

A. Survey and Outline

The material presented in Philemon is that of a direct, personal letter. It includes all the details of warm correspondence. Better than any other work of Paul it shows forth his heart of love and genuine emotion. The subject is the returning of a runaway slave to his owner. But Paul is explaining the spiritual change in the slave and urging a charitable attitude in the owner who is already a believer. This is a situation somewhat comparable to the returning of a prodigal son save that the situation is much more grave. It must be noted that it is not the intention of the Epistle to make any dealing with the subject of slavery per se and that any deductions on this line are purely inferential. This is said in spite of the numerous commentaries penned on Philemon in the days before slavery ended in the United States. It is the union of the family in Christ irrespective of human circumstances which is in view here. The thought which moves in the background is: "God is no respecter of persons."

Philemon should be studied as a whole and not in parts but this general outline may be suggested:

- 1-3 Salutation
- 4-7 Commendation of Philemon
- 8-20 Petition of Paul
- 21-25 Complimentary close