

TAKEAWAY

Snap Shots Small Books. Big Ideas.

PHILEMON

Sunday 28th July 2019

INTRODUCTION

This week, at 10:30 and The Six, Matt led us through a look at the New Testament letter known as Philemon. This tiny little letter was written by Paul to a church leader in Colossae called Philemon. Philemon's slave, Onesimus, had wronged him and run away. Onesimus later encountered Paul, became a Christian, and decided to go home and look to repair things with Philemon. The letter represents Paul's efforts to ensure that they do indeed reconcile.

READ

Philemon (all 25 verses!)

NOTE

Onesimus was Philemon's slave. Does the Bible support slavery? We have to remember that slavery in the Roman Empire was not the same as the modern slave trade (which is horrendous). There is no modern equivalent to Roman slavery, but it is a bit closer to being an employee is now. Many slaves chose to remain so even when they had the option of being 'free' – being a slave meant protection and provision from one's owner. So it is not so easy to say it was entirely bad – although certainly elements of it were. The Bible tends to

acknowledge slavery as a reality and is more concerned for how those who are slaves or masters relate to one another lovingly. In this sense it was revolutionary and centuries ahead of the culture. In Philemon, Philemon is called to treat a man he could legally have had executed as his own brother.

DISCUSS

1. Have you read Philemon before? What are your first thoughts on reading it today?
2. Paul is 'above' Philemon in church hierarchy. But how does he address him in this letter? Why do you think he does this?

3. Why do you think Paul was so confident that Philemon would welcome Onesimus home?

4. Of Paul's 12 New Testament letters, this is the only one where he doesn't even mention the cross or the resurrection. Yet the Gospel (the good news about Jesus) is still present – it is simply 'acted out'. How do we see the Gospel expressed in this letter?

(Leaders' note: It might be helpful to consider the three main characters in this letter. Onesimus recognises he's made a mistake and he 'comes home' to say sorry. Legally he faces the death penalty, but he throws himself on Philemon's kindness.



Paul minimises his position of power but he sees two people he cares in difficulty and he appeals to love as the basis for sorting it out. Philemon is given a decision to make. The letter doesn't tell us what happened but history tells us that this Onesimus later became the bishop of Ephesus.

So he must have accepted home and he ends up in church leadership position. That's only possible because Philemon must have forgiven him and welcomed him home.)

5. Who of the three main characters in the letter do you feel most compelled to emulate at this time and why?

6. Despite great examples such as this letter, why don't Christians always behave 'Christianly' in our relationships? What do we need to happen?

7. If Christians behaved consistently 'Christianly', what do you think would be the effect on the world? What would be the effect on your community or culture?

