

Lesson 3

Philemon 1:6-11

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Study Notes



*** Start the Recorder ***

Group Discussion – Reflection Questions from the Last Study: Philemon 1:3-5

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:”

- o What did you get out of it?
- o What did it mean to you?
- o Did it change your worldview?
- o What was your favorite point or lesson? Why?

Introduction: Good morning. This is our third lesson in this short epistle. Onesimus is a runaway slave who has come to Christ under the ministry of the Apostle Paul, who is imprisoned at the time. As born again believers, Onesimus needs to go back and face the music; Paul needs to send him back.

Opening Prayer: Chris Sims.

Read Allowed: Philemon 1:1-11

Philemon 1:6 (NOTES)

- “*And I pray*” – Paul is still expressing his love of Philemon through blessing and prayer. But Paul’s prayer is also an expression of his love for Onesimus, as we will see shortly.
- “*the fellowship of your faith*” – This is a difficult verse to interpret, mainly because of this phrase. The word, fellowship (Gr. - koinonia), in this context should be taken as referring to the sharing of what one has with others with whom one is in communion. In this sense, Paul means the local body of believers in Philemon’s house church, and Onesimus, who is returning voluntarily to become a part of it as a full member in good standing. They all are/will be in communion with one another.
- Some Bible versions translate the word (koinonia) here as *sharing*, others as *communication*, and others as *communion*. Paul’s objective is that Philemon’s true faith will be communicated (shared with one another in communion) through his love and good deeds, as they become obvious to all concerned.
- “*fellowship of your faith may become effective*” – Paul prays that as Philemon’s love and good deeds are communicated or shared with the house church (including Onesimus).
- “*may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you*” – In other words, that the communication of Philemon’s faith through Philemon’s love and good deeds in the local body may become effective to the added results of a). his forgiveness of Onesimus, b). his release of Onesimus’s obligations as a slave, and c). his acceptance of Onesimus as a believer and fellow brother in Christ.

- *“through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you”* – The only good thing which is in Philemon is Holy Spirit who produces the Fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, longsuffering, and self-control. Paul is expressing his desire, in a cryptic but skillful fashion, that Philemon’s Holy Spirit – motivated love and good deeds would be demonstrated to all as they are manifested in Philemon’s release and acceptance of Onesimus.
- *“the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ’s sake”* – Paul wants Onesimus to be reconciled with Philemon. But Paul’s ultimate objective is the advancement of the kingdom and the glory of Christ (i.e. - *“for Christ’s sake”*). In other words, “I pray that the believers in your house church will see the depths of the love and goodness and mercy in you, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit who resides in you, as you reconcile with, forgive, and accept as a brother, your former slave, Onesimus.”

Philemon 1:7 (NOTES)

- Paul is saying that he has already taken joy and comfort from the way Philemon has loved and ministered to the saints in his house church, and in the blessings with which he has spiritually *“refreshed”* them.
- Though Paul still has not made his request of Philemon to accept Onesimus back as a brother, he is expressing the confidence that Philemon will love and bless Onesimus as a fellow saint and member of the house church, just as he has already demonstrated with the present members of his church.

Philemon 1:8 (NOTES)

- *“to do what is proper”* – What proper thing does Paul feel he has the right and the hope of success in commanding Philemon to do? Forgive and release Onesimus and accept him as a brother in Christ.
- *“I have enough confidence in Christ”* – This has at least two meanings here.
 - First, Paul is an Apostle of Christ, commissioned and sent by Him, and thus has authority to direct the church, including Philemon.
 - Second, but Philemon is Paul's friend ("beloved brother and fellow worker"). Paul knows he can trust Christ, who indwells Philemon by His Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ #Rom 8:9), to move Philemon to be merciful and welcoming.

Philemon 1:9 (NOTES)

- *“Yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you”* – I would rather ask as a personal favor out of the love we share with one another, than command you by the authority I have in Christ.
- *"since I am such a person as Paul, an old man"* - References to his authority.
- *"and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus”* – Reminding Philemon that Paul is both in prison as he writes, the irony being that Paul is a prisoner because of his labors on behalf of Christ and that he is writing for the release of the prisoner of another. But Paul, a slave of Christ is writing to Philemon, who himself is also a slave of Christ. Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus are all three prisoners and slaves of Christ Jesus together. So, treat Onesimus as a fellow prisoner and slave.

Philemon 1:10 (NOTES)

- *"I appeal to you"* – Now, having laid down the ground work, Paul begins his appeal.
- It is important to recognize that Paul is going way out of his way to make this appeal as gently and lovingly as possible - he is gentle as a dove (Matt 10:16).
- Paul is writing this letter, and, its contents bear witness, this is a big ask. The value of a slave in this economy was thirty pieces of silver. Onesimus may have owed Philemon years of labor under his slave's contract. We don't know, but it was financially non-trivial. Moreover, Onesimus likely stole from Philemon to make his getaway, and that probably more than a loaf of bread, considering how far Onesimus traveled from Western Asia until reaching Paul in Rome (Europe) at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea.
- Not only are there the financial losses, but also the harm done to the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus. Philemon is no doubt offended, angry, and distrustful, given Onesimus's crimes. The stakes are high, and Paul understands them well.
- *"for my son Onesimus, whom I fathered"* – A spiritual son whom Paul spiritually *"fathered"*. Paul led Onesimus to Christ and, thus, *"fathered"* his spiritual new birth in Christ.

- *“in my imprisonment”* – Another reminder of Paul’s sacrifice for Christ, and of his labor for Christ in ministering the Gospel to Onesimus. The least Philemon could do, walking around as a free man, while Paul writes from prison would be to honor Paul’s sacrifice and labor on behalf of Christ in Onesimus’s life and set free the one whom Paul sacrificed and labored to set spiritually free. How painful would it be for Paul to sacrifice and labor and love Onesimus for Philemon then to re-enslave the one Paul sacrificed and labored to set free?

Philemon 1:11 (NOTES)

- *“who previously was useless to you”* – As an untrustworthy thief and runaway slave.
- *“but now is useful both to you and to me”* – Useful as a brother in Christ, who can not only serve as a co-laborer in ministry, but also as a friend with whom they both can share brotherly love (phileo) as well as the encouragement, friendship, and support that comes from sharing Christ-like love (agape).

Closing Challenge: Put yourself in the place of Onesimus. Is there someone who is waiting on you to seek forgiveness and reconciliation? Are you willing to take the risks that you might be rejected? Or worse?

Questions or Comments?

Small Groups