

The Relationships of a Runaway

Chapter 16

Audio Lesson: New Testament #70



Objective: To introduce and discuss Paul's letter to Philemon about a runaway



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

– Philemon 3-6

Our study has moved ahead to Philemon, because we are going to end with 2 Timothy, the last words of Paul. This letter is a short prison epistle addressed to a wealthy Gentile in Colossae named Philemon. His slave named Onesimus had stolen some money and had run away. Onesimus had met Paul in prison where Paul led him to the Lord. Part of Onesimus' repentance was to return to Philemon, so Paul wrote this letter and sent it with Onesimus to Philemon.

Paul's diplomacy and tact shine through in this letter. He addressed it to Philemon, his wife, his son, and the church that met in his home. He appealed to Philemon on the basis of love. He told Philemon that Onesimus was now Paul's son in the faith, as Philemon was, and he asked him to accept Onesimus as a brother in Christ. He asked Philemon to receive and to welcome him as he would receive Paul. Paul would pay Philemon whatever the slave took from him, and then Paul reminded Philemon that he owed his soul to Paul, since Paul had led him to Christ. He was confident that Philemon would do even more than Paul asked.

The message at the heart of this letter is that Jesus Christ changes people, and then He changes their relationships with each other. Jesus changed Paul from a Pharisee who persecuted Christians to a believer who would consider Gentiles like Philemon and slaves like Onesimus his brothers.

1. True or **False**? The theme of this letter is that Jesus Christ changes people but not their relationships.
2. True or **False**? Philemon was a wealthy Jew in Colossae who had been telling Christians that they must be circumcised.
3. **True** or False? The name Onesimus means "profitable one".
4. **True** or False? God had changed Onesimus' life.



Unless otherwise noted, choose one answer for each question.

5. Why did Paul write this letter to Philemon? (Choose all that apply)
 - a. Philemon's runaway slave had become a Christian because of Paul.
 - b. Onesimus needed to return to Philemon because he had stolen some money and had run away.
 - c. Paul wanted to persuade Philemon to forgive and welcome Onesimus as a Christian brother.
 - d. Paul thought of Philemon and Onesimus as his sons.
 - e. **All of the above**

6. What does the message of Philemon mean to us today?
 - a. It does not apply to us today.
 - b. We should be kind to those who steal from us.
 - c. **Jesus Christ changes people and all their relationships.**
 - d. We can solve problems like this today by being diplomatic.

7. Why would slave owners not want this letter to be preached? (Choose all that apply)
 - a. **Paul strongly urged Philemon to treat his slave as a brother in Christ and as a man.**
 - b. Slave owners would not care if this letter was preached because it does not apply to them.
 - c. **Slave owners do not think of slaves as human beings but rather, as property.**
 - d. **They would not want to be made to feel bad about having slaves.**

8. How did Paul approach the topic of Onesimus with Philemon?
- a. He ordered Philemon to do the right thing.
 - b. He appealed to Philemon on the basis of love.**
 - c. He advised him to make Onesimus work until he could pay back what he stole.
 - d. He warned Philemon that Onesimus might be dangerous.
9. Why did Paul care so much for Onesimus?
- a. Onesimus promised he would come back and visit Paul in prison.
 - b. Paul had led him to the Lord.**
 - c. Paul wanted a share of whatever Onesimus owed Philemon.
 - d. Onesimus was Jewish too.
10. Paul offered to pay back whatever Onesimus stole from Philemon. Does this example of substitutionary atonement remind you of someone else in the Bible?
- a. David offered a sheep to God because of his runaway slave.
 - b. The innkeeper offered a sheep to the Good Samaritan.
 - c. Abraham paid back what Lot stole from Isaac.
 - d. Jesus gave His life on the cross to pay for our sins and shame.**



Paul says that Philemon owes Paul himself. *Self* means that which makes us different and unique from every other person. There is a sense that we cannot be the *self* that God intended us to be until we are born again. Are you the person God wants you to be? If not, come in faith to God and ask Him to make you and guide you to become the *self* that He wants you to be.

Do you know Jesus as your Savior? How has He changed you? How has He changed your relationships with other people? Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there someone you need to be reconciled to?



Praise God that He redeemed you and gives you eternal life with Him in heaven. Thank Him that Jesus paid the debt that you owe because of your sin. Thank Him for changing Paul from a Pharisee who persecuted Christians to a devoted follower of Christ whose letters still teach us today. Ask God to strengthen your relationships with others as He grows you to be more like Him.



Going Deeper

1. How did Christ change Paul and his relationship with a Gentile like Philemon and a slave like Onesimus? _____

2. How did Christ change Onesimus and his relationship to an ex-Pharisee like Paul? _____

3. How did Paul want Philemon to trust Christ to change his relationship to the slave Onesimus, as the master from whom he had stolen and run away? _____

4. How do you personally apply the beautiful reality that Christ changes people and their relationships? _____

5. Describe how Christ has changed you and all of your relationships to the people you meet in this world. _____

6. Describe the impact this dynamic letter would have had on the abolition of slavery through men like Wilberforce in England. _____

7. Why did Paul not advocate the abolition of slavery in his New Testament Churches, but rather, he told slaves who were disciples of Jesus Christ to obey their masters as if they were serving the Lord? _____
