

A Tour Through the Divine Library
(Philemon)

I. General Introduction to Philemon

-Title and Recipients: “To Philemon” (v. 1); Apphia, Archippus, the church in Philemon’s house (v. 2)

-Author and Date: the apostle Paul and Timothy the brother (v. 1); written ~AD 61 during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30, 31; Philemon vs. 1, 9, 10, 13, 23)

-Purpose: to urge Philemon to forgive and receive his runaway slave, Onesimus (v. 17), and to prepare Paul a place of lodging (v. 22)

-Structure:

I. Introduction (vs. 1-7)

II. Appeal to Philemon (vs. 8-22)

III. Conclusion (vs. 23-25)

II. General Overview of Philemon

-Greeting (vs. 1-3); Prayer of Thanksgiving (vs. 4-7); Petition for Onesimus (vs. 8-16): v. 11: Onesimus: “Useful”; Paul urges Philemon not to punish Onesimus but instead to receive him, no longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother; Promise to Philemon (vs. 17-22): Paul promises to pay Onesimus’ debt for him; Conclusion (vs. 23-25)

III. Prominent Themes in Philemon

-Spiritual Equality (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1; 1 Tim. 6:12; Philemon vs. 15, 16); Providence of God; Surety (Prov. 6:1; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26, 27; 27:13 with Gen. 42:37; 43:9; Philemon vs. 17-19)

IV. Christ in Philemon

-Paul and others are imprisoned for Christ (vs. 1, 9, 23); Grace comes from Christ (vs. 3, 25); The saints have love and faith toward Christ (v. 5); Paul has confidence in Christ (v. 8); Paul is refreshed in Christ (v. 20); Paul’s advocacy for Onesimus before Philemon mirrors Christ’s work of mediation for us before the Father (vs. 17, 18).

V. Practical Lessons in Philemon

1) This letter displays in a marvelous way the fellowship of believers in the early church.

2) This letter illustrates in a unique way the suretyship of Christ for believers (Zech. 3:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:24; 1 John 2:1).