



Paul's "Postcard"

From prison in Rome, the Apostle Paul sent a personal note to Philemon, a church leader in the town of Colossae

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus...To Philemon, our dear friend and fellow-worker...and to the church that meets in your home. (vv.1-2)

The "Mailman" Who Delivered This Postcard

A man named Onesimus carried it from Rome to Colossae—along with another letter addressed to the entire church in that town.

I am also sending Onesimus...one of your own people. He and Tychicus will tell you everything that's happening here. (Col. 4:9)

Onesimus is also the main subject of Paul's note to Philemon!

The Purpose Of This Postcard

Paul is interceding on behalf of Onesimus, and trying to arrange a reconciliation between this runaway slave and his master, Philemon!

I appeal to you for...Onesimus...I am sending him back to you... So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me...no longer as a slave, but better than a slave... (vv. 10, 12, 16, 17)

The Back Story

Seeking freedom, Onesimus had fled Colossae—probably stealing some of his master Philemon’s stuff—and then headed for Rome.

If he has done you any wrong, or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back. (vv. 18-19)

The Back Story

While in Rome, Onesimus somehow connected with Paul—who led him to the Lord!

I appeal to you for my son, Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains...He is very dear to me...I would like to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel...Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. (vv. 10, 13, 15-16)

The Back Story

Paul wants Philemon to forgive and to free Onesimus; but the apostle also wants it to be Philemon's own decision!

Welcome him as you would welcome me...although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love...I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary...Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. (vv. 8-9, 14, 17, 21)

The Power Of The Gospel

"In the Lord"—things change!
People and relationships are transformed!

[Onesimus] is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow-man and as a brother in the Lord...Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me...I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. (vv. 11, 16, 20)

The Power Of Subtle Persuasion

Tactful Paul models the art of getting compliance without resorting to coercion!

Affirmation: To Philemon, our dear friend...Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people. (vv. 1, 7)

Deference: I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do... But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced...Yes, my brother, please do me this favor... (vv. 9,14, 20)

The Power Of Subtle Persuasion

Tactful Paul models the art of getting compliance without resorting to coercion!

Polite Reminder: If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, write this with my own hand. I will repay it. And I won't mention that you owe me your very soul! (vv. 18-19)

Gentle Pressure: To Philemon...and to the church that meets in your house... One more thing, please prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that God will answer your prayers and let me return to you soon. (vv. 1-2, 22)
