An Overview Of The Book Of Philemon

The Writer Of The Letter To Philemon:

"Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our[1] brother," Philemon 1:1. Paul was the writer of this letter, and Timothy was present with him.

The Recipient Of The Letter To Philemon:

"To Philemon our beloved and fellow worker and to Apphia, our sister, and to Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house," Philemon 1:1, 2. Philemon was a member of the church in Colosse. Apphia was very likely his wife and a Christian woman, which is why Paul called her "our sister". Archippus was likely to have been Philemon's son.

The Date Of The Letter To Philemon:

The latter part of A.D. 60 to 61

The Occasion For The Writing Of The Letter To Philemon:

The letter to Philemon was one of Paul's prison epistles, which he wrote while being held a prisoner in Rome. While being held under house arrest there, Paul received a visitor named Onesimus, whose name meant profitable or helpful. Onesimus had formerly proven to be anything but profitable and helpful. He was a runaway slave who had fled from his master, a man named Philemon. When Onesimus ran away, he probably took with him money and goods that belonged to his master Philemon. Runaway slaves customarily did this. Onesimus made his way to Rome. In Rome he somehow came to Paul. Through Paul's teaching he became a Christian. A bond of friendship developed between Paul and Onesimus. Onesimus performed valuable services for Paul. He probably ran errands for Paul, who could not leave the house. Onesimus' services greatly aided Paul's ministry.

Paul would have liked to keep Onesimus with him. Paul, however, honored the social tie that bound a slave to his master and respected the duty Onesimus owed to Philemon, his master. Guided by the tenth commandment, which forbids coveting another man's worker, and by the law of love, Paul decided Onesimus should return to Philemon. Paul was about to send Tychicus, a co-worker, to Colosse with a letter Paul had written to the church there. Philemon was a member of that church. Tychicus' traveling to Colosse offered Paul the opportunity to send Onesimus with Tychicus to Philemon. Onesimus went willingly as a penitent Christian to seek his master's forgiveness and to return to his service in Philemon's household. Paul wrote his letter to Philemon and had Tychicus hand carry it to him.

Content Of The Letter To Philemon:

In his letter Paul did not command Philemon to free his slave Onesimus. Rather, Paul commended Philemon for the loving compassion he showed to his fellow Christians and then interceded in Onesimus' behalf. Paul pleaded that for love's sake Philemon would treat Onesimus kindly. Slaves, such as Onesimus, who were brought back to their masters were often treated most harshly and under Roman law could be killed. Paul noted that Philemon was having Onesimus come back to him as more than a slave but as a brother in Christ and fellow believer. Paul asked that Philemon would receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul himself. Since it was quite possible that Onesimus had wronged Philemon and was indebted to Philemon for what he had stolen, Paul even offered to have Philemon charge the debt to him so that Paul might repay him. In offering to repay Philemon for Onesimus' indebtedness, Paul reminded Philemon that he owed him his very life, for it appears that in some way as a result of Paul's gospel ministry Philemon had become a believer in Christ the Savior. In the course of his letter Paul hinted that he would very much like to have Onesimus back with him in Rome.

Theme Of The Letter To Philemon:

In love we Christians will forgive those who sin against us as God forgives our sins against him for Jesus' sake.

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[1] Lit. the

Philemon

Part 1: Greeting Verses 1-3

¶ 1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our[2] brother;
¶ To Philemon our beloved and fellow worker
2 and to Apphia, our sister, and to Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:
3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Part 2: Thanksgiving and Prayer for Philemon Verses 4-7

¶ 4 I am always giving thanks to my God while making mention of you in my prayers,
5 because I hear of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.
6 *I pray* that the fellowship of your faith may become active in knowing precisely[3] every good thing we possess in Christ,[4] which is among you[5] all.[6]
7 For I have had much joy and comfort on the basis of your love, because the hearts[7] of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Part 3: Paul's Intercession in Behalf of Onesimus Verses 8-20

¶ 8 For this reason, although having much boldness in Christ to be ordering what is proper for you,
9 for the sake of love I rather appeal, being such as Paul an old man, but now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus –
10 I appeal to you concerning my son, Onesimus, whom I had begotten in this[8] imprisonment,
11 the man once useless to you but now useful both to you and to me,
12 whom I sent back to you – *as for* him, this man[9] is my very heart.[10]
13 whom, as for me, I was just wanting to keep for myself, so that he may serve me in your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel.
14 But without your consent I did not wish to do *so*, in order that your bestowed favor would not be, as *it were,* as a result of compulsion, but rather as a result of your own free will.
15 For perhaps for this cause he separated himself *from you* for a time, that you may have him back forever,
16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave – a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.
¶ 17 Therefore, if you consider me *as* one in Christian fellowship,[11] receive him as *you would receive* me.
18 But if he has caused you any loss or is indebted to you, charge this to my account.
19 I, Paul, write *this* in my *own* hand – I myself will pay the damages; not to mention to you that you owe me besides even your own self.
20 Yes, brother, may I benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

Part 4: Conclusion Verses 21, 22

¶ 21 Having complete confidence in your obedience, I write to you, because I know that you will do even more than the things which I say.

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[2] Lit. the

[3] Lit. in exact or complete knowledge

[4] Lit. with respect to Christ

[5] Some manuscripts read "among us"

[6] The word "all" is included because the previous word "you" is plural

[7] Lit. inward parts, bowels; likewise v. 20

[8] Lit. the

[9] Lit. this one

[10] Meaning dearly loved by Paul

[11] Lit. "if you consider me a partner"; however, the Greek word for partner comes from the Greek word for fellowship and in the context of the New Testament refers to Christian fellowship; thus the translation "as one in Christian fellowship"

22 And at the same time, also keep your guest room ready for me, for I am hoping that because of your prayers, I will be graciously restored to you.

Part 5: Final Greetings Verses 23-25

¶ 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,
24 *likewise* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke – my fellow workers.
25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with the spirit of you all.[12]

[12] Lit. Your spirit; the word "your" is plural in the Greek, so it is translated the spirit of you all