

## Lecture 18 – Letter to Philemon

*“Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—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 15-16*

### Key Terms

Philemon, Onesimus, slaves, reconciliation, pastoral care

### Objectives

- \*Summarize the message of the letter to Philemon.
- \*Understand the analogy of slavery in the ancient world frequently used in the New Testament.
- \*Identify what you learn from the way Paul approaches the issue between Onesimus and Philemon.
- \*Be able to apply Paul’s approach to similar situations today.

### Letter to Philemon

#### I. Flow of Thought in Philemon

- A. Written from Rome to a friend of Paul
- B. It is a letter of appeal on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave.
- C. How does Paul conduct himself in this socially and emotionally challenging issue?
- D. Flow of thought
  1. Positive note of connection
  2. Vv. 8-9a serves as a transition point
  3. V. 17 is an appeal to Philemon

*(The following points are not on the CD lecture)*

- E. 1-3 Greetings
- 4-7 Thanksgiving and prayer
- 8-21 Paul’s plea for Onesimus
- 22-25 Final request, fellowship, greetings, benediction

#### II. Addressees

- A. Initially, three recipients: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Col. 4:9—Onesimus placed in Colossae
- C. Col. 4:17: Colossae is given as the residence of Archippus.

#### III. Paul’s Approach

- A. Paul is not ironic or threatening, but honest and tactful.
- B. Appeal to \_\_\_\_\_: 4-10
- Appeal to \_\_\_\_\_: 11-19
- Appeal to \_\_\_\_\_: 20-21

#### IV. Content

- A. Profound consequences being drawn:
  1. The practical question of dealing with a runaway slave is approached within the context of a Christian understanding.
    - a. In Greco-Roman antiquity, slaves fled frequently. Ways to get away:
      - 1) \_\_\_\_\_
      - 2) \_\_\_\_\_
      - 3) \_\_\_\_\_
      - 4) \_\_\_\_\_
      - 5) \_\_\_\_\_

Deterrant: \_\_\_\_\_

- b. Onesimus fled abroad and sought help with a known apostle.
  - c. Paul faced a tough choice: He needed to send Onesimus back but he knew the situation would be difficult if Onesimus returned.
  - d. Onesimus may have done injustice to his master.
  - e. Onesimus probably became a Christian under Paul.
2. What needs to happen: Four principles or points of procedure
- a. Onesimus needs to go back. Paul sends Onesimus back.
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Masters need to live knowing they too have a Master; servants work for masters as for Jesus.

#### V. Theology

- A. Paul applies the Gospel to a painful situation.
- B. An example of pastoral care
- C. Paul as a messenger of reconciliation
- D. By bringing Christ into the unjust structure of slavery, only the order of authority and submission is retained.
- E. The fruit or result of reconciliation is great trust, closeness, and respect after this breach of a relationship.
- F. Because we have received forgiveness from God, we can move out and reconcile with others.
- G. Paul:
  - 1. Does not avoid the broken pieces
  - 2. Heals the unjust system from the inside
  - 3. Moves beyond the immediate struggle
  - 4. Places emphasis on the importance of dealing with uncomfortable issues
  - 5. Uses his position of privilege on behalf of others