

STUDY NOTES

POSTCARDS: PHILEMON

a series at New City Church

www.newcityphx.com/sermons

The following content is based on the message "The Power of Forgiveness" on 4/28/19 at New City Church in Phoenix, AZ. The following is not meant to be a full synopsis but rather a brief look at the main ideas. To use this Study Guide effectively you must listen to the message found at <http://newcityphx.com/sermons/>.

Leaders using these study notes for group study and reflection should read the Biblical text thoroughly before beginning, using this resource as assistance and not relying solely on this material for insight. We encourage all leaders to pray and ask the Spirit for revelation as they lead their respective community groups.

PRAYER

Pray and ask God to lead the discussion as everyone gets to share.

SCRIPTURE: PHILEMON 1-10

HUMANITY AND DIVINITY

Too often we think of these letters as disconnected from real life. In this passage, Paul is writing Scripture and writing a direct personal application of that Scripture. Paul clearly appeals to Philemon from the position of a brother in Christ. Yet, Paul is a human being and his emotions and human experiences are all over this short letter.

The Gospel is the ultimate intersection of humanity and divinity.

- *How do you feel about the Bible being written by real people, to real people, in real places?*

Read Philemon 11-17. Even though Onesimus was a run-away slave, Paul reminds Philemon that Onesimus is a brother in Christ. This is the theology (divinity) that Paul uses in this letter. In Christ, there is no division of status or power, so Paul urges Philemon to allow Onesimus to come back to him as a free man.

The Gospel means complete equality before God.

- *What kind of status divisions do you see dividing people in today's world? How should the Gospel eliminate those divisions?*

Paul knew that this would be a hard word for Philemon to hear because Paul himself had been deserted multiple times. Paul had a lot of trust built up with Philemon, so Paul included his own personal feelings about Onesimus. Paul laid his own reputation on the line for Onesimus. The Gospel calls us to do things that may not naturally make sense.

The Gospel guarantees difficult times. The Good News guarantees bad news.

- *What has been the most difficult thing that the Gospel urged you to do?*

THEOLOGY OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is an obligation of the Gospel, even after being deserted. Forgiveness may not mean relationship. However, in this case, it did. Yet, there were still earthly implications of what Onesimus did. Paul says he will repay it: Paul put his reputation and his money on the line for Onesimus.

- *In your own words, why do you think forgiveness is an obligation of the Gospel?*
- *Especially in talking about forgiveness, why do we need to understand that we abandoned God, and he offered us full forgiveness anyway?*
- *How has granting forgiveness to others been difficult for you to do?*

At first glance, it almost sounds like Paul is using spiritual manipulation. But Paul says, "I'm in this. I'm putting my name and my money on Onesimus. I'm in it with you." Spiritual manipulation happens when the manipulator is only using another for personal gain, putting all the onus on the other.

- *In what ways could we practically help each other to forgive others?*
- *Pray for strength to forgive others.*