

## A POSTCARD FROM PAUL, PT. 1; PHILE. AT A GLANCE (Ed O'Leary)

### INTRODUCTION.

THIS A.M., ~ we'll begin to look at Paul's ~ 4<sup>th</sup> ~ prison epistle, ~ Philemon. ⇒⇒ Read once/day

▶▶ This little letter, ~ more like a postcard, ~ is the shortest ~ of all of Paul's writings.

▷▷ Not ~ "wish you were here." ⇒⇒ Serious matter dealing with relationships . . . .

▶▶ Today ~ overall picture . . . .

### LET'S BEGIN ~ BY LOOKING AT ~ ¶¶

#### THE PURPOSE AND HISTORICAL SETTING ~ OF THE LETTER.

▶▶ Philemon . . . .

▶▶ At some point, ~ Onesimus, ~ one of Philemon's bondservants, ~ fled to Rome.

▷▷ Possibly having stolen ~ money or property ~ from Philemon ~ and now a fugitive, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ Onesimus was living ~ in the most populated city of the Roman Empire, ~ hoping to escape detection.

▷▷ In a rather remarkable set of circumstances, ~ not recounted in the letter ~ but certainly reflective of God's sovereignty, ~¶¶

↳↳ Onesimus ~ somehow came into contact with the apostle Paul ~ and became a Christian. ⇒⇒ Coincidence? ←← Esther . . . . →→ ¶¶ 1/10

▶▶ Getting back to Onesimus, ~ as he grew in Christ, ~ he spent much time and effort helping Paul, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ who was severely constrained by his imprisonment.

▶▶ As much as Paul ~ would like to have retained the services of Onesimus, ~ he felt obligated ~ to return him to his master.

▷▷ But he wanted to spare Onesimus ~ the wrath of Philemon.

↳↳ So he wrote ~ this carefully orchestrated plea for leniency.

→→ And returned the runaway in the company of Tychicus.

▷▷ Such a plea was in order ~ because Roman law ~ placed no limits ~ on how masters might treat their slaves.

↳↳ They might ~ punish them, ~ torture them, ~ or kill them ~ in the cruelest possible ways.

BOILED DOWN, ~ PERHAPS WE CAN SUMMARIZE THE LETTER ~ THIS WAY.

▶▶ A runaway slave, ~ Onesimus, ~ has met up with Paul and been converted, ~¶¶

▷▷ and Paul sends him back ~ to his former master, ~ Philemon, ~ with a letter, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ explaining ~ how Paul wants Philemon ~ to handle the situation of a returned slave ~ who is now a brother in Christ.

→→ Forgiveness, ~ Acceptance, ~ Reconciliation, ~ Family. ¶¶ 2/10

WITH THE OVERALL PICTURE IN MIND, ~ PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON ~ IS THE ~ most personal ~ of his letters.

AND IS ~ ACCORDINGLY SIMPLE ~ IN STYLE AND FOCUS.

▶▶ Given the sensitive nature of the situation ~ that occasioned the letter, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ this piece of correspondence ~ is a masterpiece of ~ tact ~ and ~ indirect persuasion.

PAUL KNEW ~ EXACTLY ~ HOW TO APPROACH AND ADDRESS ~ PHILEMON.

▶▶ We see ~ in Paul's approach to the situation, ~ he had an excellent grasp ~ ¶¶

▷▷ of the situation.

▶▶ Also, ~ Paul, ~ I would suggest to you, ~ was a student ~ of human nature ~ in general ~ ¶¶

▷▷ and ~ of the nature of the believers he was acquainted with ~ in particular.

▶▶ I would further submit, ~ he understood that ~ ¶¶

▷▷ when dealing with Christian relationships, ~ there is not a ~ one-size-fits-all approach ~ to them.

↪↪ He knew ~ he was dealing ~ with individuals ~ and an individual situation, ~ and acted accordingly. ¶¶ 3/10

WE NEED ~ TO LEARN PAUL'S EXAMPLE ~ on how to approach ~ people & and situations.

▶▶ This would entail ~ situations involving ~ unbelievers ~ and believers alike.

▶▶ In relation to unbelievers.

▷▷ Our speech ~ must manifest ~ a sensitivity to and awareness of ~ the needs of each individual.

▷▷ The content of the gospel ~ must never change.

▷▷ But the manner in which it is presented ~ must be adapted ~ to give an answer ~ ¶¶

↳ ↳ suitable ~ for ~ each occasion ~ and each need ~ to each separate individual unbeliever.

