

A STUDY OF PHILEMON
The Great Equalizer

1

COLOSSIANS 4:7-9

Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

2

The goal of our time together is simply to answer the question: Why is the letter of Philemon in the New Testament and what difference does it make?

3

Philemon 1-25

4

Paul additionally recognized that his imprisonment was, "...for Christ Jesus." He sees his circumstances in light of the sovereign providence of His Great King and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the will of God, for His own purposes, and for His glory the Lord ordained that Paul would have the space, time, and opportunity to study, pray, meditate, and under these special exclusive circumstances to record the self-disclosure of God under divine inspiration, the living and active Word of God, for the equipping, correction, and edification of the church.

5

Paul establishes his relationship with Philemon and expresses firstly his mutual love and affection for Philemon known by the modifying noun "beloved," fellow worker. Paul knew Philemon and Philemon was in partnership with Paul for the ministry of the gospel.

6

PHILEMON 3

“Grace to you and peace from our God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

7

Grace is the disposition of the Lord’s unmerited favor and blessing toward His chosen people. It is the Lord who demonstrates His love and mercy by the way He relates to us and provides for us which are wrapped up in His grace. Peace is more than the mere ceasing of conflict but in biblical terms, the peace of God is the result of the undeserved favor with which He has shown us in Christ by means of the redemption accomplished by the perfectly righteous unstained holy life, vicarious substitutionary death of the Lamb, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ applied to us by the Holy Spirit in the New Birth and conversion.

8

PHILEMON 5-7

because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

9

Can we honestly say that we have this same attitude and overflowing love for the members of our church?

10

Jesus specifically told the disciples for our training that they, the world, will know who his disciples are by how we love one another.

11

Notice the two-fold evaluation of Paul regarding what he has heard by public reputation of Philemon: love and faith toward Christ and all the saints. By worshipping the Lord in prayer with gratitude for Philemon's love of God and love of neighbor, again authentication and assurance that Philemon had really been born-again and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes to the Jew first, then to the Greek (Rom. 1:16). Paul was filled with joy and comfort continuing to trust Philemon in their partnership in the ministry because he had seen the fruit of God's work in his life.

12

“...for all the saints...”

13

Paul is thankful to God for the love of Philemon toward all saints. What is the significance of that? Monumental. Not only is this subtle detail going to be essential for the request that Paul will make in verses 16-20, but it speaks to the nature of Philemon’s character as a follower of Jesus Christ and leader in the Colossian church.

The love for the saints by Philemon was unrestricted, free, unhindered, and most pointedly without partiality. Nothing got in the way of Philemon to love all the various kinds of saints that made up that mixed Jew and Gentile church in Colossae.

14

Pointing back to the issue of Philemon, consider the broader picture, the real scenario, and precarious decision that Paul levies to Philemon in verses 8-20. Onesimus was a runaway slave who may have also taken some material and financial resources from Philemon on his way out of town. Philemon is out of a workforce, has been defrauded, and under Roman law has every right to punish Onesimus however he sees fit.

15

Philemon is also one of the leaders and likely an elder whose issue was very public to the church in Colossae. Philemon the Master, Onesimus the slave, what is going to happen?

16

Philemon 8-20

17

The Apostle Paul makes his appeal to Philemon, not on the right use of a true authority that he has as an apostle of Jesus Christ and leader of the New Testament church, but for the sake of love. Essentially, rather than a clarion call to duty to the law, Philemon is given the option to use his rights and authority under Roman law but something has fundamentally changed. What exactly? Onesimus is a Christian now.

18

What is the point of Philemon? Why is it in the New Testament? Why does it matter? Simple. The book of Philemon is nothing less than the most clearly delineated object lesson of real people in real history for how the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has completely transformed and reshaped human relationships, especially in the household of faith. The book of Philemon is about the gospel!

19

I believe it is safe from Scripture to say that Paul wrote the letter to Philemon solidly rooted in belief and trust in the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the transforming sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit, and knows that Philemon's obedience will fundamentally erode the worldly pagan social norms, barriers, and arbitrary partialism which find no place in the Christian church in the New Covenant. Do you approach your brother and sister in Christ in this manner?

20

PHILEMON 15-19
For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.

21

Onesimus is no longer as a mere slave in the cog of pagan social classes and norms, but a brother in the Lord Jesus, saved by grace through faith. Paul said in the letter to the Galatians about 10 years before this letter was written that in Christ there no longer is slave or free, male or female, neither Jew nor Greek, for as many has been immersed into Christ through faith, we are children of God heirs of the patriarch Abraham according to the promise and not the law.

22

Forgiveness is a moral act of spiritual worship to consciously choose to pardon a moral debt, undeserved by the one being forgiven, for the sake of Christ and holy fellowship corresponding to the relationship of the parties involved. It is about covenant relationship.

23