

Gleanings of Grace

Philemon

Lesson 18

Paul was a prisoner in Rome, his friend Philemon was in Colossae, and the human link between them was a runaway slave named Onesimus. It appears that Onesimus robbed his master, Philemon, and then fled to Rome where he met Paul and surrendered his life to Jesus. Paul wrote this letter to Philemon seeking to restore him or any losses and asking him to, *for love's sake*, restore Onesimus. May we be touched with all God has done for us, and in turn asks of us *for love's sake*.

OBSERVATION: Read Philemon

1. Read through this week's verses using both your Observation Worksheet (the last page of this homework) and another Bible translation or paraphrase. After reading through these verses, what would you say to someone if they asked you what they are about?
2. Key words help us to better understand the verses. We have listed below key words. Mark each one in a distinctive way (either with a symbol, highlighting, or some form of boxing, circling, or underlining). Mark each of the key words each time they are used in the text. Remember to mark any personal pronouns that refer to *Jesus* and *God*, the Father.

Key Words: *Jesus*, *God*, and *love/beloved*
3. The contrasting word *but* is used seven times in Philemon. Mark the word. Choose one instance of its use and record what is being contrasted.
4. The term of conclusion *therefore* is used in Philemon two times. Mark the word. Choose one instance of its use and record what it is based upon.

Background:

1. It is believed that this letter to Philemon was written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome recorded in Acts 28:30-31. What was written about this time?

2. The letter to the Colossians was written around the same time as this letter to Philemon. Using Colossians 4:7-9, what do you learn about those who delivered the letter?
 - a. Onesimus left Colossae as a slave and returned as a representative of the apostle Paul. What questions might you have asked Onesimus when he returned home?

Read Philemon 1:1-3 - Greeting

1. Paul addressed the letter to Philemon. What did Paul call Philemon?
 - a. Describe a *friend* who is *beloved* and a *fellow laborer*.
 - 1.) What might you expect from her?

2. What two people did Paul extend greetings to?
 - a. Tradition states that *Apphia* may have been Philemon's wife. What might be the wisdom in including Philemon's wife as a recipient of the letter?

 - b. Paul referred to *Archippus* as *our fellow soldier*. What instructions did Paul relay to *Archippus* in Colossians 4:17?
 - 1.) What did Paul write in 2 Timothy 2:3,4 about *soldiers*?

 - 2.) What do you think Paul meant for *Archippus* to do?

3. The church met in Philemon's *house*. The believers there would have been familiar with Onesimus and his apparent theft. What concerns might they have had about welcoming him home as *one of them*?

Read Philemon 1:4-7 – Philemon's Love and Faith

1. Paul was thankful for Philemon. What had Paul heard about him?
 - a. Describe a *love and faith* toward:
 - Jesus*

 - all the saints*
2. Consider Paul's prayer for Philemon in verse 6. What did he pray?
 - a. Paul's desire was that the *sharing of Philemon's faith be effective*. Define the word *effective*.
 - 1.) What is the opposite of *effective*?
 - b. What should be our goal of *effective ministry* according to Matthew 5:16?
3. In this letter, Paul would ask that Philemon *receive* Onesimus. What are some things he might be asking Philemon to do?
 - a. How might refusal to *receive* Onesimus render the *sharing of Philemon's faith* ineffective?
4. *...the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you* (Philemon 1:7). Paul could also be referring to Philemon's sharing of material goods or money with others. Considering that Onesimus had stolen from Philemon, how might the mention of Philemon's generosity to others encourage the same with Onesimus?
 - a. Reflect upon a time when a fellow believer ministered to you in some way. How did it *refresh your heart*?

Read Philemon 1:8-16 – The Pleas for Onesimus

1. Paul could have approached Philemon in many ways. He mentioned one way in verse 8. What was it?
 - a. What are some other ways he could have approached Philemon in his effort to convince him to *receive* Onesimus?
 - b. Given the many options, on what basis did Paul *appeal* to Philemon?
 - 1.) Paul was not exempt from *appealing* to Philemon's sympathies. What did Paul declare about himself in verse 9?
 - a.) How might this have softened Philemon's heart?
2. In Philemon 1:10, Paul referred to Onesimus as his *son*. It was common for Paul to refer to those he led to the Lord as *son* or *children*, i.e. Timothy, Titus, and the Corinthian and Galatian believers. Why do you think Paul used such an endearing term to describe his relationship with them?
3. What did Paul say about Onesimus in verse 11?
 - a. A runaway slave became *profitable* as a believer. In what ways are you more *profitable* to others because you are a Christian?
4. Although Onesimus had become *profitable* to Paul, he was sending him back. Why do you think it was important to honor Philemon's position as Onesimus' master?
 - a. It would have been easier for Onesimus to remain in Rome and avoid facing Philemon. He needed to be willing to return to his position as slave. Ponder what that would have been like for him. What are your thoughts?
 - b. What was Paul's *heart* for Philemon to do?

- 1.) Define the word *receive* as it relates to Philemon *receiving* Onesimus.

5. According to Philemon 1:13, what did Paul *wish* to do?
 - a. Remind yourself of the loneliness Paul expressed to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:9-16. Although this was a different imprisonment, what *profit* might Onesimus have been to Paul?

 - b. If you were facing feelings of abandonment, what would some of your requests be?

6. Reflect upon Paul's heart as he expressed it in Philemon 1:15,16. How are you challenged?

7. Paul looked for the *purpose* in the matter. What was his conclusion?
 - a. What have you learned about the value of looking for God's *purpose* in a matter?

Read Philemon 1:17-22 - Philemon's Obedience Encouraged

1. According to Philemon 1:17, what was Paul requesting of Philemon?

2. Paul was sincere in his request. What did he offer to Philemon that he would do? Verses 18,19
 - a. What does it mean to you when someone offers to back up their request as Paul did?

3. In verse 20 Paul expressed his belief that Philemon's response to Onesimus would bring him *joy* and *refresh his heart*. Share a time that someone's expression of God's love toward you or another *refreshed your heart*.

4. Remark on your impression of Paul's *confidence* in Philemon in verse 21.
 - a. 1 and 2 Corinthians contain several loving rebukes from Paul. The believers in Corinth rightly responded to Paul. What was his response in 2 Corinthians 7:16?
 - 1.) What is it like to have *confidence* in knowing the way a person will respond in a situation?
 - a.) How might you be personally challenged to be that kind of a person?
5. Why might Philemon 1:22 be a declaration of the *confidence* that Paul had in Philemon?

REVIEW: Read Philemon

1. Why do you think this short letter, related to a specific relationship problem, is included in the Bible?
2. What do you think Philemon's response was when Onesimus returned to him?
 - a. Why?
3. What did you personally glean from this lesson?

*"He who receives you receives Me,
and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."
- Matthew 10:40*

Observation Worksheet

Philemon

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, ² to 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. 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 you in Christ Jesus. ⁷ For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. 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 back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own 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. 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. 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.