▷▷ So ~ as we noted, ~ we need ~ to better understand ~ unbelievers in general ~ ¶¶

↳ ↳ and the ones we are talking to ~ in particular.

▶▶ And more to the point in Philemon, ~ our approach ~ in relation to believers.

▷▷ We're not just ~ to barrel in ~ and say ~ whatever pops into our minds.

▷▷ We need to take into account ~ what we've just observed about Paul, ~ ¶¶

↳ ↳ and apply it ~ to our relationships ~ with our fellow believers.

▶▶ And of course, ~ in all of this, ~ we need wisdom from God. ¶¶ 4/10

IN ADDITION ~ to knowing ~ how ~ to approach Philemon, ~ Paul showed him ~ great respect.

PAUL ~ HAD THE AUTHORITY AS AN APOSTLE ~ TO TELL PHILEMON WHAT TO DO.

▶▶ Yet Paul chose ~ to appeal to his friend ~ in Christian love ~ rather ~ than to order him ~ what to do.

▶▶ Paul clearly ~ made his desires known.

▷▷ But, ~ he treated Philemon ~ with great respect, ~ as a peer and fellow believer.

TACTFUL PERSUASION ~ WILL ACCOMPLISH MUCH MORE ~ THAN STRONG COMMANDS or language ~ when dealing with people.

▶▶ So let's remember ~ to be courteous toward fellow believers ~ and ~ to treat them with great respect.

MOVING ON IN OUR OVERVIEW OF PHILEMON, ~ THIS LETTER ~ SERVES ~ AS A MODEL ~ of Christian compassion.

IN MANY WAYS, ~ IT PARALLELS JESUS' PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

▶▶ The letter speaks of ~ failure, ~ the need for intercession, ~ returning, ~ forgiveness, ~ and ~ restoration.

▶▶ Getting relationships straight ~ is just as important ~ as getting doctrine straight.

▶▶ We are to relate to our fellow believers ~ with ~ grace, ~ forgiveness, ~ and encouragement. ↴ ↴ 5/10

NEXT IN OUR GLANCE AT PHILEMON, ~ IN THIS BRIEF LETTER, ~ PAUL WAS URGING mercy ~ for a runaway slave.

CONSEQUENTLY, ~ THIS CONCISE MISSIVE ~ IS A REMINDER ~ OF GOD'S LOVE AND advocacy ~ for the lowly.

▶▶ Slavery was widespread across the Roman Empire.

▷▷ But Paul urges Philemon ~ to regard the escaped but returning slave Onesimus ~ ¶¶

↳↳ "no longer as a bondservant ~ but more than a bondservant, ~ as a beloved brother" (v. 16).

▷▷ Philemon should receive Onesimus ~ as he would receive Paul (v. 17).

▷▷ In fact, ~ Paul is confident ~ Philemon will do even more ~ than Paul requests (v. 21).

↳↳ This may very well mean ~ to grant Onesimus his freedom, ~ which Paul would view as a good thing. (1 Cor. 7:21)

▶▶ All this ~ underscores God's care ~ for those whom society ~ looks down upon and abuses, such as ~ widows, ~ orphans, ~ and the poor.

▷▷ As part of its mission, ~ the church is called ~ ¶¶

↳↳ to reflect God's compassion and provision ~¶¶

→→ in its care for members ~ and ~ in its outreach to the world. ⇨⇨ Matt. 14:13-14

MOVING ON ~ IN OUR OVERVIEW, ~ PAUL'S NOTE TO PHILEMON ~ POINTS ~ TO THE equality ~ of all believers ~ in the kingdom of God. ¶¶ 6/10

VERSES 1, ~ 2, ~ 7, ~ 16, ~ 20 . . . .

▶▶ We've talked about this before, ~ and it bears repeating.

▶▶ There is no caste system ~ in the kingdom of God.

▶▶ There is no spiritual elite ~ in the kingdom of God.

▶▶ There are no second-class citizens ~ in the kingdom of God.

▶▶ In God's kingdom ~ there is no ~ spiritual superiority or inferiority.

▶▶ In Gal. 3:28, Paul writes, ~ "There is neither Jew nor Greek, ~ there is neither slave nor free, ~ there is no male and female, ~ for you are all one ~ in Christ Jesus."

▶▶ Being citizens of heaven ~ makes us all ~ united and equal.

