



Introduction (1:1-3)

Greeting (1:1-2)

Author (1:1a)

Paul. When Colossians was written, Paul was in prison (1:1, 9), most likely in Rome.

Audience (1:1b-7)

The letter is addressed Philemon, Apphia and Archippus. Philemon was a rich slave owner who most likely lived in Colosse (Colossians 4:9), and in whose house the church met (1:2b). Apphia is most often presumed to be Philemon's wife. Archippus is most likely the pastor or a church leader in Colosse, based on Paul's encouragement in Colossians 4:17 for him to take heed of his ministry.

Paul begins with his standard greeting, followed by a prayer of thanksgiving for his reader (1:3). In his prayer, Paul is thankful for Philemon's faith and love (1:4), and prays that Philemon his fellowship would become effective through knowledge of the good (1:5-6). Paul has received much comfort and joy from his love.

Theme of the Book

Philemon is a practical example of forgiveness and a reminder that in Christ we are no longer master and slave.

Structure of the Book

	Greeting		Request		Conclusion	
1	7	8	21	22	25	

Occasion for the Writing (1:8-21)

Onesimus, a slave owned by Philemon, had stolen items from the household and then run away. He had made his way to Rome, where he encountered Paul and became a believer. Paul is writing this letter to ask Philemon to forgive Onesimus and to accept him back as a fellow believer in Christ.

Interestingly, Paul does not seem to request that Philemon set Onesimus free, but only that he accept him back into his household without requiring payment for past offenses. There is some indication that Paul would have liked Philemon to send Onesimus back to Paul so he can minister to him (1:13-14).

Paul's Authority (1:8-9)

While he has the right as an apostle to order Philemon to forgive and accept Onesimus back, he instead appeals to him on the basis of love instead (1:8-9). This demonstrates Paul's humility, for he never mentions his apostleship, but instead he only refers to himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus (1:1, 9). Paul doesn't lord his authority over others, but instead appeals to others as a partner (1:17) and fellow brother (1:20) in Christ. In so doing Paul is also establishing an example for Philemon, as he desires that Philemon not consider himself first as Onesimus' master, but as his fellow brother in Christ (1:16).

Paul's Appeal (1:10-16)

Paul's appeal is based on Onesimus' ministry to Paul while he is in prison. While Onesimus was somewhat worthless as a slave (1:11), he now has become very useful to Paul, ministering to him while in prison (1:13). Paul thought so highly of him that he would have rather kept Onesimus with him. However, he thought it right to ask Philemon first, since he had a legal right to Onesimus. Paul could have just sent a letter to Philemon ordering him to let his slave stay with him in Rome, but Paul didn't want to force Philemon, but instead to give him a chance to demonstrate freely his goodness (1:14). In fact, Paul believes that God may have orchestrated these events, including Onesimus' encounter with Paul in Rome, just so Philemon might demonstrate the love and goodness of God to his slave (1:15). Therefore, Paul asks Philemon to accept Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a fellow brother in Christ (1:16).

Paul's Account (1:17-21)

Paul asks Philemon to take any monetary damages or any money owed by Onesimus and to "charge that to my account" (1:18). Paul is willing to pay the penalty for Onesimus' sin against Philemon, serving as a living example of the gospel.

Philemon may have been concerned that such a letter might have been a forgery. Therefore, Paul assures him by writing in his own handwriting "I will repay it" (1:19). Then Paul reminds him that if we are going to keep accounts, Philemon owes Paul his very own self, probably referring to Philemon's salvation through the word of Paul (1:19).

Paul then gives his final appeal, telling Philemon of the joy he will have if he accepts his slave back (1:20), and telling him that he is certain that Philemon will do this and all the more (1:21).

Conclusion (1:22-25)

Finally, Paul closes his letter telling him to prepare lodging for Paul, for he hopes to get out of prison and return to him (1:23). He then gives greetings from Epaphras, the likely founder of the church in Colosse (1:23), as well as greetings from Mark, Luke and others (1:24). Paul then concludes with a blessing of the grace of Jesus for Philemon (1:25)

Bibliography

Deibler, Edwin C. "Philemon." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, ed. Victor Books, 1988.

Rupprecht, Arthur A. "Philemon." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998. Electronic edition, STEP file.