

Live Up To Your Name

An Exposition of Philemon

Introduction: This prison epistle was written from Rome in early 60 A.D. Paul penned these 334 Greek words on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave. He was not the only slave in the church, Colossians 4:1. Paul didn't attack slave owners because he believed people should change from within. The best solution to social problems comes from the heart.

A valuable book:

Personal value - Paul's character - humility

Evangelical value - God redeems slaves from sin

Ethical value - do what is right regardless of man's law

Practical value - divine principles apply to human affairs

Social value - love sets prisoners free

I. Humility in appealing, Verses 1-7

Paul does not call himself an apostle, but a prisoner. He does not usurp authority; he appeals in humility. He refers to Philemon as dearly beloved and as an equal (fellow laborer). He also addresses his wife, his son, and the local church, which met in Philemon's home.

Grace and peace. Grace is divine favor without repayment. Grace is listed first as no one will enjoy peace without first obtaining God's favor of grace.

Paul is thankful for them and he prays for them. He exhorts them for their love upward to God and outward to man which is the result of loving God. He is refreshed by the fellowship (communication) of their faith.

II. Tact in revealing, Verses 8-11

The word wherefore connects these two sections. Paul had confidence (boldness) that Philemon would do what is right. He could have insisted, but instead he begged (I beseech thee). Paul, the aged man, begging the younger, Philemon. Onesimus means useful, but he had been useless until his conversion. Paul, the intercessor, calls him his son; disciples were often called sons during that era. Onesimus was still responsible to confess his wrong, Luke 15:18.

III. Integrity in feeling, Verses 12-22

Bowels, v12 - emotions, Paul truly cared.

Don't do things out of obligation, (v14), but out of the heart.

Departed, v15, literally separated by God's will.

Accept brothers (literally from the same womb) in the Lord as equals. Slaves were treated as a possession by pagans.

A. Identification - receive as myself, like Christ did with us II Corinthians 5:20 and Ephesians 1:6.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

B. Imputation - on Paul's account and our debt on Christ's account, Romans 5:13, Psalm 32:2, Romans 4:8, II Corinthians 5:21,

The penalty for a runaway slave was death, as was the penalty for our sin, Romans 6:23.

Thank God the old account was settled.

Paul had won Philemon as well. He doesn't ask Philemon to free Onesimus but to love and receive him - love sets free. Christ also did more than we asked, verse 21.

Conclusion: Since Christ forgave us and released us from our debt, we should forgive others and release them from obligation.