

Dear Friends and Family,

This week we will study the last of the Pastoral Epistles.

Interestingly, some scholars do not agree that Philemon belongs in the same category as Timothy and Titus.

They argue it is not a Pastoral Epistle.

And honestly, this short little book reads more like a real life soap opera.

We have three characters.

A wronged party.

A run away sinner.

And Paul.

In these 25 verses, there is a dramatic backstory, a main character transformation, a climactic plea, and then it ends!

Sadly, we don't really know how these people reacted when they met in person.

But if Paul was correct, we can be sure that all parties did what was right in the sight of the Lord.

This one chapter book provides real application for the process of restoration.

Philemon was apparently a wealthy man.

The church at Colosse met in his home.

Philemon's servant, Onesimus, and Philemon suffered some sort of confrontation and as a result, Onesimus ran away.

Through God's sovereignty, of all the places Onesimus could go,

And of all of the people he could meet,

he finds and befriends Paul!

And glory to God, Onesimus comes to faith in Christ!

Onesimus is even of great help to Paul during his imprisonment!

Fun fact: Paul refers to Onesimus in the book of Colossians!

Philemon is Paul's letter on behalf of Onesimus.

Paul instructs Onesimus to return to sort out his problems.

Paul writes the letter, so that upon the return of Onesimus,

Philemon will not kill Onesimus as he could legally do.

Paul instead instructs Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother, no longer as a servant.

Pastor's Point of View

The big question: **Who are you? Onesimus, Philemon, or Paul?**

Day 1 - The Dramatic Background: READ Philemon - it's brief, just 25 verses.

Paul begins this letter as he does in most of his letters, by stating that he is the author. He sends greetings from Timothy as well, so we know that Timothy is still with him during the time this is written. He uses the personal pronouns 'I' and 'me' throughout the letter, showing that it is written by him and also states in verse 19 that he writes it with his own hand.

1. The letter is written specifically to whom in verse 2?
2. Verse 2 also mentions two other names as well as a church, who might these people be?
3. Apphia is mentioned in scripture only here. She was obviously someone of some importance either in this church or in this home. Many scholars believe she is the wife of Philemon. This would fit the narrative as she is mentioned second in the letter. Paul likewise, would know her well from his missionary journeys if he stayed in Philemon's home, as he intends to again one day (verse 22). Apphia's care and hospitality was most certainly fondly remembered by Paul, especially now that he is in prison in Rome.

Day 2 - Character Development: READ Colossians 4:7-18

1. Who are the two men charged with taking the letters from Paul to the churches mentioned?
2. Two men specifically, were charged to take the letter to the Colossians. Tychicus and Onesimus. They carried with them at least two letters, one to Colosse and one to Laodicea. However, Paul also sent this very brief petition to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus.
3. We also learn something more about the third person mentioned in the introduction to Philemon, Archippus. Apparently, he was charged with a "ministry in the Lord" at Colosse. Archippus was most likely the Pastor of the church which met in Philemon and Apphia's home.
4. This is why many do not count the book of Philemon as a Pastoral Epistle, because it was written to the host of the church rather than the pastor of the church directly.

Day 3 - Rising Action: READ Galatians 6:1-5

1. Understanding all of the characters in this drama, let's now turn to another of Paul's writings and look more deeply into the idea of restoration.
2. The main point of this text focuses on when a brother falls into sin. This is instruction for believers who sin, and how they are to be restored to the body of fellowship.
3. Paul makes two statements that seem at odds with one another:
"Bear one another's burdens" Galatians 6:2
"each will have to bear his own burden" Galatians 6:5
The distinction is found in the two words used here, both translated as burden. The first is literally *some burdensome weight*.

The second however, is *a portion of a weight*.

4. Imagine that the burden of the Christian life is the weight of sin. We are justified and will not suffer the wrath of God due to our sin, but as we walk through life, we still endure temptations and we still stumble and fall, as indicated in verse 1.

