

## **Philemon: Teaching Us Deep Truth Through Real-life Drama**

### **Philemon 10-19**

#### **Introduction:**

1. Philemon is a personal letter that Paul wrote to his dear friend, Philemon. Philemon was a dedicated believer who had opened up his home for the church at Colosse to meet there.
2. What was Paul's purpose for writing this letter? In verse 10, Paul gets right to the point.
3. Paul had led a young man by the name of Onesimus to Christ, in Rome. But here was the problem. Onesimus had been a servant of Philemon's. He had rebelled against Philemon and fled from him.
4. So, there are three principal characters in this story:
  - Paul – who has a close partnership with Philemon. vs. 1
  - Philemon – the offended lord and master of Onesimus. vs. 11a
  - Onesimus – the rebel and enemy of Philemon, who now has a relationship with Paul. vs. 10
5. In this letter, Paul plays the role of mediator between Philemon and Onesimus. Paul beseeches Philemon to receive back Onesimus, forgive him, and restore him not as a servant, but as a brother in Christ. vs. 15-16
6. Verse 17 is a key verse in the book. Paul desired for Philemon to receive back Onesimus just as he would have received Paul himself.
7. There are some incredible spiritual truths that are put on display here in this little book. We see these deep truths illustrated in this situation between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus.
  - It is as if the wonderful doctrines that God gave Paul in Romans through Titus are set to real-life drama, right here in this final little book that Paul wrote.
  - It is the perfect book to end Paul's epistles.

#### **First spiritual truth – the doctrine of mediation (Christ is the mediator between me and God.)**

1. Onesimus is a picture of every one of us before we found Christ. He had rebelled against his lord and was now an enemy and condemned by law. His actions had separated him from his lord and he was on the run. He was lost and without hope, in a completely alienated position.
2. This is a perfect description of every one of us before we trusted Christ. Ephesians 2:12; Colossians 1:21
3. Our own sin had alienated us from God. We were enemies of God by wicked works, and condemned by law. There was nothing that we could do in and of ourselves to bring reconciliation with God. We were without hope. The problem was beyond our ability to solve.
4. Back to our story. A mediator stepped in to help condemned Onesimus. Paul mediated with Philemon on Onesimus' behalf. Paul did **for** Onesimus what Onesimus could not do for himself.

5. Let's apply this to us and God. We also were in a hopeless, alienated position from God Almighty, but a mediator stepped in to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Praise the Lord for 1 Timothy 2:5! Praise God for the mediator, Jesus Christ.
6. Look back at Ephesians 2:12, but now let's read verse 13. Look back at Colossians 1:21, but now read verse 22. We have a mediator! Somebody went to bat for us, and that somebody was the Lord Jesus Christ.
7. He was fully God and fully man, the perfect mediator between God and man.

**Second spiritual truth – the doctrine of imputation  
(Christ takes my sin and gives me His righteousness.)**

1. Notice what Paul the mediator says in verses 18 and 19. Paul says to Philemon, “Whatever he has done against you or whatever he owes you, put it on **my** account. I will pay his debt.”
2. As you read this, it becomes clear that Paul is telling Philemon, “Take his debt and all his wrong-doing and put that on my account. Credit me with the wrong he has done. Take **my** good standing that I have with you and put that on **his** account.”
3. This is a beautiful picture of the doctrine of imputation. Jesus Christ took our debts upon Himself on the cross. Our sins were imputed to Him on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24; Romans 5:6-8
  - To impute simply means “to credit.” Jesus Christ said, “Take every one of Dan Proctor’s sin debts and put them on My account. Don’t impute them to him, but to Me.” 2 Corinthians 5:19
  - Not only this, Christ said, “Father, take My righteousness and put it on Dan’s account.” 2 Corinthians 5:21
4. This is the doctrine of imputation. Christ takes every one of our sin debts and has them imputed to Him. The moment we trust Him as our Savior, He takes His righteousness and credits that to our account. And it is all on the basis of our mediator and what He has done for us. It is all done on the basis of our faith in what Christ has accomplished for us.
  - Notice this doctrine of imputation in Romans 4. Romans 4:5-8, 20-25
  - This doctrine is vividly illustrated for us in the story of Philemon.

**Third spiritual truth – identification  
(God now receives me as He does His own Son.)**

1. In verse 17, Paul says, “*If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.*” Three times Paul admonishes Philemon, “*Receive him.*”
2. Paul had a wonderful, loving partnership relationship with Philemon. He says to Philemon, “Even though he has sinned against you and wronged you, I want you to take him out of an alienated relationship and put him in a partnership relationship, and treat him just like you would me.”
3. Philemon and Onesimus were alienated in their relationship, so until **Paul** and Onesimus had a relationship, there would continue to be a breach between Philemon and Onesimus.
4. Think about it. Christ does for us what Paul did for Onesimus. We were alienated from God by wicked works.

5. But Christ has a loving, eternal, partnership relationship with the Father. John 1:1, 14:9-10
  - So when you trust Christ and enter into a relationship with Christ, do you know what that means? It means He reconciles you to the Father and brings you into that same partnership that He enjoys with the Father!
  - This is why Jesus told the disciples that the only way to the Father was through Him. John 14:6
6. When you trust Christ, Christ says, “Father, I have paid all their sin debts, I have given them my righteousness; now receive them just like you would me.”
7. When you got saved you received more than just your sins being forgiven. You received an eternal identification in Christ whereby you are completely accepted and received by the Father. Ephesians 1:6, 3:12; Galatians 4:6-7
8. If you are saved, you don’t have to slip in the back door of heaven. You are a new creature in Christ. You have a new identification! You have been made one with Christ, bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. Ephesians 5:30-32
9. Christ became a curse for us on the cross so that we could be eternally accepted of the Father in Him. You were baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ the moment you were saved (1 Corinthians 12:13, 27). You are eternally identified **in Christ**; therefore, the Father receives you as He does His own Son, Jesus Christ.

**In Conclusion:**

1. Do you see how valuable this little letter is to the believer? Do you see why the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this and then preserve it for us as Holy Scripture?
2. This real-life situation illustrates for us many of the wonderful doctrines of Jesus Christ and what He does for the believer.
3. Aren't you thankful we have a mediator? Aren't you thankful that Christ had your sins imputed to Him, and then had His righteousness credited to your account? Aren't you thankful that God now sees you as “**in Christ**?”