

Intro:

I. Introduction to Philemon

A. A Personal letter, but also one of The Prison Epistles

1. Prison Epistles include Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians - so name because Paul was in Prison (1st imprisonment found in Acts)
2. Though not filled with the kind of doctrine found in the others, still deals with a vitally important practical issue - forgiveness
3. Forgiveness
 - a. first taught in the NT by the Lord - Mt 6:12 the Lord's Prayer
 - b. In the OT God describes Himself as a forgiving God - Ex 34:7
 - c. the theme runs through the scripture - Ps 32:1; 85:23; 130:3-4; Isa 42:25; 55:7; Jer 33:8; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1 Jo 1:9; 2:12
 - d. Best understood through the story of the Prodigal son - Lk 15:11-32
 - i. when the prodigal comes to his senses, realizing that his father's servants have it better than him, decides to return home to seek a job not expecting forgiveness
 - ii. When the father sees him, he runs to receive him back
 - iii. Represents how God forgives - eagerly, totally, lavishly
 - e. A second issue about God's forgiveness (after salvation), based on our forgiveness of others
 - i. Positively stated - Mt 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy
 - ii. Negatively stated - Jas 2:13 for judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy
 - iii. Jesus taught in the context of the Lord's prayer
 - forgives us our debts as we forgive our debtors Mt 6:12
 - if you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions - Mt 6:14-15
 - iv. Salvation obviously forgives all sins from their condemnation
 - v. Forgiveness of others is what fellowship with God after Salvation is dependent

B. Authorship

1. Only two periods in Church history has the Pauline authorship of Philemon been in question
 - a. During the 4th century because it contains no doctrine
 - i. countered by Jerome, Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia
 - ii. Why would some forge something with no doctrine

- b. During the 19th century, some radical critics who had rejected the Pauline authorship of the other Prison epistles
- 2. accepted as Pauline by Church Fathers Tertullian and Eusebius and is universally accepted today
- C. Date and Place of Writing
 - 1. Written at the same time as Colossians
 - 2. Written from Rome during Paul's first imprisonment
- D. Occasion
 - 1. Philemon
 - a. led to faith in Christ by Paul probably while in Ephesus
 - b. became a prominent member of the church at Colossae
 - c. was a wealthy man, had a large enough house for the church to meet there - vs 2
 - d. actively involved in ministry - called fellow worker - vs 1
 - e. owned at least one slave - Onesimus - Col 4:9
 - 2. Onesimus
 - a. ran away to Rome when not a Christian probably to get lost in the crowd
 - b. somehow met Paul
 - i. may have sought him out
 - may have heard about Paul in in the house of Philemon
 - may have traveled with Philemon to Ephesus and met him
 - may have run into Epaphras who was there from Colossae ministering to Paul
 - ii. Quickly endeared himself to Paul - vs 12, 16
 - c. Name means "useful," became so by assisting Paul - vs 11, 13
 - 3. The Problem
 - a. He was a runaway slave
 - b. He had defrauded his master by depriving him of his services
 - c. He had stolen money when he fled - vs 18
 - d. returning to his master from Rome, he could have been caught by the vigilante slave catchers
 - e. Roman law gave complete freedom to the master over a slave,
 - i. especially one who had done the above
 - ii. life and death in the master's hand
 - iii. A slave had no claim to forgiveness
 - iv. Could be crucified, branded on the forehead with F for fugitive, or beaten
 - 4. the Solution
 - a. though a sacrifice for Paul, he returned Onesimus to Philemon with Tychicus for protection
 - b. the willingness of Onesimus to return to the possible above stated punishment showed the genuineness of his faith
 - c. Paul send this letter urging forgiveness and receive him back

E. Christianity and Slavery

1. One needs to understand slavery in Rome to fully grasp Philemon
2. The whole structure of Roman society was based on slavery
3. Slavery grew with Roman society until it changed the economic basis
 - a. did away with free labor
 - b. transferred all industries into the hands of slaves
4. During Rome's expansion wars, slaves were war captives
5. Slaves made up as much as a third of the population
6. Their standing
 - a. not considered persons, but property
 - i. could be sold
 - ii. could be exchanged
 - iii. could be given away
 - iv. could be seized to pay a master's debt
 - v. masters had almost unlimited power to punish slaves
 - b. had no legal right to marriage
 - i. cohabitation was regulated by the master
 - ii. Any children produced belonged to the master as slaves
7. By the time of the NT,
 - a. most slaves were born into slavery
 - b. slavery was changing
 - i. treatment was improving b/c masters knew contented slaves worked better
 - ii. Though still not recognized as persons,
 - began to acquire some legal rights
 - in 20 A.D., the senate decreed slaves accused of crimes were to be tried as a freeman
 - c. slaves were often better off than freemen
 - i. assured of food, clothing, and shelter,
 - Freeman often slept in the streets or in cheap housing
 - ii. Freeman had no job security, could lose it in economic downturn
 - slave often dressed as well as freemen
 - d. slaves could be doctors, musicians, teachers, librarians, and accountants
 - i. not uncommon for masters to train a slave in his trade
 - ii. not uncommon for masters to pay for their education and training in almost all disciplines
 - e. Freedom was a real possibility for many
 - i. freedom held out by masters to inspire better work
 - ii. Many slaves shared deep friendships with their masters, they were loved and cared for generously
 - iii. Many slaves would not have taken freedom if it were offered b/c their job was happy and beneficial
 - iv. They could purchase their freedom

- v. masters often put in the wills freedom and part of their estate for the slave at their death
 - vi. By the time of Augustus Caesar, so many slave were being freed at their master's death that the law was changed
 - vii. Average length of time a slave waited to be freed was 7-20 years
8. The NT nowhere attacks slavery directly
- a. any insurrection would have been brutally crushed
 - b. the message of Jesus and the disciples would have been swallowed up by social or political reform
 - c. Notice in the NT
 - i. the one in submission is always addressed first
 - Wives - Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-6
 - Children - Eph 6:1-2; Col 3:20;
 - Slaves - Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:22-25;
 - ii. By being and living Christ's way, one can have influence over those in authority especially for the Gospel
 - d. Christianity did plant the seeds for the destruction of slavery
 - i. destroyed by changed hearts
 - ii. The gospel curtailed the abuses of slavery
 - iii. Paul does not order Philemon to free Onesimus, but to treat him as a brother

Outline for Philemon

Introduction - vs 1-3

The Spiritual Character of One Who Forgives - vs 4-7

The Spiritual Action of One Who Forgives - vs 8-18

The Spiritual Motivation of One Who Forgives - vs 19-25