

Partnership of Slaves
Philemon 1-25

Read **Philemon 1-25**

Relationship Issue – three individuals

1. Paul – the aged, minister to the gentiles, imprisoned
2. Onesimus – young convert, ran away from commitments to Philemon
3. Philemon – wealthy, leader in the church which met in his home

v. 15-17 are the key - particularly **v. 17**

- relationships between the people

There are different levels of relationships:

1. World: Superficial level

- United around a special interest or shared experience
- Low commitment, short duration
- Example – Cardinals game – cheering with those around you

2. Partnership: Business example

- Also united around a special interest but sharing a major portion life/time
- Medium commitment, longer duration
- To accomplish what I can't accomplish by myself but it is still for my benefit
- Example - Law firm: sharing a major portion of life for success

3. Biblical partnership is even deeper

- Koininia based word, translated most as fellowship
- No word is more abused in the church
 - we have Fellowship halls for meetings and gatherings
 - but is more than just coffee and donuts
- It is connectedness – depth to it
 - Initial SanTan ministries were called connections

v. 16: Brother, showing equality and commitment between Philemon and Onesimus

Context of the letter puts this relationship in perspective:

Read **Colossians 4:7-12:** Gives us context to understand what is going on in Philemon

- Philemon letter was delivered with Colossians
- It was a personal letter
- There was terrible heresy going on in the church in Colossus at the time
- Slaves – the idea that someone else is in control
- That is how Paul describes these men in Colossians 4
- Fellow slaves: Tychichus v. 7, Epaphras v.12 (not Onesimus)
- Paul refers to himself as a slave many times (**Rom 1, Titus 1**)
- **Colossians 4:1** - direct statement to Philemon:
 - Reminder that he too has a single master in heaven

Back to **Philemon 17: “If”**

- Not a maybe - maybe not
- Based on an assumed truth of acceptance – like an algebraic formula – not tolerance
- Bring him in and make him a part of this
- **“accept him”** - is a command, not optional

CHALLENGE: Which level do you see church?

1. Level One: very common today
 - Coming together for shared interests
 - shared experience for a few hours on Sunday
 - Churches segregate to satisfy those shared interests
 - What happens when your interests change?
2. Level Two: more spiritual
 - Recognized partnership but like a business
 - Share major portion of life, but for personal fulfillment
 - If I am not getting what I want, I will disconnect
 - Reality: Master gone to prepare those mansions of glory (**John 14:2**)
 - Not Following commands of Master
 - He left us His instructions and His Spirit to illuminate the Word

Consider this illustration:

You are sitting in your office cubicle for eight hours each day. You have an office manual that tells you what you are expected to do each day. You decide that you feel like standing on your chair and singing “Old McDonald Had a Farm”. Should you? It doesn’t say in the office manual that you can’t do that. If you feel like it.....???

The Bible is more than a manual: it is a revelation of God’s character

I hear people: I feel God has lead me to... DANGER

Should say: I read this in His Word...

God communicates to us for relationships – for connectedness

3. Level Three: Partnership of Slaves
 - excited to see that kind of church.
 - the first San Tan sermon here: **1 John 1.3**
 - the importance of partnership: Christ, others

10 characteristics of their partnership:

1. Ministry is hard work – don't assume that if we have Koininia, life will be easy
 - Paul is a prisoner v. 1
 - Philemon is not the head pastor
 - Epaphras, the lead pastor, has left to get more instruction
 - Dealing with heresy against Jesus deity
 - Philemon's house is being used by the church and Philemon has lost one of his slaves.
 - Abandonment: Demas – mentioned in **v. 24**, also in **Col 4**
 - but in **2 Timothy 4** Demas leaves chasing the world
2. Communicate well
 - Personal letter to address issue
 - Greetings to each other are personal
v. 1-3, 23-25
 - Appropriate communication
v. 8-10: not an order, a request
v. 16 Calls Onesimus a brother, never a slave
3. Prayer for each other
 - Letter going to whole church and Philemon personally shares that they are praying for one another - **v.4**
 - Example - Clay sent a text to me this morning telling me that he was praying for me
4. Growing together in God's word
 - **v. 5-6** – knowledge of God is in you and I am going to draw it out?? NO!
 - **Col 1.9** – studying, reminding each other to be in God's Word. Are you growing in knowledge of God? Understanding who He is?
5. Refresh each other
 - **v. 7** – each other - Philemon is refreshing the hearts of those around him
 - **v.20** – also the leadership

Example: I had a tough day last Tuesday: worked long day with much going on, on the phone all the way home about church budget and business, just enough time to eat dinner and have family devotions, then we rushed to clean up for home group (which was such a blessing!). After everyone had left, I finally could look at the mail, and there among the bills etc was a card from Sis Club → refreshed me

 - **Heb 13:17:** Bring joy to leadership, when we follow

6. Sharing gospel

- v. 10.** – Onesimus came to Christ through Paul’s ministry
- Where you are→ share the gospel

7. Sacrificing

- v. 12-14** – Onesimus was valuable to Paul’s ministry but Paul sent him back
- he is willing to sacrifice this support to do the right thing
- v. 18-19** - Paul pay his debts
- may require more than yourself – may include sacrificing your money

8. Obedient to leadership

- v. 12** - Onesimus sent back by Paul
- Onesimus didn’t voluntarily go back – he is obeying Paul

9. Confidence and hope in fellow slaves

- v. 21** - even when know will be disappointed at some point
- people disappoint
 - mustn’t get jaded over time

10. Hospitable

- v. 22**

Conclusion:

As a church, we need to ask if we are acting like a partnership of slaves?

As individuals, are you part of this partnership of slaves?