

THE GOSPEL CHANGES EVERYTHING!

Paul's epistle to Philemon

 MORNING STAR BAPTIST CHURCH

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"Each has heard the claims of Christianity from totally different backgrounds. Paul was once a rigorous Jew of the Dispersion who advanced in Judaism beyond all his contemporaries. Philemon was a wealthy Gentile. Onesimus was the most despicable of all creatures, a runaway slave. They find themselves united in the gospel of Christ."

- Arthur Rupprecht

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"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus"
- Galatians 3:28

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THE GOSPEL HAS AN EFFECT ON OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

- I. The Gospel radically changes relationships
- II. The Gospel radically changes actions
- III. The Gospel radically changes perspectives

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I. THE GOSPEL RADICALLY CHANGES RELATIONSHIPS

A. Philemon & Paul

- Paul refers to Philemon as a "beloved friend and fellow laborer"
- *"Paul uses this term of his associates in the tasks of evangelism and pastoral care."*
- Murray Harris

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I. THE GOSPEL RADICALLY CHANGES RELATIONSHIPS

B. Paul & Onesimus

- Paul becomes Onesimus' spiritual father
- vs. 10
- Onesimus becomes valuable to Paul
- vs. 11, 13
- *"Paul means that with the new nature that Onesimus has received as a believer in Christ, he has for the first time become true to his name. In sending him, Paul means, 'I am in truth sending part of myself.'"*
- F.F. Bruce

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I. THE GOSPEL RADICALLY CHANGES RELATIONSHIPS

C. Onesimus & Philemon

- Onesimus becomes profitable to Philemon - vs. 11
- Onesimus was once only a slave to Philemon, now he is a brother.
- Philemon should now regard Onesimus the same way he would regard Paul.

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APPLICATION

- When we interact with other believers, the basis of our relationship is the gospel.
- We are all on equal ground at the foot of the cross where there is no room for selfishness, grudge-holding, arrogance or pride.
- It is the gospel that makes it possible to forgive others.

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II. THE GOSPEL RADICALLY CHANGES ACTIONS

- A. The Motives for our Actions
- B. The Model for our Actions

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A. THE MOTIVES FOR OUR ACTIONS

- Love is to be our motive not obligation or compulsion
 - Paul refrained from commanding Philemon to forgive Onesimus
 - Paul refrained from keeping Onesimus with him at Rome.
 - *"This is drawn from the general rule, that no sacrifices are acceptable to God but those which are freely offered."* - Calvin

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B. THE MODEL FOR OUR ACTIONS

- Christ is to be our model, not conventional wisdom or "following your gut"
 1. Christ's model of service
 2. Christ's model of reconciliation
 3. Christ's model of intercession

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1. CHRIST'S MODEL OF SERVICE

- Philippians 2:5-11- He served others.
 - Philemon followed Christ's model - vs. 7, 20
 - Onesimus followed Christ's model - vs. 11, 13
 - Paul followed Christ model - vs. 4, 13, 14

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2. CHRIST'S MODEL OF RECONCILIATION

- Colossians 1:19-23 - It's important to Him.
 - Paul followed Christ's model in that the main purpose of the letter was to seek reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus

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"Paul is not asking for a paternalistic willingness to let bygones be bygones. Nor is he offering good advice to Philemon on how to maintain a dignified detachment, untroubled by passion or anger. He seeks the specifically Christian virtue of loving forgiveness, which will demand humility from both parties - Onesimus to seek forgiveness, Philemon to grant it. Onesimus must abandon fear: Philemon, pride. And the thing which will induce both parties to do this is a theological fact, namely the fellowship which belongs to the people of Christ"

- N.T. Wright

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2. CHRIST'S MODEL OF RECONCILIATION

- Onesimus followed Christ's model in that he desired reconciliation with Philemon.
- Philemon now has the opportunity to follow Christ's model of reconciliation being important.

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3. CHRIST'S MODEL OF INTERCESSION

- I Timothy 2:5 - He is the great Mediator.
 - Paul follows Christ's model of intercession
 - *"Paul is reconciling master and slave by taking on himself the role of Christ. For Onesimus' sake God makes Paul a debtor to Philemon (even though he owns him nothing), so that in Paul Onesimus may find a welcome into the church and home where he now truly belongs. God is in Paul reconciling Philemon and Onesimus."* - N.T. Wright
 - *"There is no better picture of what Jesus did for humanity than what Paul did and offered to do for Onesimus."* - Richard Melick Jr.

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3. CHRIST'S MODEL OF INTERCESSION

- Paul follows Christ's model of intercession
 - ▶ Paul identifies with Onesimus - vs. 12, 16, 17
 - ▶ Paul offers to take Onesimus' debt - vs. 18,19
 - ▶ Paul advocates for Onesimus' changed life - vs. 17

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APPLICATION

- The gospel-changed person has motives for their actions out of love, not compulsion.
- The gospel-changed person has a model in Christ Jesus. He perfectly illustrates how we are to interact with and on behalf of our fellow believers.

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III. THE GOSPEL RADICALLY CHANGES PERSPECTIVES

- A. Paul's Perspective of Onesimus changed
- B. Onesimus' perspective of himself changed
 - He ran away because he hated to serve
 - He ends up serving Paul and Christ and is willing to go back to Philemon.

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III. THE GOSPEL RADICALLY CHANGES PERSPECTIVES

- C. Philemon's perspective of Onesimus and his running away changed.
 - Onesimus is now profitable to Philemon
 - *"It was a triumph of God's grace that a disgruntled slave ran away and then voluntarily returned a better person, willing to serve both his earthly master and heavenly Master for good."*
- Melick
 - Paul suggests God's Providence in Onesimus running away.

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*"Onesimus deserved punishment. The grace of God appeared, however, in that Onesimus did not get what he deserved. Rather, his circumstances brought him to a new life. God worked through them to accomplish His purposes **in spite of** failures, misunderstandings, and blatant sins. The gospel truly offers good news. Paul's introductory word, 'perhaps' seems to warn that absolute knowledge about how and why things happen rests with God alone."*

- Melick

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APPLICATION

When we look at things through the lens of the gospel, we see God at work. We see Him using human choices to fulfill His perfect plan of redemption. It may take time for all that we see through that lens to come into focus, but we will eventually see how all things do really work together for good.

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