



Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart.”

Course Text: Philemon

This short little book (25 verses) is a letter asking Philemon to show kindness to its bearer, Onesimus, a former slave who ran away from Philemon. I think it is a small book with a big message. It shows how Paul went about trying to get two Christian brothers to reconcile.

Why Study Philemon?

1. It is a picture of our relationship with Christ – for we are all His slaves
2. It is a practical example of forgiveness between believers
3. It gives insight into Paul’s character – mediator. The knowledge of the true character of Paul would be greatly diminished without the letter to Philemon in our Bible. It opens a window on Paul’s character. He is a man who is also an apostle, full of sympathy and concern for a person in distress and willing to do all in his power to help, even at a cost.

Suggested methodology:

1. Let the students have a copy of the lesson well before the class meets. (Perhaps the previous meeting)
2. The students read the Bible book and answer the questions in this lesson before the group meets.
3. At the class meeting allow time for greetings and fellowship. (Save most of this for the end)
4. Take prayer requests (Try to keep it from becoming a competition to see who has the most or the worst.)
5. Pray (The idea here is to leave our troubles with God so we can give His word our attention with a clear mind.)
6. Discuss the questions on page 5. Let those who prefer to listen, listen. My answers, when provided, are just one opinion; you may have a better answer. It might be good to establish the norm that only those who have actually read the book should discuss it aloud.
7. Discuss whatever other questions people have on their mind about the Philemon.
8. Close in prayer (It is best to call on others to pray, but try to get their permission ahead of time.)
9. Fellowship (Leave this as open ended as possible for the time and place you meet.)

Depending on the number of people, this class is expected to take about an hour.

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Philemon

Read these scriptures and answer the associated questions?

[PA] Philemon 1:1-3 Who is Paul the prisoner of? _____

[PB] Philemon 1:4-7 How gives Paul much joy and comfort? _____

[PC] Philemon 1:8-9 What does Paul do instead of giving Philemon an order? _____

[PD] Philemon 1:10-16 Instead of a slave what is Onesimus to become? _____

[PE] Philemon 1:17-20 Whose debts does Paul agree to assume as his own? _____

[PF] Philemon 1:21-25 What was Paul confident concerning? _____

[PG] Deuteronomy 23:15-16. According to this passage are runaway slaves to be returned to their "owners"? _____

So what? _____

ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW FROM GOTQUESTIONS.ORG:

Brief Summary: Paul had warned slave owners that they had a responsibility towards their slaves and showed slaves as responsible moral beings who were to fear God. In Philemon, Paul did not condemn slavery, but he presented Onesimus as a Christian brother instead of a slave. When an owner can refer to a slave as a brother, the slave has reached a position in which the legal title of slave is meaningless. The early church did not attack slavery directly but it laid the foundation for a new relationship between owner and slave. Paul attempted to unite both Philemon and Onesimus with Christian love so that emancipation would become necessary. Only after exposure to the light of the gospel could the institution of slavery die.

Connections: Perhaps nowhere in the New Testament is the distinction between law and grace so beautifully portrayed. Both Roman law and the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament gave Philemon the right to punish a runaway slave who was considered property. But the covenant of grace through the Lord Jesus allowed both master and slave to fellowship in love on an equal basis in the body of Christ.

Practical Application: Employers, political leaders, corporation executives and parents can follow the spirit of Paul's teaching by treating Christian employees, co-workers and family members as members of Christ's Body. Christians in modern society must not view helpers as stepping stones to help them achieve their ambitions but as Christian brothers and sisters who must receive gracious treatment. In addition, all Christian leaders must recognize that God holds them accountable for the treatment of those who work for them, whether the helpers are Christians or not. They must eventually answer to God for their actions (Colossians 4:1).

From: <http://www.gotquestions.org>

Philemon

[PA] Philemon 1:1-3 Who is Paul the prisoner of? Christ Jesus

[PB] Philemon 1:4-7 How gives Paul much joy and comfort? Philemon's love

[PC] Philemon 1:8-9 What does Paul do instead of giving Philemon an order?

He appeals to him

[PD] Philemon 1:10-16 Instead of a slave what is Onesimus to become? A brother

[PE] Philemon 1:17-20 Whose debts does Paul agree to assume as his own?

Onesimus

[PF] Philemon 1:21-25 What was Paul confident concerning?

