

MORE THAN A SLAVE

A Study of Philemon

Study #5

Charge That to My Account

(Philemon 17-20)

17 Εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ.

18 εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα.

19 ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω· ἵνα μὴ λέγω σοι ὅτι καὶ σεαυτὸν μοι προσοφείλεις.

20 ναὶ ἀδελφέ, ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ· ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ.

I. INTRODUCTION/REVIEW

- A. Paul writes from house arrest in Rome, to his friend Philemon in the city of Colossae (*verse 1*).
- B. Philemon's slave, Onesimus, had stolen from him (*verse 18*) and run away, ending up in Rome where he met Paul and was saved (*verse 10*).
- C. Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him for service, but felt it was only proper to send him back to his master (*verses 12-14*).
- D. Paul did so, sending along this short, personal (18 times the singular pronoun *you* is used; only 4 times is the plural *you all* used) and brilliant letter as well.
- E. He has gently, subtly nudged Philemon to forgive Onesimus; and now, toward the end of the letter, in the fifth paragraph, he will make his final, and clearest, appeal.
- F. In this fifth paragraph, there are three commands/imperatives given (and with only one exception, they are the only imperatives given in this letter...the exception, a fourth imperative, is contained in the closing comments): accept (*verse 17*); charge (*verse 18*); and refresh (*verse 20*).

II. TEXT: PHILEMON 17-20

- A. *verse 17* = Using a *first class conditional sentence*, Paul issues his first imperative of the entire letter: *accept*.
 1. “**If then you regard me as a partner...**” = This conditional phrase assumes the reality (it is a *first class condition* in the Greek construction). Philemon *does* regard Paul as a partner, and vice-versa (hence *verse 1*: “...our beloved brother and *fellow worker*...,” emphasis mine). So if this is true (and it is), it has a specific practical implication: Because of their close relationship, Paul can appeal to that relationship as an impetus for Philemon to accept Onesimus. But there is more to it than that, even:
 2. “...**accept him as you would me.**” = Because of Onesimus's new position as a child of God (*verse 10*), and a brother in Christ (*Colossians 4:9*), he is to be given the same consideration as any brother, even Paul himself. If Philemon was willing to accept Paul, he needed to show the same willingness to accept Onesimus. The first command of the letter, then, is *accept*, (see *1 Corinthians 16:10* for a similar appeal to the church at Corinth regarding young Timothy).
 3. “...**accept...**” = (Greek *proslambano*) The Greek word means literally to receive, to welcome into fellowship (see *2 John 10* for a negative command using the same verb). Onesimus is a new creature, welcomed and accepted by Christ; and he *must* receive the same welcome and acceptance by his new Christian brothers (see *Romans 15:7* where the same word is used).
 - a. *2 Corinthians 5:16-17* = When we are made new in Christ, our past is dealt with and must be forgiven—consequently our brothers in Christ should not view us through the lens of our sinful past.
 - b. *1 Corinthians 12:13* = We are baptized by the same Spirit into the same body; there is an acceptance and unity that disregards and supersedes worldly, human distinctions (cf. *Galatians 3:26-28*;

Ephesians 4:1-6). We are one in Christ, and accordingly, we must accept one another. And this is Paul's first command to Philemon.

