

Philemon

Good evening and thank you for joining us! We're going to stay in the NT tonight and study the short book of Philemon, so would you please turn to Philemon 1?

Next week parental advisory as we'll begin our through SOS.

Now as we go through this short epistle, it's important to remember that there are 3 main subjects. **SHOW SLIDE** Paul, the author,

Onesimus, the runaway slave

Philemon, the letter recipient and slave owner

CLOSE SLIDE

Under Roman law, a slave who ran away from his master could face the death penalty. In spite of this possibility, the apostle Paul sent Onesimus, a runaway slave and a recent convert to Christianity back to his owner Philemon to make restitution. This Epistle, or letter, to Philemon is Paul's plea that Onesimus no longer be viewed as a runaway slave, but rather as a beloved brother in Christ.

That would be a hard thing to do. In order for Philemon to accept Onesimus' return, it would require forgiveness and restoration, actions which no other slave owner would even think about when dealing with a slave.

But Christians are commanded to a higher calling, one that contradicts the popular back then, and the popular culture today.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

You see the world pursues power and glory, prestige and money. To the world today it's more important to have a lot of Instagram followers than to be a Jesus follower.

But as Christians we're to pursue the way of the Cross. The way of forgiveness, servanthood, suffering and love. That's why we're told in **1 John 2:15 15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.** So if you feel like you're a little different, maybe you don't entirely fit in with society, that's good. we're not supposed to.

The title of this series is Reconciliation through forgiveness

Let's pray

This letter was written about the year 60 AD. This book is one of the prison epistles because it was written when Paul was confined. The other prison epistles are Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. In fact, Philemon and Onesimus were both from Colossi

Since slavery is such a big part of the setting of this letter we need to address the topic of slavery during this time period. At that time the slave/master relationship was as common as the employee employer relationship is today. Oftentimes people became slaves as a means of paying off a debt that they owed.

And of course during this time the Jews practiced slavery according to the provisions of the Law of Moses.

You see, the law of Moses said a Jewish slave belonged to the family of the owner, and the slave had certain religious and social rights. If the slave was a Hebrew, the longest he could be a slave was 6 years. In fact God's law forbid lifelong slavery. **Jeremiah 34:9 9 that every man should set free his male and female slave—a Hebrew man or woman—that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage.**

But even if a slave was a gentile, a non-Jew, the owners power was still limited by Jewish law. If the master punished and injured a slave in his possession, the slave was to be set free. The slave was to be treated fairly.

All that to say this wasn't the same brutality of slavery that we know of in America. It doesn't mean that it was acceptable, and surely there were some instances of brutality, but again it wasn't like the horrors that we've seen from American history.

But there's a deeper message that we'll soon uncover in this book. Ultimately the book of Philemon points to the cross. You and I were once slaves to sin but Christ redeemed us from that bondage.

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy *our* brother, Pause here. Now we already talked about how Paul was a prisoner at the time he penned this letter. Its most widely believed that he was held in a Roman prison at this time. Look at the 1st 6 words again. **Paul a prisoner of Christ Jesus.**

Even though Paul was under lock and key because of the Romans, he didn't view it that way. Paul viewed himself as a prisoner of Christ because he was fully surrendered to Jesus. It just so happens that his circumstances caused him to be in prison, but again he was a prisoner of Christ because it wasn't his own life.

Notice Timothy is mentioned-we studied Timothy right-how he was with Paul as they went through their missionary journeys?

...1 To Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer, So what's interesting is this letter isn't addressed to a whole church like in the Ephesians right where it was written to the church. No this letter was written for 1 person in mind.

Do you think Paul knew the magnitude of this letter as he wrote it, that it would be in the canon of scriptures for hundreds of millions to read in the bible? I mean this letter changed the world right? No, I doubt he thought that for a second. But it makes me wonder what things are you doing that we have no idea the impact for the glory of God, and we'll reap eternal rewards for simply being obedient? Fun to think about!

2 to the beloved^[fn] Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Scholars believe that Apphia was likely the wife of Philemon, and Archippus was likely his son. So we learn a couple of things about Philemon right from verse 2 here.

- 1) Philemon was a believer
- 2) Philemon had a church in his house
- 3) They all must've had a close relationship with Paul-beloved

4) They were soldiers for Christ!

Philemon may've been a wealthy man - with a large, spacious home. Apparently, he had opened his doors and offered his house as a meeting place for the church at Colossi. Philemon and his family were hospitable to the saints.

Remember the early church met in the homes of its members for the first 275 years of its existence. And we see Acts 2 describe the habits of the first church in Jerusalem, **Acts 2:46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,**

They would meet in the Temple for a large corporate gathering, yet they also gathered from house to house, in more intimate and personal settings.

Recall that nowhere in the NT does the word church refer to a building. We the people are the church.

