

PHILEMON

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This epistle of Paul to Philemon is a very beautiful letter from which we can learn a great deal but, sadly, we may not always implement the lessons of this book.

Paul recalls the faith and love of Philemon and pleads with him about his slave, or servant, Onesimus, who has left Colossae and with money belonging to his master.

With use of prudence and wisdom, Paul does not introduce himself as an apostle but as a prisoner for Christ which will have a bearing on both his condition and that of Onesimus.

It is generally thought that Apphia was Philemon's wife and Archippus was their son. To this family, Paul sends his greetings of grace and peace. He then goes on to thank God that Philemon is always in his prayers and recalls the good that is in him and how he refreshes others.

It would appear that Onesimus was converted under the ministry of Paul while Paul was bound in prison. He laments that this convert has not been profitable to Philemon and his household and Paul is sending the miscreant back trusting Philemon will receive him as he would Paul himself. He is doing this without Philemon's consent and will reimburse his friend with the money that Onesimus has stolen. The best way to deal with evil is in a positive way. In sending Onesimus back, Paul is depriving himself of a helper and at a time when he would benefit from some support.

Philemon is asked to receive Onesimus not as a servant but as a brother since he has now found faith in the Lord Jesus and the apostle is confident that Philemon will acquiesce to his wishes. Paul also hopes that he will himself be released and met up with Philemon again.

One must admire the wise way that Paul deals with this delicate situation and we should learn from it.

It has been said that what evil men do lives on, but the good that they do does not.

The letter was written by Paul from Rome and entrusted to Onesimus to deliver it. In common parlance that took some courage on behalf of the servant himself but Onesimus is now a beloved brother.

The matter of discipline among Christians is an important issue and A G Clarke writes about this and strongly makes the point that discipline refers to misconduct rather than matters of faith. There are some assemblies who will not receive into fellowship people who may not agree with everything that the assembly promotes but as Clarke says, You cannot refuse into fellowship someone the Lord has accepted.

It is to be lamented that in some churches and assemblies there are those who dislike a brother particularly if he has erred. But we all have. A brother who is gifted as a ministering brother can also be disliked because he has academic abilities and is not a blotting paper Christian. Anyone who is a little different may be feared or not respected but we all have differing gifts.

This is a letter of intercession and forgiveness and some Christians are hard and do not seem to understand forgiveness. Christian brotherhood obliterates all social and class distinctions.

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