

MEN'S LIFE BLOOMINGTON & GOD @ WORK

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Equal Partners Through the Messiah

Overview: Paul's letter to Philemon directly shows Paul's ability to demonstrate the act of love and selflessness that Jesus demonstrated throughout his time on Earth, most importantly, during his sacrifice on the cross. Paul's desire for Philemon to not only forgive Onesimus but to embrace him as a brother in the Messiah is bold and powerful; even more incredible is Paul's insistence that he be charged with anything Onesimus owes Philemon. Paul demonstrates the willing sacrifice made to restore two men to an equal partnership through the Messiah.

Video: Bible Project | Philemon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW9Q3Jt6Yvk>

Segment Questions: (References are on back)

- Why was it important for Paul to send a letter to Philemon requesting he forgive Onesimus and to accept him as an equal brother in Christ Jesus? Is there something deeper we should take away from this effort by Paul?
- This was the only letter Paul wrote where he didn't directly refer to the death and resurrection of Jesus - was this ironic or was it intentional?

Read Philemon 1:8-9

- What do you think is meant when Paul says "...in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love..."? Is he not effectively doing both (being bold and ordering while also appealing with love)?

Read Philemon 1:15

- What do you think Paul is getting at with this line?

Read Philemon 1:22

- What is Paul trying to convey by requesting a guest room so he can be restored to Philemon in answer to his prayers?

Action Questions:

- Have you encountered a situation where you've tried to reconcile a relationship between two parties? How did it go? Is there anything you could have pulled from Paul's letter that would have made your efforts more fruitful?

Closing Personal Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, we're so thankful and blessed to be in the fellowship of men who share a love and passion for you. Thank you, Lord, for this example from Paul that helps illustrate sacrifice, equality, love, and grace. Lead us to be men who can help reconcile differences through your love and light, Lord. Allow this world to see the strength and benefit of inserting your love as it relates to being equal brothers and sisters through your son and our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Perhaps nowhere in the bible does someone “walk the walk” with their faith better than Paul in his letter to Philemon - the only letter that Paul writes that doesn’t explicitly mention the death and resurrection of Jesus. He didn’t need to - he was demonstrating this act by telling Philemon that if Onesimus wronged him or owes him anything, charge it to me (Paul) and I will repay it. Paul puts himself in the place of Jesus by taking the place of Onesimus for the wrongdoing and insists he will pay the cost so Onesimus and Philemon may be reconciled.

The context of Philemon and Onesimus’ relationship (a well to do Roman citizen and his former slave who wronged him in some way) is a timely example of how Jesus wants us to come together as equals through him – not for our values and social status to be defined by race, gender, social or economic class, etc. Through Jesus, we are all equal partners who share in the gift of God’s love, grace, and healing mercy through his son, Jesus Christ.

This might be the shortest letter from Paul in the New Testament, but it’s certainly not lacking power. You could argue this letter is even a textbook example of a way one might go about addressing a difficult conversation with another:

- open up by expressing sincere well wishes for the recipient (in this case, towards Philemon)
- give compliments
- open up the concerns you have
- share suggestions/requests
- close with love and well wishes

Is this a model that you use in addressing conflict or difficult situations?

Philemon 1:3 | Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon 1:4-7 | I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.

Philemon 1:8-11 | Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

Philemon 1:15-16 | Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—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 fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

Philemon 1:18-19 | If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.