- B. *verse 18* = Using another consecutive *first class condition*, Paul issues his second command, and offers to pay Onesimus's debt.
1. "**But if he has wronged you in any way...**" = Paul again assumes the reality of the condition, recognizing that Onesimus *has* wronged Philemon. Paul then is not asking Philemon to pretend that nothing has happened or that nothing is wrong. Instead, he recognizes that the offense is real, the wrong inflicted is genuine, and the hurt is tangible.
 2. "**...wronged...**" = (Greek *adikeo*, used 28 times in the New Testament) The word means to act unjustly in causing harm to another (cf. *Luke 10:19; Acts 7:24, 26-27; 2 Corinthians 7:12; Revelation 2:1, 7:2-3, 9:4, 10, 19, 11:5*). Paul's use of this strong word indicates that Onesimus has caused Philemon more than mere passing inconvenience. The wrong inflicted is serious, its consequences grossly unfair for Philemon, who had done nothing to deserve it. In these kind of situations, it can be difficult to move past the offense and our sense of injustice and unfairness. But the standard is clear (cf. *Proverbs 19:11; 1 Corinthians 13:5b*).
 3. "**...or owes you anything...**" = (Greek *opheilo*, see *verse 19* for the same word) Paul implies that there was monetary or material loss involved as well; hence many students conclude that Onesimus had not merely absconded, but had stolen from Philemon in the process. This follows logically enough. Onesimus ended up in Rome, which would certainly not have been an inexpensive journey. And perhaps he stopped running in Rome because he could not afford to go any further, which would mean he had run out of funds. This would, in turn, indicate that he did not have the means to make monetary restitution to Philemon on his own. Accordingly, Paul's second command:
 4. "**...charge that to my account...**" = This is Paul's second command of the letter, and it affords what is one of the most precious pictures offered in the entire situation. Paul is willing to own and to absorb all of Onesimus's debt, so that he might be restored and reconciled to his debtor, Philemon. This is an ineffable picture of what Christ, our reconciler, has done for us (cf. *Mark 10:45*).
 - a. *Isaiah 59:1-2* = God, who is willing to save, is yet bound by His holiness; and our sins have separated us and alienated us from Him, creating an unbridgeable chasm between us. This is the state we find ourselves in apart from Christ, just as Onesimus was alienated from Philemon because of his transgression.
 - b. *Isaiah 53:4-6* = God, recognizing our helpless state, offered a substitutionary sacrifice to take on Himself all of the penalty for our sin (*Romans 5:6-8*).
 - c. *2 Corinthians 5:21* = Christ *is* that reconciler, who took on Himself our sin so that we might receive, in Him, God's righteousness (see *1 Peter 2:24*).
 - d. *Revelation 1:5b* = Because of His love, Christ has released us from *our* sins by *His* blood. He took the debt that belonged to *us*, and paid it *Himself* instead, thereby releasing us (cf. *Colossians 2:13-14*).
- C. *verse 19* = Paul guarantees repayment, and reminds Philemon of his own, greater debt.
1. "**...I, Paul, am writing this...**" = This is the second time that Paul states clearly that he is the author of this letter (see also *verse 1*).
 2. "**...with my own hand...**" = Paul often used an amanuensis, or scribe, to pen his letters. He would dictate to them, they would put pen to paper, and then he would add some closing notes in his own handwriting to guarantee authenticity (see *Romans 16:22; 1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; and especially 2 Thessalonians 3:17*). Here he may be following the same pattern, or he may be asserting that he has penned this entire letter himself; it is hard to be certain. One thing, though, is clear: By penning at least these closing lines in his own hand, he intends to guarantee, by his own good name, the personal repayment of Onesimus's debt.
 3. "**...I will repay it...**" = Paul gives his word, in no uncertain terms, that he will make good his offer of repayment. Philemon may have had a difficult time trusting Onesimus, but he could certainly trust Paul's integrity. As a side note, what about you? Is your word trustworthy?

