

## THE PARENTHETIC PERSONAL EPISTLES

### PHILEMON

This, the only private personal letter from Paul is a specimen of its kind. It's powerful yet pathetic appeal is the ripe fruitage of that overwhelming grace which Paul dispensed from his Roman prison. Himself a prisoner, he captures the runaway slave, and gives him the freedom of Christ, yet sends him back to the master from whom he had escaped.

This note was doubtless written at the same time as the epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians. Onesimus, accompanied Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21) to Ephesus and Colosse. (Colossians 4:7-9) From the fact that Onesimus is spoken of as "one of you" (Col.4:9) we may infer that Philemon was a member of the ecclesia at Colosse, and that he was given the message to the masters in that epistle at the same time.( Col. 4:1)

But the precious little letter goes far beyond what is "just and equal" so far as Onesimus is concerned. No picture of God's grace can better this. Not only a slave, but subject to torture and death for stealing from his master, he is first reconciled to God through Paul's preaching and then is reconciled to his master through Paul's pleading. He is caught upon the very crest of the great tidal wave of grace that was just ready to overflow the whole world.

The transcendent grace of Paul's PERFECTION EPISTLES was doubtless his precious possession even before it was delivered to Onesimus. Can we realise what this must have meant to Onesimus? To be taken from the deepest depths of social degradation and to be seated with Christ in the celestial realms, by faith, almost exhausts the possibilities of grace, and now upon all this he is given this precious passport to his master's heart! Is not this a lovely little letter?

In literary form too, it is a perfect example of a simple reversion. Every topic is repeated in reverse order, as set forth in detail in the following literary analysis.