

How to...A Semi-Complete Guide to Straighten Out the Church

Part 4

Straighten Out Your View of Past – Philemon

"Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me." Philemon 1:11NLT

A. Slavery in the time of Philemon...

1. Slavery was practiced in the Roman culture and was not ethnically based. They were happy to enslave anyone.
2. Slaves might have been Greek doctors, educated scribes, or even important household slaves that managed estates or wielded power, as well as any menial tasks.
3. Slaves, in some cases, suffered all manner of abuse. Escaping could result in severe punishment or death!
4. A slave could be valued anywhere between \$725 and over \$600,000, depending on their worth.
5. The Bible does not openly tackle the social issue of abolition of slavery as much as it tackles the issue of proper treatment of slaves.

"Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them." 1 Corinthians 7:21-24 NIV

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him." Ephesians 6:5-9 NIV

B. The setting...

1. Paul was the spiritual father of a wealthy slave owner named Philemon.

"I am writing to Philemon, our beloved co-worker" Vs 1

2. Onesimus was the runaway slave who gave his life to Christ and came to Paul!

"I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison." Vs 10

3. Paul's appeal is on the behalf of Onesimus that Philemon would not only forgive and release him but might find him useful.

"He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord." Vs 16

4. Paul's appeal is because of Philemon's faith and partnership in Christ!

"So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me." Vs 17

C. Philemon is an incredible example of love and forgiveness...

1. We need to forgive those who have offended us, stolen from us, or who owe us. Holding bitterness only destroys us.

"That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do. But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus." Vs 8-9

"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." Matthew 6:14-15

2. When we forgive, we may have to establish boundaries.

"And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ." Vs 6

3. When we forgive, we need to let go of their past.

"Yes, my brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ." Vs 20

"Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many." Hebrews 12:14-15

4. When we forgive and see evidences of God's grace, we need to give them the freedom to become all that God has for them.

"I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf." Vs 13

D. No matter what our past...

1. God has a plan for our future! He will change us from "useless" to "useful."

"Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me." Vs 11 NIV

2. God's grace is great enough to overcome our past, allow God to assist you to forgive yourself!

"I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus." Vs 10a
"And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins." Jeremiah 31:34b

3. Although God does not cause us to sin, He will use everything in our lives to bring honor to Him!

"Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us." Vs 11

4. For us to be of value to God, we need to let go of the past and live in the present with an eye to the future!

"I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us." Philippians 3:12-14

Forgiving yourself...

Forgiving yourself is not about forgetting. It is about not bringing the offense up to yourself in negative ways. Forgiving yourself is simply letting go of what you are holding against yourself so that you can move on with God. If God has moved on, shouldn't we do the same?

Every bit of energy we give to negative activities and dwelling on regrets, robs us of the energy we need to become the person God wants us to be.

If you do not forgive yourself of past sins, it is a form of pride. Whenever we enact a different set of rules, a higher set of standards for ourselves over others, that is pride. When we can find it within ourselves to forgive others, but not ourselves, we are saying that we are less capable of making a poor decision than others. We are somehow more intuitive, wiser, more insightful, more careful than others, and therefore, we are without excuse and should not forgive ourselves. When we reject the forgiveness extended to us by God and others, when we refuse to forgive ourselves, what we are doing is setting ourselves above others and that is pride!

“Dear Heavenly Father, I understand that there is nothing to gain by holding myself in unforgiveness and there is everything to gain by releasing myself from unforgiveness and beginning the process of healing. I want to move forward and make a positive difference in the future. I confess the ungodly accountability, self-abasement, and the vows I have made to never forgive myself. Because Jesus died for my sins, I choose to forgive myself--to no longer punish myself and be angry with myself. I forgive myself for letting this hurt control me and for hurting others out of my hurt. I repent of this behavior and my attitude. I ask for Your forgiveness and healing. God, help me to NEVER again retain unforgiveness of myself or others. Thank you for loving me and for Your grace to move forward with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.”

Coming next:

February 12 – March 5

“Loaners not Owners” –Luke 16:10