

Paul Writes To Philemon

Philemon 1:1-25

MEMORY VERSE

PHILEMON 1:20

“Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Several “super” bouncy balls.

Blank paper and pencils.

ATTENTION GETTER!

Bouncing Ball

Bring several super bouncing balls and let the kids bounce them and catch them themselves. Explain to the children the concept of gravity and how everything by nature will fall down.

As sure as gravity will make things fall down, our sin nature will make us fall down and sin against our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Whenever the ball is bouncing back up it is going contrary to the force of gravity. God wants us to forgive those who have wronged us even though it may be contrary to our nature. Even though it is going against our nature, it can be done with the help of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

LESSON TIME!

In today's lesson we will discover the power of Christian brotherly love. This letter is a beautiful example of the kind of love that Jesus wants us to have for one another. **God wants us to love and forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ.** In order to help us understand better the letter of Paul to his friend Philemon, we must first get a quick look at the story behind the letter.

The story centers on a slave named Onesimus. As a slave, Onesimus was owned by a man named Philemon. Philemon was not your typical slave owner. Philemon was a Christian man, a follower of Jesus Christ. There is little doubt that Philemon was an excellent example of a Christian. Paul describes him as loving and faithful to the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints. He was a man that was not afraid to share his faith in God with others. He probably witnessed to Onesimus.

Now one day Onesimus ran away from his master. He quite possibly robbed Philemon and fled to the large city of Rome. He was probably hoping to blend into the crowd and disappear. But God had other plans for Onesimus. While in Rome, Onesimus met Paul who told him about Jesus and he asked Jesus to come into his life and save him.

Now we have a problem! What should Onesimus do? Should Onesimus go back to his master Philemon? Or should he stay with Paul who is in need of his assistance?

But what about Philemon? What should he do? By law he could have Onesimus put to death for running away, but now Onesimus is his brother in the Lord. If he does not discipline Onesimus for his crime it could lead to more slaves running away. What a dilemma!

NOTE: Talk about these questions with the class and see what kind of answers they might come up with before telling the rest of the story.

PHILEMON vs.1-7

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer,

to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,
hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus
and toward all the saints,
that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the
acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.
For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts
of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.**

This lesson will give us the answer to the dilemma. Paul begins his letter with words of encouragement and blessing to his “friend and fellow laborer” Philemon. You see when we become Christians we join a family, the family of God. We are commanded by God to love one another. God will help us to love one another. Paul loves his friend and brother in the Lord, Philemon. Paul makes note of Philemon’s love for “all the saints.” **God wants us to love and forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ.**

Would Paul be able to write the same things about you? Do you show your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Discuss with the class.

What’s For Dinner?

Do a role-play. The teacher plays the role of a family member and asks a child to play the role of a tired mom or dad. The “child” (teacher) is sitting down to a meal and keeps asking for things (can be real props or just pretend) such as salt, pepper, water, napkin, more food, more water, etc.

This will demonstrate the repetitive nature of our sins against each other, and our own need for forgiveness. Ask the student how it felt to be tired and continually asked to do something more. That is what it is like whenever we keep on sinning over and over.

You could also tie in the story of Peter asking Jesus how many times that he should forgive a brother who has sinned against him. He asked if it should be seven times. But Jesus answered and said, “seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21,22). This is an example that we should continually forgive those who sin against us.

PHILEMON vs. 8-16

**Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you
what is fitting,**

yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you; being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ-

I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains,

who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.

I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart,

whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.

But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.

For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever,

no longer as a slave but more than a slave; a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Because Paul knows that Philemon loves him and that he also loves Onesimus, he has full confidence that he can trust him to make the right decision about Onesimus. Paul could command Philemon to do it his way, "yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you." Love appeals and does not force the issue. **God wants us to love and forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ.**

God's love is that way toward us. God loves everyone and does not want anyone to perish in their sin. Yet He does not force us to accept His salvation. He allows us to make the choice. God does appeal to us to make the right choice. It is a loving appeal. Paul does the same for Philemon.

PHILEMON vs. 17-25

If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.

But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.

I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay; not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.

Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Paul offers the perfect solution, the answer to the dilemma. The solution was a costly one, but Paul was willing to pay the price. There are two statements by Paul that sum up his answer to the dilemma. First he says to Philemon “receive him (Onesimus) as you would me.” Second, “If he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.”

So Paul is basically saying to Philemon that you need to receive Onesimus back because I am willing to stand in his place and pay the price for his sin. I am willing to repay to you whatever is owed to you. **God wants us to love and forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ.**

This is exactly what Jesus has done for us. We are all spiritual Onesimuses. We, like Onesimus, are slaves. The Bible says we are slaves to sin. “All have sinned and fallen short of God’s standard” (Romans 3:23). We, like Onesimus, deserve death for what we have done, “for the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Like Onesimus we have no way out of our dilemma except that someone steps in for us and takes our place.

Paul was willing to put himself on the line for Onesimus. Jesus was willing to put Himself on the cross for all of us. He took our place so that we would not have to die.

Just as Paul makes this appeal to Philemon, Jesus has made this offering to His Father in heaven on our behalf. The question is whether or not you and I will accept it.

You see it takes more than love to solve the dilemma of Onesimus. Paul had to put it on his account. Pay the price. Jesus was willing to pay our debt of sin. When Jesus died on the cross He put my sin and yours on account, paying our sin debt for us.

So we learn a great lesson from Paul's letter to Philemon. Christian brotherly love is strong enough to overcome a great dilemma. Christian brotherly love is to be a reflection of God's love for us. A love that says, "Receive him as you would receive me and charge that to my account."

As Paul finished his letter, he expressed his knowledge that Philemon would do the right thing. He even said that he was confident that Philemon would go above and beyond in restoring his brother. **God wants us to love and forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ.**

Don't Keep Accounts

Have the children write or draw in pencil a sin someone has committed against them. Then take time to pray and let them forgive the person. Next, erase the sin from the paper.

For older children use the fact that the image can still be seen because even though we forgive, sometimes we do not forget and the image will keep coming back to our minds. But just as the Lord has forgiven us and does not remember our sins, we should do the same for others.

Also, you can explain to the children that this is an illustration of what Jesus has done for us. Because He paid our debt of sin, like Paul was willing to pay the debt of Onesimus, our sins can be erased forever.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to always love and forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.