

## PHILEMON

- 1) Vs. 1 -- Written by Paul, probably when he was in prison in Rome, 62-67. /// This letter was used by U.S. slave owners to justify their position on slave-holding. However, Cain Felder in NIV says, "There is no basis whatsoever for thinking of Onesimus as a progenitor of the African American slave, especially since the Roman empire did not have a race-based policy..." The central focus of the letter is that the gospel can transform lives regardless of class or other distinctions. The letter stands in contrast to Gal 5:11, 1 Cor 7:21, 2 Cor 11:20-21, all of which rail against slavery. /// Philemon was a leader in the church at Colossae. Apphia was his wife, Archippus his son. /// "Whose father I have become" is literally "whom I have begot" (in the Christian faith).
- 2) Vs. 10 -- Onesimus was a slave of Philemon (Onesimus means "useful," -- a name commonly given to slaves, as a tribute to their usefulness, or as an incentive to become so). Tradition has it that he stole from Philemon, ran away, was converted to Christianity by Paul in Rome, now is sent back to Philemon still a slave! But there is no basis for the assumption that Onesimus stole anything. It is more likely that Philemon abused him in some way. Why did Paul not keep Onesimus with him, rather than send him back? 1) He didn't view slavery as being wrong, or 2) He believed that time was running short (1 Cor 7:29a) and there was no need to combat slavery. Or, more likely: 3) He wanted Philemon to honor their new tie as Christians *above and beyond* any legal demands, their relationship to be conditioned by love, not law.
- 3) V. 11 -- Paul plays on the word "useful."