- a. *Proverbs 10:9* = Our integrity helps us to walk securely (*Proverbs 11:3, 19:1, 20:7; 22:1; 28:6; Ecclesiastes 7:1a*).
 - b. *Matthew 5:33-37* = Our word should be good enough (cf. *2 Corinthians 1:17-18; James 5:12*).
4. "...not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well." = It was through Paul's ministry of the truth that Philemon had heard the gospel, believed, and been saved. The debt he therefore owed to Paul was incalculably greater than the piddling, trifling material debt owed to him by Onesimus. In light of this, how could he fail to forgive the lesser debt and not demand repayment (cf. *Matthew 18:23-35*)? However this does *not* negate the need for restitution in repentance—it just means that such restitution should be at the offender's insistence, not the offended's. Onesimus should insist on repaying the debt; and Philemon should insist on forgiving it. Such willingness to make restitution is a hallmark of genuine repentance (cf. *Luke 19:1-10*). Genuine repentance *always* acknowledges the seriousness of the offense to the other. If you have wronged someone, *make it right!* On the other hand, if someone has wronged you, *let it go!*
- D. *verse 20* = Paul's final appeal, and his third command of the letter.
1. "Yes, brother..." = This is the third time Paul has called Philemon a brother (see *verses 1* and *7*). In his final appeal, he refers again to the closeness they share, and the bond they have as believers. This is how we, as God's family, relate to one another (cf. *1 Timothy 5:1-2*).
 2. "...let me benefit from you..." = Paul requests that Philemon make a decision that will furnish Paul with some benefit, specifically that he forgive Onesimus and put the past behind them.
 3. "...benefit..." = (Greek *oninemi*) This verb is a play on the name of Philemon's slave, Onesimus. Both are derived from the same lexical root, and therefore share a similar sound and the same basic meaning: *useful* or *beneficial*. In effect, then, Paul is telling Philemon, "Your slave was previously useless, but now he is useful," (*verse 11*). "Now it's *your* turn to be useful like Onesimus, by making a useful, beneficial decision."
 4. "...me...you..." = These two words are side by side in the Greek construction. There is a subtle reminder in the phrasing, that Philemon's decision will impact Paul. This is true of us, in both our good and bad decisions. This is why other people's welfare should factor into our decision-making process (cf. *Philippians 2:3-4*).
 - a. *Psalms 51:4* = David recognizes that his sin with Bathsheba, was, ultimately, against God alone. Still, think on the consequences of his sin for other people: for Uriah who was killed to cover up the adultery (*2 Samuel 11:24b*); for Bathsheba who was forced to face and grieve the loss of her beloved husband (*11:26*); for David's family, which would forever after be plagued by discord and turmoil (*12:10*); for David himself who would face evil from his own household (*12:11*); for the entire nation of Israel who would be forced to witness this royal discord (*12:12*); and even for the innocent child born of that adulterous union, who would die (*12:18*). Our choices, good and bad, affect a multitude of people; and that should factor into our decision-making.
 5. "...in the Lord..." = In other words, let our common relationship with the Lord impact your decision (see *verse 6*). We are in the same spiritual place. Make your decision from that place.
 6. "...refresh my heart..." = (compare with *verse 7*) The hearts of the saints have been refreshed by Philemon's love. Now Paul request such refreshment personally as well (see *Matthew 11:28-29* for the same word, there translated *rest*). This issue obviously weighed greatly on Paul's heart; and in one last, final thrust, he urges Philemon to make a decision that will ease his burden, allow him some rest, relieve his heard and mind.
 7. "...in Christ..." = The repetition here (*in the Lord; in Christ*) is surely intentional. It is a reminder to Philemon that he must not address this issue from the flesh, or allow the world's view to impact his decision. He has been rescued from this world's system, and must make a decision from a mind renewed and established in the new system. If he identifies in the flesh, he will make his decision from the flesh. If he remembers his identity in the Spirit, he will make his decision from the Spirit (see *Galatians 5:16-17*).

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Can you accept all believers equally? Or do you put them on tiers, accepting those on higher levels but neglecting those on lower levels? See *James 2:1-5, 8-9*.
- B. If you have wronged someone, are you willing to do what is necessary to make restitution?
- C. On the other hand, if someone has wronged you, are you willing to insist that the restitution be forgiven?
- D. Are you willing to intercede for other believers, even if that means owning their debt so that they can be reconciled to an offended party? As difficult as this seems, it is Jesus' example to us.
- E. Have you come to Christ, recognizing your own separation from God because of sin, and accepting His payment on your behalf?
- F. Are you aware that your decisions have consequences for other people? Does their welfare factor into your decision-making process?
- G. Do you make decisions in the flesh, or in the Lord? Why do you think this is?

IV. PRAYER