That Philemon would comply and do even more

[PG] Philemon 1:Deuteronomy 23:15-16. According to this passage are runaway slaves to be returned to their "owners"? No

So what? Paul had been a Pharisee and was an expert on God's law. He must have known about this passage. If Onesimus was a runaway being returned to Philemon, Onesimus was going of his own free will, not because Paul approved of slavery and was somehow forcing him to go.

MORE OF ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW FROM GOTQUESTIONS.ORG:

Author: The author of the Book of Philemon was the apostle Paul (Philemon 1:1).

Date of Writing: The Book of Philemon was written in approximately A. D. 60.

Purpose of Writing: The letter to Philemon is the shortest of all Paul's writings and deals with the practice of slavery. The letter suggests that Paul was in prison at the time of the writing. Philemon was a slave owner who also hosted a church in his home. During the time of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, Philemon had likely journeyed to the city, heard Paul's preaching and became a Christian. The slave Onesimus robbed his master, Philemon, and ran away, making his way to Rome and to Paul. Onesimus was still the property of Philemon, and Paul wrote to smooth the way for his return to his master. Through Paul's witnessing to him, Onesimus had become a Christian (Philemon 10) and Paul wanted Philemon to accept Onesimus as a brother in Christ and not merely as a slave.

Key Verses: Philemon 6: "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

Philemon 16: "...no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord."

Philemon 18: "If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me."

From: <http://www.gotquestions.org>

(1) How many places can you find Jesus Christ in Philemon, either by mention, or by example?

Think & Pray _____

(2) Who is the slave and who is the master?

Think & Pray _____

(3) If someone asked you what Philemon was about what would you say?

Think & Pray _____

(4) How can the lessons of Philemon be applied to our own life?

Think & Pray _____

(5) Which verse or passage would you select to memorize from Philemon? Why?

Think & Pray _____

If you have any questions about Philemon, now is the time to discuss them with your classmates.

(1) Where is Jesus in Philemon?

In verses 1 and 9 Paul says that he is the prisoner of Jesus Christ recognizing that the circumstance of being in prison was in the hands of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 3 Paul prays that Philemon will be blessed with the grace and peace from Jesus Christ.

In verse 5-6 Paul compliments Philemon for his love of and faith in the Lord Jesus.

In verse 8 Paul gives Christ the credit for his boldness.

In verse 16 Paul calls Philemon a brother "in the Lord." He repeats the phrase twice in verse 20.

In verse 23 Paul calls Epaphras, some mutual friend of Paul and Philemon, a fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus.

In verse 25 Paul again prays that Philemon will have the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Paul imitates Christ in both sacrifice and intercession. Paul sacrifices his comfort by letting Onesimus leave him. He intercedes for Onesimus with Philemon. We, also, should try to imitate Jesus Christ in our lives.

(2) Slave & Master Philemon is the Master, Onesimus is the slave. This is the correct and expected answer; however, some other interesting answers were "discovered" by some of the earlier students:

(A) Christ is the Master, we are the slave

(B) Philemon is the Master, Onesimus is the slave and they are both slaves to the Lord God

(C) Paul is the prisoner and Christ Jesus is the master.

Not exactly what the letter to Philemon says, but thought provoking, huh?

(3) Philemon Summary Two possible scenarios seem to fit. In both scenarios, Paul led Philemon to Christ. (suggested by verse 19) Philemon opened his home to have a church there. A fellowship of believers met there on a regular basis. (verse 2) What is not clear is whether this happened before or after Onesimus ran away. If it happened before that means Onesimus already knew Paul and probably sought him out in Rome. If it happened after Onesimus ran away, then he met Paul in Rome somehow, and after Paul led Onesimus to the Lord, they discovered that they both knew Philemon. (My opinion is that Onesimus would not have found it necessary to run away from a Christian master.) Either way, it is clear that Onesimus was led to the Lord by Paul in Rome. (verse 10)

(4) Philemon Life Application What we have here is an example of how Christians should feel about each other. Paul led these two men to the Lord and then trusted and believed in them. Paul believed that Onesimus would deliver the letter and trusted that he would make himself useful. (Onesimus is a Greek word meaning "useful" or "profitable" so verse 11 is a play on words.) Paul believed that Philemon would treat Onesimus with kindness. (verse 21)

So what? I need to treat my fellow believers with trust and respect. I also need to bless them and pray for them as Paul did Philemon and his family. (verses 1 to 4) I need to compliment them and acknowledge their accomplishments as Paul does Philemon. (in verses 4 to 7).

(5) Something to Remember I really like Philemon 1:3 "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," and Philemon 1:25, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit," because I can use them as a final blessings when I am dismissing church.