

Listening Well

August 22, 2010 -- The Letter to Philemon

This is a personal letter written by **AN APOSTLE to A MEMBER** of a congregation regarding **PERSONAL BEHAVIOR**

PERSONAL choices have **CORPORATE** effect

Philemon's personal behavior affects **THE ENTIRE GROUP**

We are so indoctrinated with privacy that we fiercely avoid the **ACCOUNTABILITY** designed to motivate us toward right behavior and deny the fact that our behavior **HARMS OR HELPS OTHERS**

Issues that affect the church are discussed and settled in the **PARKING LOT** instead of at the **ALTAR**.

Philemon (page 828)

^{NIV} Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker,² to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers,⁵ because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.⁶ I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.⁷ Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.⁸ Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do,⁹ yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul-- an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus--¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.¹² I am sending him-- who is my very heart-- back to you.¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.¹⁵ Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good--¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.¹⁷ So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back-- not to mention that you owe me your very self.²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.²² And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.²⁴ And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

The issue is **CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR** regardless of the law and regardless of social structures

Paul calls him into account regarding this issue in front of everyone.

What is in question here is the **NATURE OF GRACE** in the Church

The question is will Philemon extend to Onesimus the **SAME GRACE** he has received from **CHRIST**

Onesimus is required to stand there in front of the whole church and **ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT HE DID**. Philemon is required to stand there in front of the whole church and **DECLARE HIS RESPONSE** to what Onesimus did in light of what he has been asked to do by the Apostle. And everyone is included in the **LOGIC AND PERSUASION** of the arguments that Paul uses in relationship to his request to Philemon.

The matter is public now and the congregation has the need to know the **TRUE FACTS**; the **SPIRITUAL ISSUES** involved; the **ADVICE OF THE APOSTLE**; the nature of the offender's **REPENTANCE**, and the nature of the offended party's **RESPONSE**