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“Do Me a Favor!”
Introduction to Philemon

The New Testament is composed of twenty seven books. The four Gospel accounts and the Book of Acts are historical narratives. The last book, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is the vision given to the apostle John. The remaining twenty one books are letters written to individuals, churches, or believers in general. The Book of Philemon is one of these letters.

A proper understanding of any biblical book requires a thorough historical background. The “w” questions are an easy way to begin. **Who** wrote the book? **Where** and **when** was it written? **To whom** was it written and **why**? **What** are its contents? The answers to these questions will provide a sure foundation for a proper exegesis (explanation) of Philemon.

The apostle Paul is the author. The letter was written from Rome where Paul was held a prisoner. Along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, it is one of the “prison epistles.” Scholars date the prison epistles around 60-62 A.D. Early church fathers such as Jerome and John Chrysostom attested to its’ validity as part of scripture. It was included in one of the earliest New Testament canons, the Muratorian, dated about 170 A.D. It was written to Philemon, a slave owner whom Paul had led to Christ (verse 19). Paul’s purpose in writing was to appeal to Philemon about his runaway slave, Onesimus (verse 10). Paul had also led Onesimus to the Lord while in Rome and was sending him back to Philemon with this letter asking forgiveness on all the charges against him (verses 18-19).

The Pauline authorship of this letter is important as to it’s inclusion in scripture (Eph. 2:20) and it’s theme of love, grace and forgiveness. The first mention of Paul is found at the stoning of Stephen, when he was known as Saul (Acts 7:58-8:3). On his way to Damascus Jesus appears to Saul and he was converted (Acts 9:1-31). His conversion is repeated two other times (Acts 22:1-16, 26:9-23). He becomes the missionary to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:16, 2:9) and embarks on three journeys around the Roman Empire and authors most of the New Testament epistles.

The Book of Philemon reveals Jesus Christ. Paul is the mediator between the owner Philemon and the slave Onesimus. Christ is *the* mediator (1Tim. 2:5) between the human race enslaved to sin and the Father to whom a debt is owed (Rom. 6:23). This is a story of God’s love (Luke 15:11-32).

