

PHILEMON

1-21 What do we learn from this letter?

Paul wrote this letter to Philemon from Rome, where he was in prison for his witness for Christ (CP V 1, 9). Philemon was a Gentile believer who lived in Colossae. The Colossian church met in his house (CP V 2). Philemon was a convert of Paul's ministry (CP V 19). The subject of this epistle is Onesimus, a runaway slave owned by Philemon. Paul met Onesimus while he (Paul) was in prison in Rome, and converted him to christianity (CP V 10). Now Paul is sending Onesimus, accompanied by Tychicus, back to Philemon with this letter (CP V 12; Col 4:7-9).

The dominant theme of Paul's epistle to Philemon is forgiveness, which is featured throughout the New Testament (CP Phm 8-21 with Mt 6:12-15;

18:21-35; Mk 11:24-26; Eph 4:32; Col 3:12-13). Paul's instruction to Philemon in this epistle provides the biblical definition of forgiveness, without ever using the word. The epistle also illustrates for us how Paul dealt with slavery. Rather than attacking it directly, or stirring up an insurrection, Paul set forth Christian principles which undermined the evils of slavery by changing the hearts of both slaves and masters (CP Ga 3:27-28; Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22 - 4:1; 1 Ti 6:1-2).

Paul's epistle to Philemon also illustrates for us the message of the gospel. Once a slave to sin (CP V 18), Onesimus is now a beloved brother in the Lord (CP V 16), and Philemon is challenged to show Onesimus the same forgiveness and pardon him, as Christ also forgave and pardoned Philemon (CP V 8-17).