



THE LETTER TO PHILEMON

The Apostle Paul wrote sweeping theological treatises that shook the Roman Empire, but he also wrote postcards. The Book of Philemon is exactly that—a brief, deeply personal letter slipped into the mailbag alongside the heavier theological weight of Colossians. Yet, packed within its 25 verses is one of the most breathtaking, practical pictures of the Gospel found anywhere in Scripture.

Philemon is a story about a wronged master, a runaway slave, and a mediator who steps into the gap. It moves the doctrine of redemption out of the clouds of theological theory and grounds it in the messy reality of human relationships. As Pastor Steve unpacks this letter, we are challenged to look at our own lives. Are we willing to forgive as we have been forgiven? Are we willing to intercede for the guilty? And most importantly, have we realized that in the grand story of redemption, we are the runaway slaves who have been bought back by the blood of Christ?

Pastor Steve noted that Paul didn't try to overthrow the Roman institution of slavery politically; he changed it from the inside out through the Gospel. Why must true societal change always begin with the regeneration of individual hearts? (OT: Ezekiel 36:26 | NT: Mark 7:21-23)

Study Questions:

1. The early church often met in homes, like the church meeting in Philemon's house. How does opening your home to others practically demonstrate the hospitality and community required by the Gospel? (OT: 1 Kings 17:10-15 | NT: Romans 12:13)
2. Pastor Steve noted that Philemon's love for the saints was rooted in his faith in Jesus. Why do our attempts to love difficult people eventually fail if they are not grounded in a prior love for Christ? (OT: Deuteronomy 6:5 | NT: 1 John 4:19)
3. Paul had the apostolic authority to command Philemon to forgive, but he chose to appeal to him in love instead. Why is willing, love-driven obedience always superior to forced compliance in the Kingdom of God? (OT: Exodus 35:5 | NT: 2 Corinthians 9:7)
4. Paul led Onesimus to Christ while in a Roman prison. What does this teach us about God's ability to orchestrate divine appointments in the middle of our worst circumstances? (OT: Jeremiah 38:7-13 | NT: Acts 16:25-34)
5. Paul tells Philemon, "If he has wronged you... put that on my account." How does Paul's offer to pay Onesimus's debt perfectly illustrate the doctrine of imputation? (OT: Isaiah 53:6 | NT: 2 Corinthians 5:21)