

## LESSONS IN PHILEMON

(Philemon 1-3)

### Introduction:

1. A Sermon Suggestion Slip recently submitted said it had been a long time since a lesson had been given from the book of Philemon; thus, this morning's lesson.
2. The short letter from Paul to Philemon affords us a unique opportunity in our study/consideration of a Bible book. Because of its size, we are able to study/consider the book in total, not in part.
3. Let us consider the lessons concerning the people of the church, the relationships of the church, and the work of the church.

### Discussion:

#### I. The People of the Church.

- A. Paul: a prisoner of Christ Jesus, that is, a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.
  1. Paul was a preacher and an apostle, a teacher of the Gentiles (1 Tim. 2:7).
  2. He had once been a blasphemer, a persecutor of the church, and an insolent man (1 Tim. 1:13). But God showed grace towards Paul because of his ignorance (1 Tim. 1:12-14).
  3. Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome around 62AD (Acts 28:30, 31). Philemon is one of the so-called "Prison Epistles" along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.
- B. Philemon: not much is known of this man. We can surmise that he was converted by Paul (v19), that he was a wealthy man (vv 16, 22), a church assembled at his house (v2), and that he had a good reputation in the brotherhood (vv 5-7, 12-14, 20, 21). It is believed that Philemon was a citizen of Colossae (v2 = Col. 4:17; 9; 12 = v23).
- C. Apphia and Archippus are believed to be the wife and son of Philemon (v2).
- D. Onesimus: a runaway slave belonging to Philemon who Paul apparently converted while in prison at Rome (vv 10, 15, 16; note Col. 4:9).
- E. Timothy (Acts 16:1-3), Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12), Mark (aka John Mark = Acts 12:25; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11), Aristarchus (Acts 20:4), Demas (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. 4:10, 11), and Luke were fellow laborers in the Lord with Paul.

#### II. The Relationships of the Church.

- A. Paul and Philemon were brothers in Christ. Paul had converted Philemon. Paul was an apostle and yet he refused to "force" Philemon to forgive and free Onesimus (vv 8, 14). Instead, he explains the reason he wants Onesimus freed (so that he could help Paul, that is, so that Onesimus could work as a slave of the Lord!) and appeals to Philemon's "love and faith" toward all the saints (vv 5, 10). Paul ends the letter with an expectation of future fellowship with Philemon. A relationship of love, gratitude, mutual respect, and positive expectations.
- B. Paul and Onesimus were brothers in Christ. Paul had converted Onesimus while in prison in Rome, and as such he was considered by Paul as a son (vv 10-13, 16, 18; cp. 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; et al) and Paul found him useful in his ministry. A relationship of love, gratitude, repentance, teacher/student.
- C. Philemon and Onesimus were master and slave in the Roman Empire. A master could punish a slave in whatever manner he wished, the slave had zero rights. A runaway slave was not allowed to be sold by another but was typically branded on their forehead, often accompanied by the breaking of joints/bones. But in Christ, their relationship was to change for the better (vv 10-21). A worldly relationship was offered the chance to become a spiritual relationship; worldly concepts and past wrongs to be forgotten/forgiven in light of spiritual realities.
- D. Onesimus and the church. Being a runaway slave put all who were around Onesimus in danger. The harboring of a runaway slave was a heinous crime punishable in many dire ways (especially after the slave rebellion of Spartacus). There were extenuating circumstances (these men knew the master and were on good terms), but still if they had been discovered it could have meant

trouble. An uncomfortable relationship engaged in for spiritual reasons. Even danger accepted in view of the goal of salvation/service.

### III. The Work of the Church.

- A. The proclaiming/sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ (vv 1, 6, 7, 11, 22-25).
- B. The working to maintain the proper relationships between brethren (Luke 9:23; Matt. 5:23, 24; 18:15-17; Rom. 12:9-21).
- C. Sacrifice for the cause of Christ.
  - 1. Paul sent Onesimus away so that things could be made right with Philemon, even though Paul wanted Onesimus with him to help him.
  - 2. Onesimus had to return to his master whom he had defrauded and place himself once again under his power/authority.
  - 3. Philemon was asked to free a slave who was an investment/commodity.
  - 4. Tychicus was asked to travel with Onesimus back to where he had runaway. His life was potentially in danger (Col. 4:7-9).

### Conclusion:

- 1. Philemon is only 25 short verses and yet there is much we can learn about the church of our Lord Jesus Christ contained within it. We learn about the different people in the body of Christ, the relationships that exist and are to exist within that body, and we read a lot about the various ministries within that body.
- 2. There is nothing unimportant in the Bible and there is nothing casual regarding the church. Jesus died for the church. It is His bride. Thus, it is something very special to be respected, cherished, protected, nourished, and empowered. This is accomplished by seeking God, seeking His kingdom, seeking our place in His kingdom, and our devotion to His kingdom.
- 3. Invitation.