

of Discipleship

September 25, 2022

Day 1: Philemon 1:1-3

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is writing from house arrest in Rome. He emphasizes the fact that he is a prisoner to show how Onesimus, being a slave, is also like a prisoner. Both slaves and prisoners do not have freedom. Paul is forcing Philemon to think about Onesimus, his slave, in a different light. Philemon is most likely the leader of the house church in Colossi. There is a very close relationship between Paul and Philemon.

Question: Why does Paul refer to people as “brother, sister or my child in Christ”?

Challenge: Think about your friends. Which ones are your brother or sister in Christ? Is there someone who you would consider your spiritual father?

Scripture: Colossians 3 and 4

Day 2: Philemon 1:4-7

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

The effect that Philemon and the other church members’ faith and prayers have on Paul is to make his life in prison better. When Paul is feeling like his work might be in vain he recalls the church members and their faith and love toward the others in the community.

Question: How does Paul know that the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through Philemon?

Challenge: Think back to a time when you felt your work was in vain. How did you deal with that?

Scripture: Philippians 1:26-2:6

Day 3: Philemon 1:8-13

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel;

Onesimus was an escaped slave of Philemon’s. He somehow came into Paul’s influence and became a Christian. In addition to being a convert, he also became like a son to Paul, taking care of Paul like a son would take care of his father. Paul makes an interesting point - as a non-Christian slave, Onesimus was not a willing servant, but now that he is a Christian he will be a willing servant. The reason Paul can say he could command Philemon is that Paul is (spiritually) Philemon’s father. As such he can command obedience.

Question: How has Onesimus become useful?

Challenge: Be honest. If you did not know whether Philemon would treat Onesimus favorably, would you have sent him back?

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

Day 4: Philemon 1:14-16

but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

As a runaway slave Onesimus would be open to severe punishment so Paul is trying to mitigate that punishment and at the same time teach about love. Paul wants Philemon to forgive Onesimus, receive him back into the family and treat him as a brother. All of this is to be done willingly, not out of obligation. Paul could demand obedience but he knows that if the actions are done out of love Onesimus, Philemon and the members of the house church will benefit from this practical example of the love of God being shared.

Question: Is Paul asking Philemon to adopt Onesimus?

Challenge: Think back to a time when you experienced real mercy. What happened and what was your response?

Scripture: 2 Kings 11:20-12:9

Day 5: Philemon 1:17-21

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Paul is not sure if there has been any financial loss from Onesimus running away but if there is Paul is willing to pay for it himself. Of course where Paul would get any money is hard to say and in fact, he did not have any but his example of willingness to pay if necessary for someone else shows how Paul does see Onesimus as a son for whom he is responsible. Paul hopes Philemon will see his slave as a brother. If Philemon can make the change from master to brother it will be a living example of God’s grace. Philemon has no reason to comply with Paul’s request. Similarly, God had no obligation to send Jesus and through Him forgive us our “running away” from God. However, God did forgive us so how can we do any less?

Question: Do you think Paul was serious about making up for any loss Philemon might have suffered or was this just talking?

Challenge: What do you think you owe to God?

Scripture: Mark 9:32-42

Day 6: Philemon 1:22-25

One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you. Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow-workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul ends his letter by asking for a place to stay. Notice how Paul says that he can come through the prayers of the members of the church. We pray for those traveling because they in a sense travel on our prayers.

Question: Do you think Paul ever made it back to see Philemon?

Challenge: Is there something in your life that you feel enslaved to? Ask God to free you from that slavery.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:1-8