

LESSON 1: PHILEMON 1:1-25

Paul's Plea for Onesimus

1. Paul greets Philemon, Apphia (his wife), and Archippus (their son; see Col. 4:17), and refers to the church that meets in their house (v. 2). See Acts 18:7, 18-19, 26; 19:26; 19: 9; 16:15; Romans 16:5; and Colossians 4:15. What do we learn about the character of house churches during the time of Paul?
2. Compare verses 4-5 to Colossians 1:3-8. What do we learn about Paul's prayer life on behalf of the congregations of early Christians? For what is he thankful?
3. What were the events which led to this letter (vv. 1-25)? What kind of relationship do Paul and Philemon have (vv. 1, 7, 17, 19-22)?
4. What is Philemon's character like (vv. 4-7)? How does Paul encourage his spiritual growth (vv. 4-6)? Pay special attention to the key word translated as "sharing" (*koinonia*) in verse 6, which shows up again in verse 17. (On *koinonia*, see Phil. 1:5.) What do you think Paul is saying in verse 6?
5. How does Paul appeal to Philemon (vv. 8-16)? What techniques of persuasion does he use in these verses? What does this tell us about relating to each other in Jesus Christ? How do you understand Paul's claim that he has become Onesimus' father in his imprisonment? (Compare 1 Cor. 4:14-17; Gal. 4:16-20; Phil. 2:22; 1 Thess. 2:7, 11; 1 Tim. 1:2; and 2 Tim. 1:2.)
6. In what way has Onesimus changed since running away from Philemon (vv. 10-16)? How has he become worthy of his name (v. 11)? What words or phrases describe Paul's relationship with Onesimus (vv. 10, 12, 16)?
7. How does Paul extend himself to persuade Philemon to accept Onesimus (vv. 17-20)? What will it require of Philemon to do as Paul asks? What do you learn about Paul's leadership style? (With regard to writing in his own hand (v. 19), compare Rom. 16:22; 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; and 2 Thess. 3:17.)
8. What risks was Onesimus taking by returning to Philemon? What do you imagine his feelings were? Was it right for him to return? And was it right for Paul to send him back to Philemon?
9. What does this letter teach concerning the gospel's impact in our lives? Our relationships?