

# “A BROTHER BELOVED, ESPECIALLY TO ME”

## The Letter to Philemon

### Who wrote The Letter to Philemon?

The Letter to Philemon was written by the Apostle Paul.

### How did The Letter to Philemon get its name and/or what does that name mean?

Paul wrote The Letter to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, Philemon’s slave.

### When did these events take place?

The Letter to Philemon was probably written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome between 60 and 61 A.D.

### For more about The Letter to Philemon:

See page 1321 in the Fireside Catholic Youth Bible.

Just because something is legal - that doesn’t make it right! The challenge for Christians in today’s world is to continue to point out the difference. Just take a look around you. Thousands of babies are aborted every year because it is legal to do so. People are given “assistance” to die because it is legal to do so. Marriage and the traditional family are under attack because society accepts cohabitation, same-sex marriages and all forms of homosexuality as legal. Yet, we hold out hope that these institutions and practices will one day be recognized for exactly what they are. Wrong!

The Letter of Paul to Philemon (the shortest book of the Bible) addresses a practice that is finally being judged both illegal and wrong - the practice of slavery. However, in Biblical times, slavery was a common practice. There are several references in both the Old and New Testaments addressing the relationship between slaves and their masters. Neither party is condemned for maintaining this institution. In fact, as it was during the early history of the United States, slavery for some people was more about a way of life than an act of one man against another.

Paul does not judge Philemon because he is the master of Onesimus his slave. He simply points out to him that Onesimus is first, a man, an equal in the eyes of God. Paul apparently convinced Onesimus, who had probably run away, to return to his master carrying this letter with him. Paul reminds Philemon that Onesimus (who was converted by Paul) is now “a Man in the Lord.” Because of this, Paul asks Philemon to “welcome him as you would me.”

The lesson for us is that we should always look for what is right as we go about our lives. As Christians, we can’t simply hide behind the false protection of doing what is legal no matter how wrong it is. Paul teaches us that every life is equally valuable in the eyes of God and that, as Christians, it is our responsibility to care for others, especially the helpless, the weak and the oppressed.

**Interesting Fact:** The Letter to Philemon is actually addressed to three people: Philemon, the owner, Apphia, his wife and Archippus, an associate of Philemon who may have been a disciple of Paul.

**Bonus Point:** What human institution is detailed in the Letter to Philemon showing it to be widely accepted in the early Christian Church?