▶▶ All believers share the same standing before God.

▶▶ While leadership structures do exist and are legitimate, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ in Christ ~ all believers ~ are on an equal spiritual footing.

MOVING ON IN OUR OVERVIEW OF PHILEMON, ~ ONE OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE gospel ~ is that believers ~ are to grow more and more ~ Christlike.

AS PAUL SAYS IN ROMANS, ~ ¶¶

▶▶ For those he foreknew ~ he also predestined to be conformed ~ to the image of his Son, ~ so that ~ he would be the firstborn ~ among many brothers and sisters. ¶¶ 7/10

## IN THE CASE OF PHILEMON AND ONESIMUS, ~ PAUL MODELED CHRIST-LIKENESS.

▶▶ First, ~ two people were in need of reconciliation, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ and Paul sought a way to accomplish it, ~ just as Jesus did.

▶▶ Second, ~ Paul pleaded the case of Onesimus, ~ taking the side of the guilty ~ in calling for forgiveness.

▷▷ Similarly, ~ Jesus pleaded the case of sinners, ~ bringing them to the Father.

▶▶ Third, ~ Paul offered to pay the debt Onesimus owed, ~ even though ~ it was not Paul's responsibility.

▷▷ Verses 18-19a . . . .

▷▷ Jesus took the debt of sinners ~ and paid it on our behalf.

▶▶ Fourth, ~ the reconciliation was, ~ in essence, ~ effected in Paul.

▷▷ He was the tie ~ that brought Philemon and Onesimus together.

▷▷ Through Paul, ~ harmony was restored.

▷▷ Paul's consistent theme ~ "in Christ" ~ reveals ~ ¶¶

↳↳ that he thought the same way ~ regarding the God-human relationship.

▷▷ In Christ, ~ humanity and deity are reconciled. ¶¶ 8/10



↪↪ In Col., ~ Paul writes, ~ ¶¶

→→ For in him ~ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ~ and through him ~ to reconcile to himself ~ all things, ~ whether on earth or in heaven, ~ making peace ~ by the blood of his cross.

IN THE CONFLICT BETWEEN PHILEMON AND ONESIMUS, ~ Paul acted like Christ did.

▶▶ In this epistle, ~ Paul demonstrated ~ that he understood ~ ¶¶

▷▷ the implications of the gospel.

▶▶ Apart from personal salvation, ~ nothing equals Christlikeness ~ in attitudes and actions.

▷▷ The gospel demands it.

▶▶ In the Epistle to Philemon, ~ Paul demonstrated it.

ALL BELIEVERS ~ ARE TO ~ GROW IN ~ AND DEMONSTRATE ~ CHRISTLIKENESS ~ IN A comprehensive sense.

▶▶ I.e., ~ in every area of our lives in general. ⇨⇨ God takes this very seriously.

▶▶ Note that ~ 1 of the reasons ~ Jesus gave spiritually gifted leaders to the church, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ is to help us grow ~ more and more like Him (Eph. 4:13).

IN THE CASE OF PHILEMON AND ONESIMUS, ~ PAUL DEMONSTRATED ~ ¶¶

▶▶ the specific ~ Christ-like characteristic ~ of peacemaker. ¶¶ 9/10

▶▶ Like our Savior, ~ the Prince of peace, ~ believers are to be mediators.

▶▶ In brief, ~ we are to be peacemakers, ~ not troublemakers.

▶▶ And we are to do all that we can, ~ short of moral and theological compromise, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ to live in peace with everyone ~ and ~ to promote peace in our church.

▶▶ Rom. 12:18, ~ "If possible, ~ so far as it depends on you, ~ live peaceably ~ with all."

▶▶ And Prov. 12:20 says, ~ NIV ~ "Deceit ~ is in the hearts of those ~ who plot evil, ~ but those who promote peace ~ have joy."

## CONCLUSION.

### JUST A COUPLE OF CLOSING THOUGHTS ~ TO WRAP UP OUR OVERVIEW OF PHILEMON.

▶▶ This letter ~ offers a picture ~ of how believers should live ~ in relationship to one another.

▷▷ The keynotes are ~ accepting one another as equal recipients of forgiveness in Christ, ~ giving generously, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ thinking the best ~ of fellow believers, ~ and ~ seeking the best ~ for them.

▶▶ Paul's missive to Philemon ~ also teaches that ~ a person's relationship with Christ ~ affects ~ all other relationships.

LET'S PRAY . . . . 10/10