

Philemon is the shortest of Paul's epistles (25 verses in all) and is one of the seven undisputed letters written by Paul and is dated somewhere between 55-61 AD.

A personal letter written primarily to Philemon but also included in the greeting are Apphia (thought to be Philemon's wife) and Archippus (presumed to be one of his sons) as well as embracing the church that was meeting in Philemon's home. There is a distinct family feel to it with Paul using terms such as *brother, sister, my son*, all of which help to keep an intimate feel. Philemon is about the power of the gospel to transform human relationships; it is about reconciliation and restoration; the closest of relationships that can be made through the knowledge of the love of Christ. It is also about equality at its most extreme: Onesimus, a slave of the lowest social status in the Roman world and having no rights is shown to have equal spiritual status with his owner Philemon, a wealthy man of rank and standing and with Paul, leading apostle.

- **All are equal in the eyes of God. All have potential under God's direction.**
- **Accountability as a family. Small groups meeting in homes help us on our Christian journey.**
- **Everyone's situation has value for God.**

Prisoner in chains: what do we feel trapped by? Yet perhaps God wants us to use this to further his Kingdom.

Slave: if we feel useless and not in control of our own lives then we need to remember that we are under God's authority first and foremost and turn our feelings of helplessness to God's purposes.

Slave owner: we have the power to set people free from their past. We can all be active in sharing our faith.