

## *Was Paul an Old Man?*

In his letter to Philemon, Paul says that he writes to his friend as a *presbytēs*, an “old man” (v. 9). This statement is intriguing because it is the only reference in the New Testament to Paul’s age. How old was he? What would qualify as an “old man” in those days?

Some scholars suggest that he is not necessarily referring to chronological age but rather to his status as a leader or “elder” in the church. But Paul never refers to himself as a church “elder” in any other instance, and writers who do refer to themselves that way use slightly different Greek words to do so (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1).

A few scholars have speculated that there might be an error in our manuscripts here. Paul did not write “elder” or “old man” but rather another word that looks very similar in Greek. They suggest that perhaps he referred to himself as a *presbeutēs* (“ambassador”; cf. *pres-beuein* in 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:20), and a later copyist mistook that word for *presbytēs* (“old man” and “elder”). But this is simply a guess for which there is no actual evidence; we have no manuscripts in which the word *presbeutēs* (“ambassador”) occurs here.