

## Philemon – “. . . yet for love’s sake . . .”

#17 in series “Words of God to You”

Philemon

March 8, 2009

1. Author – “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother...” [1:1a]
2. Date – 60-64 A.D. during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. [cf. 1:1a, 9b “prisoner of Jesus Christ”]
3. Destination – “...to Philemon our beloved friend...the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house...” [1:1b-2]
  - Philemon is Paul’s friend and a house church leader in Colossae [cf. Col. 4:9]; Apphia is likely his wife and Archippus is either his son, a co-leader in the Colossian church or both.
4. Purpose – “to encourage Philemon to release his newly believing servant, Onesimus.”
  - Onesimus, a runaway servant of Philemon, finds Paul in Rome, and Paul leads him to faith in Jesus [v. 10]
  - Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon [as required by law] and asks his friend to consider returning him to Paul – because Paul loves him and needs him. [v. 11-14]
5. Themes
  - Response to institutional, cultural injustice and evil in Jesus’ name. [vv. 15-17]
    - Slavery was a given in the ancient Greco-Roman world.
    - However, slavery is clearly condemned in the NT as part of “an order that is passing away” with the coming of the Kingdom of God! [cf. Galatians 3:26-28, Colossians 3:11]
    - Paul asks Philemon to kill the institution of slavery by doing the humanly unthinkable – receive Onesimus, his rebellious slave, as a brother in Christ.
  - Love and respect between brothers in the body of Christ. [vv. 8-9]
  - Picture of the redemptive, sacrificial love of Christ. [v. 18]

*“The gospel was a ‘call to die to old identities and to come alive in and to the new one, the solidarity of the Messiah...and to live together as a new version of the human race.’” [N.T. Wright]*

*“Paul believed that it was his task to call into being by proclaiming Jesus as Lord, the worldwide community in which ethnic divisions would be abolished and a new family created as a sign to the watching world that Jesus was its rightful Lord...and that a new creation had been launched and would one day come to full flower.” [N.T. Wright]*