If this is not considered individually, my sin and your sin, but collectively, the burden of sin, then the whole body of believers, and more importantly a local fellowship of believers in a church, carry that load together. We “Bear one another’s burdens”(vs. 2). When everyone is carrying their own “portion of the load” (vs. 5) the entirety of the burden is light and easy (Matthew 11:28-30; 16:24-26).

5. However, when one stumbles, the burden is increased on all. The rest of the fellowship suffers until the individual can be restored. This should motivate us to long for and pray for the restoration of fellow believers.

Day 4 - Climax: READ Philemon

1. Paul begins his plea for Onesimus in verse 8. While Paul has the confidence that he could command forgiveness and restoration, he chooses not to approach it this way. Can anyone truly force two other people to be restored?
2. What about the Pastor, did Paul call on Archippus to sit down with them and restore them to one another?
3. What does verse 10 tell you about Onesimus’s salvation?
4. Apparently he was cast out of Philemon’s home or he ran away for fear of retribution. Scripture does not detail exactly what his sin was. We do know that Onesimus went to hide in Rome, found Paul, and was introduced to faith in Jesus Christ!
5. Reflect for a moment on how God works! Onesimus runs away from his problems, yet God meets him there. Any other scripture references come to mind about people running away from their problems? (Hint: Jonah) Read Psalm 139:1-12.

BONUS DAY this week - Day 5: Resolution: Philemon 12-25

1. Look specifically at verse 16, what is Paul’s hope for their restoration?
2. Paul writes an impassioned plea for his “very heart” - Onesimus! (vs 12). Would Paul make this plea and effort if Onesimus was not truly repentant of his wrongdoing? Paul even offers to make restitution on behalf of Onesimus, if he owes anything. This offer demonstrates that true Christian restoration is not turning a blind eye to sin. Love doesn’t “cover all sins”, translating that verse out of context to mean a blanket over sin. Instead, it is by love that a believer calls out sin, opens the door for repentance, and seeks to make restitution. When the sin has been dealt with, love restores.

3. Notice what is required of Philemon. It sounds like Philemon had every right to be angry and execute punishment on his wayward servant. However, Paul requests, “receive him as you would receive me.” Surely a visit from the Apostle Paul would have been cause for much anticipation, celebration, and honor. Here Paul is asking Philemon, the one wronged, to extend this same welcome to a sinner, one who left on bad terms, one who stirred up conflict and then departed! Paul is asking Philemon to forgive, when it would be much easier to stay angry. Have you ever encountered this situation in your life? What has your response been? Did you feel justified in your anger?
4. Paul writes, “Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.” How is this possible? How is it that Philemon can forgive and then move on and do MORE?
5. It is important to note that Paul provides details revealing a changed Onesimus. If someone is content to sin with no repentance, no change, and no request for forgiveness, that is a different situation. You will not be able to restore that relationship until Christ intervenes.
6. Think about how much effort it takes to forgive one who has sinned against you, especially if there has been no admittance of fault. As Onesimus was returning, Scripture does not indicate that he had asked for the forgiveness of Philemon, yet Paul was asking Philemon to extend it. Forgiveness requires putting aside self, laying down pride and extending grace and mercy. We all *know* that is what Christ did for *each of us* on the cross, but how quick we are to withhold it from others!
7. Paul is confident that because of the obedience of Philemon, all will be well. To whom is Philemon obedient? Paul? God? To whom are you obedient?

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

- Colossians 3:12-14

True restoration comes through true repentance. We have an obligation as the body of believers to hold each other accountable for sin.

May we be like Onesimus, living a changed life through Christ, sacrificially serving others, and seeking to restore relationships we have damaged.

May we be like Philemon, forgiving those who have wronged us, releasing anger and retribution, and welcoming those who have sinned against us as we would welcome Christ.

May we be like Paul, championing restoration, gently instructing, seeking peace for the unity of Christ, and encouraging others to live in restored relationships.

May we speak the truth in love, so that we may be one united body as Jesus is one with the Father!

Peace be with you all!
Pastor Matt

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*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **RUN** with endurance the race that is set before us -- Hebrews 12:1*