Verse: 15,16

1. As a dear brother

Paul was sending the runaway slave Onesimus back to his master Philemon. It was hard for him to do this, because he had come to love Onesimus like a son. But before Onesimus could serve Jesus freely, and serve Paul, he had to go back and settle accounts with his master. When a man meets Jesus, he gets the courage to face old problems and solve them.

2. Refresh my heart in Christ

Paul did not directly command Philemon to set Onesimus free. He appealed to him as a partner in the gospel, a co-worker. He asked him to welcome this slave, not as a slave, but as a man and brother in the Lord. Paul regards Philemon as a partner in the gospel. He asks him to welcome Onesimus as he would welcome Paul himself. He offered to pay his debts. Paul also hints that he is coming for a visit soon.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for real freedom in Jesus. Help me to solve old problems through faith in him.

One Word: Not a slave but a brother