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The other Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are also written first to individuals, but as we studied those letters we see that the letters were intended to be shared with the entire congregation. Philemon really is a personal note written by Paul to one man.

4 I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, Notice, the Apostle Paul prayed for his friends. In almost every letter he wrote to let his friends know he was praying for them...

Hey, the most important favor you can do for a friend is to pray for them, and the next most important favor you can do is to let them know that you're praying for them.

What a comfort it is to have someone who cares enough for you, to intercede with God on your behalf.

5 hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, Paul heard of the love and faith in action that Philemon had, not just towards his own family, but to all his fellow Christians.

Now we'll learn later in this section that Philemon and Paul knew each other. Evidently, Philemon and Paul had learned to trust each other in the midst of the battles they'd fought. They knew from firsthand experience they could count on each other for cover when the attacks ramped up.

Years ago there was a TV show called The Lone Ranger. **SHOW PIC** The masked cowboy had an Indian sidekick named Tonto, who called him, "Kemosabe." Years later I learned what the term Kemosabe means "faithful friend."

This is what we need, a friend to depend on, a Kemosabe in Christ. **CLOSE PIC**

6 that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you^[fn] in Christ Jesus. Paul prays that people will notice Philemon's godly life, so that his sharing of the Gospel will be more effective. When it comes to evangelizing others, a life-full of good works is far more impressive than a mouthful of good words.

Have you noticed that before people will listen to us, we first need to earn the right to be heard? We need to first be a friend and show our love; then they'll be more inclined to listen to our message.

7 For we have^[fn] great joy^[fn] and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. So Philemon, this slave owner who became a Christian and has a church in his house, was a man who encouraged and loved other believers. look at how verse 7 begins-we have great joy and consolation in your love.

Paul loved to be around Philemon! Why-because he refreshed the hearts of fellow Christians.

SHOW PIC Ever jumped in a pool on a super duper hot day?

SHOW PIC Or super thirsty and you get a cool cup of water?-it's refreshing right! **CLOSE PIC**

That's the effect that Philemon had on everyone he encountered!

What effect do we have on the people around us? Would they describe joy when hearing of our name? Do we encourage others?

Hey, you'll make more friends in two months by being interested in other people, than you will in twenty years trying to get other people to be interested in you!

Now in v8 Paul gets to the point of the letter

8 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, Paul reminds Philemon of the authority that he could have used in addressing him but Paul's not gonna use that apostolic authority.

9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ— Paul appeals to Philemon *on the basis of love*. You can be obedient, but do it begrudgingly right? We've all had those times where we're doing the right thing, but with the wrong heart.

10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, Onesimus became a Christian by talking to Paul. This happened while Paul was imprisoned.

Now remember, Philemon was not a vile, exploitive slave trader. Paul had just commended him for his love, kindness, and faith. It's quite probably that in this instance of Onesimus's being a slave to Philemon that Onesimus was paying off a debt.

But Onesimus had failed to appreciate Philemon's care and concern. Onesimus begrudged his servitude, and was common culture in that day, Onesimus probably stole from his boss.

Finally, Onesimus flew the coup. He tried to get as far as possible from all that was familiar, so Onesimus boarded a boat and sailed 900 miles from the country town of Colossi to the big city of Rome. There he figured he could get lost in the crowd.

Yet a strange chain of events occurred while in Rome. Imagine one night, a haughty Onesimus strolls into a local bar to celebrate his newfound freedom. He downs one too many beers, and makes some bad decisions, and gets arrested and tossed in the slammer.

The next day, Onesimus is shaking off a hangover, when he opens his eyes - and irony of all ironies, he's in the same jail cell as Philemon's buddy, Paul. What Onesimus thought he was running from, he had run right into.

You can imagine what happened next. God used His servant Paul to convict the runaway's rebellious heart. Through Paul, Onesimus saw his need for Jesus, and opened his heart to the Gospel.

Lets read 10-11

10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while in my chains*, 11 *who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me*. Here's a play on words. The name "Onesimus" means "profitable." Paul is saying that Philemon's

slave has not been very Onesimus. He's been more a headache than a helper, but now Jesus has made Onesimus live up to his name.

Only Jesus takes unprofitable people and makes them spiritually profitable, and productive, and fruitful...

12 I am sending him back.[fn] You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, Paul has a new spiritual son in the faith. Onesimus was born again by God's Spirit. That's why Paul now writes to his buddy Philemon and asks a fellow believer to take back Onesimus - as a brother.

But what about Philemon? The story has a happy twist for Onesimus, but he was wrong to run. Onesimus had an obligation to Philemon. In fact, his AWOL had now made the situation worse. Under Roman Law a run-away slave was a wanted man. His master listed his name and description with the authorities. If caught, he could face death.

Paul appeals to Philemon to take him back. But notice how Paul makes his appeal. He doesn't use his authority - instead his appeal is based on love. Notice again in verse 8, "though I might be very bold in Christ to command you... 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you..." Paul is asking, not commanding.

