

Philemon: Bridging Barriers to Brotherhood - June 8, 2022

Introduction: *Prejudices we all have them whether we admit it or not. Some are openly blatant, and some may be subtle or implied...someone is too rich, too poor, too unstable, too stupid, wrong technology, wrong body type, wrong gender, wrong denomination, wrong leadership style, wrong political party, unemployed, homeless and the list goes on. God brings all types of people into the Christian faith. What kinds of barriers keep them from feeling like brothers and sister to each other? In a society where slavery was an established institution that Christians had no authority to change, Paul wrote of how to behave within that framework in his letter to Philemon.*

1. If you were Philemon, would you want to receive this letter from Paul? Explain.
2. Study the greeting of Paul's letter in verses 1-3. What can you know about the writer, the receivers and the relationship between them?
3. How do Philemon's faith and love form a basis for what Paul is about to ask him to do (vv.4-7)?
4. What all can you know about Onesimus from verses 8-21?
5. In what different ways does Paul express his love for Onesimus throughout the letters? How does he express his love for Philemon?
6. When have you particularly enjoyed the love and acceptance of God people?
7. The name Onesimus means "useful." Yet Paul admits in verse 11 that Onesimus had been useless to Philemon in the past. What steps does Paul take to convince Philemon that Onesimus will now live up to his name (vv.11-15)?
8. What gentle pressures does Paul exert to ensure that Philemon treats all Onesimus as he has requested?
9. If you had been Onesimus, how would you feel returning nearly 1000 miles to Philemon with this letter and under these circumstances? What would you fear? What would you hope for? What temptations would you face?
10. The Christians mentioned in this letter had to cross many social, economic and geographic barriers in order to relate to each other. When have you benefited from a relationship with the Christian who is vastly different from yourself?
11. How could Paul's instructions help you rethink your relationship with Christians who don't fit easily into your natural circle of friends?

Reflect and Pray: Re-read vv.4-7, who might Paul be describing among your own circle of acquaintance? Pray Paul's prayer of verse 6 for that person or yourself.

Greeting:¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy *our* brother,

To Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer,² to ^[a]the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon's Love and Faith

⁴ I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,⁵ hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,⁶ that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in ^[b]you in Christ Jesus.⁷ For we ^[c]have great ^[d]joy and ^[e]consolation in your love, because the ^[f]hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

The Plea for Onesimus

⁸ Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting,⁹ *yet* for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains,¹¹ who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.

¹² I am sending him ^[g]back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own ^[h]heart,¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.¹⁴ But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.

¹⁵ For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever,¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon's Obedience Encouraged

¹⁷ If then you count me as a partner, receive him as *you would* me.¹⁸ But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.²⁰ Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

²¹ Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.²² But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

Farewell

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,²⁴ *as do* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.²⁵ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.