

Philemon - Study Guide

Outline and emphasis: Pictures of Christ

Onesimus guilty of great sin /offense 11,18

11 Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us.

18 If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me.

Paul steps in and interrupts the normal consequences, punishments / intercedes 10-17

10 I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison. 11 Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. 12 I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

13 I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. 14 But I didn't want to do anything without your consent.

I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced.

15 It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever.

16 He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me.

Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

18 If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me.

Paul sets aside his position (8)

8 That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do.

Paul assumes Onesimus' debt (18-19)

18 If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me.

19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it. And I won't mention that you owe me your very soul

New relationship for Onesimus (15-16)

15 It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever.

16 He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me.

Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

Philemon Text

1 This letter is from Paul, a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy.

I am writing to Philemon, our beloved co-worker, 2 and to our sister Apphia, and to our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the church that meets in your house.

3 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer

4 I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, 5 because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. 6 And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. 7 Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people.

Paul's Appeal for Onesimus

8 That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do. 9 But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.

10 I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison. 11 Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. 12 I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

13 I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. 14 But I didn't want to do anything without your consent.

I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced.

15 It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever.

16 He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me.

Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

18 If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me.

19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it. And I won't mention that you owe me your very soul!

20 Yes, my brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake.

Give me this encouragement in Christ.

21 I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more!

22 One more thing—please prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that God will

answer your prayers and let me return to you soon.

Paul's Final Greetings

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings.

24 So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my co-workers.

25 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul has spoken about slavery

Eph 6.

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Col 3.22

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Col 4.1

1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

1 Tim 6.1-2

1 All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. 2 Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves.

Peter has spoken on topic, too:

1 Peter 2.18 -

18 Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh

Colossian believers were slave owners: **Col 4.1**

1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Notable theme of forgiveness: 16-17

16 He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. That you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave; a beloved brother: Paul "re-introduced" Onesimus to Philemon; not as a slave, but as a brother. In this relationship as brothers and not slaves, Paul effectively abolished the sting of the "master-slave" relationship and laid the foundation for the eventual legal abolition of slavery. If a man is a stranger, I might make him my slave. But how can my brother be my slave? (Guzik, Blueletterbible.com)

Questions:

Were Colossian believers challenged to rethink their cultural values because of Paul's example?

Which letter would be harder to read and celebrate in church - the letter to Philemon or the letter to Colossians?

If you're Philemon, do you want your letter read in church?

Does Paul 'imitating Jesus' in his conduct as reconciler and go-between for Onesimus and Philemon challenge you in any relationships in your life?

Does Paul seem like he is 'butting in' on somebody else's business to you?

When you give your opinion in someone's life, do you feel like you're just butting in instead of minding your own business?

What do you see about Paul's attitude that is different than the typical "butting in"?