

The Half Hour That Changes the World

Philemon

Book 57

Basic Questions behind the book:

What things are there in society that we as Christians should challenge? And: How do we handle conversations with others where we are likely to have conflicts of opinion?

Summary of book:

This is a special, personal letter to a friend. It is one of the shortest letters in the New Testament. It is concerned with merciful treatment for a runaway slave.

Onesimus is a runaway slave. He was converted while he was in prison with Paul. Paul sees himself as his spiritual father. He has been a great help to Paul while he was in prison. Because of the law of the time, a master was free to beat and even kill a runaway slave. Philemon, who was also a Christian, was Onesimus' master. Paul, therefore, calls for him to put the love of Christ into action, and forgive Onesimus and accept him as a dear brother. While Paul seems to have accepted slavery as a given in the society, he helped the Christians to transform it within. While Paul does not condemn slavery in his writings, he makes a radical statement by calling this slave Philemon's brother in Christ.

This small letter is a masterpiece of grace and tact and a profound demonstration of the power of Christ and of true Christian fellowship in action.

Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To convince Philemon to forgive his runaway slave, Onesimus, and to accept him as a brother in the faith.

Author: Paul.

Recipients: To Philemon, who was probably a wealthy member of the Colossian church, and all the believers.

Dating: The date is believed to have been around AD 60, during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, at about the same time Ephesians and Colossians were written.

Setting: Slavery was very common in the Roman Empire during the time Paul wrote this letter. Some Christians were also slaves.

Questions for Reflection:

- How do I normally behave in Conflict Situations?
- How do I normally use the power that I have?

"Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good - no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord." (1:15, 16)