

Philemon



Study Outline

Main Point: Of all of the Apostle Paul's writings, his letter to Philemon is the most unique in style and content. Most of Paul's letters - though written for a specific church or church leader - were intended to be circulated and studied by the church as a whole. There is no doubt that beyond these letters Paul wrote many more of a personal and practical nature not included in the canon of Scripture. This letter to Philemon stands in contrast to the norm because it's obvious Paul's intention was not for the letter to be circulated beyond those he specifically addresses.

So... why include a personal letter concerning a personal matter in the pages of divine Scripture? The answer is four-fold. First, the backdrop of Paul's letter (slavery) has been a common human problem all of history. And yet, though Paul is writing to a slave owner on behalf of a runaway slave he doesn't delve into the intricacies of this social topic or advocate for the abolishment of slavery. Instead he establishes a more radical approach to enacting social change: seeing Jesus change a human heart. Legislation might be a by-product of a societies change of heart, but it will never be the catalyst.

Secondly, this story teaches us the importance of making restitution. By running from his master, Onesimus was in essence stealing from Philemon. After his conversion it was important for him to quit running from his problems and instead return to right the wrongs he had committed. Though it's true we have a new life found in Christ Jesus, it's equally true this new life doesn't eliminate the need to restore what our sinful choices might have destroyed. (vs. 10-13)

Thirdly, Paul's exhortation to Philemon builds a wonderful case for the need of making restoration. Paul never excuses Onesimus' actions, but rather challenges Philemon to have a heavenly perspective - to forgive this man as Christ had forgiven him - and view him as a brother in the Lord. (vs. 15-16)

Finally, the way in which the Apostle Paul handles this situation paints a perfect picture of the important role of intercession. Paul inserts himself in the middle of a ugly situation, but he does so with one aim. He was willing to make a personal sacrifice to see this happen. (vs. 17-18)

Background: The year was 62 AD and Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Though we don't know the circumstance that surrounded this encounter, it's evident from Paul's letter that his path crossed with a runaway slave named Onesimus. After a season of ministry Onesimus not only became a convert of Christianity, but was advised by Paul to return to the master he had run from. As providence would have Onesimus had run from a man of the region of Colosse named Philemon - a man who was also a convert of the Apostle Paul's and a leader in the church. Paul sends Onesimus home with this letter to Philemon pleading for grace and forgiveness.

OUTLINE OF PHILEMON:

1. PRAISE: "I THANK MY GOD"

PHILEMON 1-3	INTRODUCTION
PHILEMON 4,5,7	THANKSGIVING
PHILEMON 6	PAUL'S PRAYER

2. PLEA: "I APPEAL TO YOU"

PHILEMON 8-9	PHILEMON'S CHARACTER
PHILEMON 10-14	ONESIMUS' CONVERSION
PHILEMON 15-16	GOD'S PROVIDENCE

3. PROMISE: "I WILL REPAY"

PHILEMON 17-19	PAUL'S PARTNERSHIP
PHILEMON 20-22	PAUL'S ASSURANCE
PHILEMON 23-25	PAUL'S GREETING



Day 1: Prisoner of Christ Jesus.....

Philemon 1-3 // THINKING POINTS: (1). What was Paul's present circumstances when he wrote this letter? (2). What is revealed about Paul's state of mind when he refers to himself as a "prisoner of Christ Jesus" when he was clearly a "prisoner of Rome?" (3). In what areas does this world try to enslave us? What's then the key to victory?

Day 2: Praying for a Friend.....

Philemon 4-7 // THINKING POINTS: (1). Do you pray for your friends like the Apostle Paul prayed for Philemon? What content seems to dominate your prayer life? (2). What do we learn about the nature of prayer from the example presented in these verses? (3). What incredible truth concerning Christianity is reaffirmed in verse six?

Day 3: Need for Restitution.....

Philemon 8-13 // THINKING POINTS: (1). Following his conversion to Christ, what does Paul exhort Onesimus to do? (2). Why was it important for Onesimus to return to Philemon? What does it mean to make restitution for ones mistakes? Are there risks involved? (3). Have you been running from a problem you need to return and fix?

Day 4: Need for Restoration.....

Philemon 14-16 // THINKING POINTS: (1). What threefold challenge does Paul issue to his friend Philemon? (2). Why would it be important for Philemon to forgive and restore Onesimus? (3). In order to truly restore Onesimus, what would first be demanded of Philemon?

Day 5: Cost of Intercession.....

Philemon 17-20 // THINKING POINTS: (1). What does it mean to intercede on someone else's behalf? (2). What was Paul's ultimate desire by inserting himself into this present situation? In order for Paul to effectively intercede, what must he first have to be willing to except? (3). Is there a situation in your group of friends that demands your involvement? What can you learn from Paul's example?

Day 6: Social Change.....

Philemon 21-25 // THINKING POINT: (1). Why do you think Paul didn't use this situation as an opportunity to speak out against slavery? (2). Most of the time how do we as Christians try to enact moral social improvements in the world around us? (3). What example does Paul establish in his handling of slavery? What is the only way we can truly change society for the better?

DEVOTIONS

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