Once, Dwight Eisenhower explained the two types of leadership. He put a string on the table and pushed one end. He failed to move it where he wanted. But then he pulled the string and controlled it precisely.

And people are like strings... Folks don't like to be pushed. They respond best to the pull of love.

This is why Paul doesn't push Philemon, he pulls on his heartstrings.

13 whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. Paul wanted Onesimus to stay with him, to be his own helper. I mean Onesimus could be really valuable to Paul.

But Paul put the needs of reconciliation of these 2 brothers above his own needs.

14 But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. It's interesting to note Paul's concern that any help he receives for the Gospel's sake be voluntary, or as he puts it, "not by compulsion." And this should be true of everything we do for God or give to God.

2 Corinthians 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

God wants us to serve Him and give to Him from our hearts - not because we've got to, but we get to! When we do for God or give to God with a grudge, it's a tainted sacrifice.

We learn from the OT that God was insulted when his people offered less than their best.

It's love for God that prompts the best gifts.

15 For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever, look how Paul describes Onesimus escape-remember he was a runaway slave. He committed a crime that could be punishable by death. But Paul could see a purpose behind this whole matter. Onesimus departed for a while, and maybe it was for this very purpose, that he would meet me while in prison and put his faith in Christ.

Philemon the master lost a slave; but Philemon the Christian gained a brother, and he gained that brother forever.

16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. How does someone go from a slave to a brother? Well it's only through Jesus!

Social problems like slavery and abortion are symptoms of deeper spiritual issues. If sin is only dealt with on a legal level the problem won't be truly solved. It has to be dealt with spiritually - in hearts and minds.

Hate has to be replaced with love. Selfishness has to be substituted with compassion... Truth has to triumph!

And this doesn't happen through political means or social unrest, but through spiritual awakening - by the Gospel. As Paul said to the Corinthians, **2 Corinthians 3:17 "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."**

Only Jesus can bring about true freedom - from both sin and slavery.

His appeal here to Philemon is based on love, not legislation.

There's a symbolic, spiritual message in Paul's plea to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. For just as Paul interceded for Onesimus, Jesus intercedes for us! In a sense, we're all runaway slaves, unprofitable to God. In Martin Luther's commentary on the book of Philemon he wrote, "All of us are Onesimus's!" We departed for awhile, but only to be received back forever!

Certainly, we're slaves or servants of Christ, but that's not all **Galatians 4:7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**

Our place is not only at the Master's feet, but around His table.
17-18

17 If then you count me as a partner, receive him as *you would* me. 18 But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. Paul will pay for any damages Onesimus caused. Paul loved him enough to put his money where his mouth was. And what Paul did for Onesimus describes what Jesus has done for those who trust in Him.

See every person has two problems... First, apart from Christ we've failed to earn God's approval. And second, we lack what it takes to pay our debt of sin.

On the asset side of life's ledger we don't have enough. On the liability side we owe far too much.

But Christ has the answer! Just as Paul went to bat for Onesimus, the Father in heaven has promised to accept us just as He receives His own Son, Jesus. He adds the righteousness, stature, and holiness of Christ to our account.

Now when I approach God I'm assured of His acceptance because He treats me as He treats Jesus. I'm now heartily received into the family circle. I can come boldly to the throne of grace!

And in verse 18 Jesus works on our liabilities

Just as Paul agreed to cover Onesimus' debt, Jesus covered our spiritual damages. On a Roman cross God placed our sin on Jesus' shoulders. He took our payments, and cleared our debt!

When Jesus died on Calvary's cross all that needed to be done was done for us to be saved!

The account of Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon paints a beautiful portrait of the salvation Jesus has offered you and me!

19 I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.

Paul's signature at the bottom of this letter may've doubled as a promissory note. The transaction is now in writing. His promise to Philemon is legally binding. Which is the reason Jesus came under the Law.

Atonement for our sin was carried out legally - by the book! Sin had to be blotted out and righteousness imputed according to the biblical legalities. In essence, God has also put His signature on our salvation.

Then Paul adds, Philemon 19 “I will repay - not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.”

Here Paul concedes that at times human beings are motivated by less than love.

Just in case love doesn't prompt Philemon to do the right thing - he reminds his friend he carries some clout. “Remember Philemon, ole buddy, you'd be going to hell if it wasn't for me.”

Apparently, Philemon owed his salvation to the ministry and preaching of the Apostle Paul. Paul is reminding his former convert, that he owes him one!

20-21

20 Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. 1 Corinthians 13:7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Paul expected Philemon to do what was right.

22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you. Paul is planning a visit to Colossi and invites himself to stay at Philemon's house-they were close.

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,
24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. Each of these names is also mentioned in the conclusion of the letter to the Colossians. This confirms that the two letters went to the same place. Philemon lived in Colosse.

25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.
Amen.