

Philemon - Postcard With A Punch
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Why do we do what we do for the Lord? Discuss several choices we have in making a decision to serve God and our fellow man. Ex. Duty, a sense of ought, etc. II Cor. 5:11-21

The book of Philemon is principally about three very diverse individuals. There is Paul, the convict who wrote the letter; Philemon, the rich man who was wronged and Onesimus the thieving, runaway slave who wronged him. How likely in most any society are these three to have anything to do with one another; to say nothing of their becoming “brothers” and for Paul to call both of them his “sons” and “children?”

Philemon is depicted by Paul as being an exemplary person in every way. A master like him would by his life and example discourage behavior like that of Onesimus. Discuss the fact that Onesimus ran away and in the process likely stole something from Philemon.

How Paul and Onesimus met during Paul’s imprisonment is a mystery. The fact that Paul “harbored” him for long enough to teach and convert him is also somewhat of a mystery. Surely Paul was aware that to harbor a renegade slave would add no positive points in his jailed circumstances. Discuss possible consequences Paul could have suffered for such behavior. (Read Philippians 2: 5-30 – Epaphroditus “risked” his life to serve Paul)

In verse 15 Paul writes “For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever’ no linger as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother.” Read and discuss Romans 8:28

Read verses 18-19 and discuss Paul’s willingness to assume Onesimus’ debt to Philemon. This seems to be the high point of the short letter as Paul adopts the very attitude of Jesus who “paid it all” for all of us. Discuss