

“ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD”

PHILEMON 12-16

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INTRODUCTION

Making hard choices in life—we all have to do that. Both Paul and Philemon had to make a difficult choice as we see in the passage before us, and both had to be willing to sacrifice **their own personal interests** in order to make that choice. This passage also confronts us with the dilemma we all face as to why “bad things happen to good people.”

These two issues often intersect in our lives and experiences, just as they did here with Philemon and Paul. When we truly trust God and genuinely believe that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28), then we free ourselves to make the right choices that are unselfish and that have the best interests of others in view.

YOU MUST TRUST GOD’S SOVEREIGN PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE, AND MAKE WISE AND UNSELFISH CHOICES FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS AND FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

Paul has just appealed to Philemon for his “child” whom he had led to Christ in his imprisonment, Philemon (10). Onesimus had been useless to Philemon, but now as a Christian was useful both to Philemon and to Paul. Now Paul had to make a painful but very important choice, and he encouraged Philemon to make one also.

- I. MAKING WISE AND UNSELFISH CHOICES (12-14; 16)
 - A. Paul’s Unselfish Choice (12-14)
 1. He is sending Onesimus back to Philemon. (12)
 - a. He sent him “in person”—he himself and no other.
 - b. In sending him it was like Paul was sending one of his internal organs, even his “heart.”
 2. Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him. (13)
 - a. He was desiring/purposing that for a time—but later decided against it (v. 14)
 - b. Onesimus could take the place of Philemon, who could not be there.
 - c. Onesimus “ministered” to Paul, in many personal ways and likely also spiritually.
 - d. Onesimus helped him while weak and in prison—when Paul really needed help!
 - e. Paul’s imprisonment was occasioned by the gospel.
 3. Paul made a firm decision not to do anything without Philemon’s approval.
 - a. Philemon’s “mind/consent”—well thought out approval was necessary.
 - b. Philemon must not appear to act out of coercion—pressure.
 - c. Philemon must act freely/willingly, out of his own free will.
 - B. Philemon’s Unselfish Choice (14, 16)
 1. Paul calls it “his good deed” (14).
 - Welcoming Onesimus as a brother
 - Showing him full forgiveness
 - Possibly setting him free—manumission
 2. Philemon must receive Onesimus back not merely as a slave—but as more than a slave. (16)

- He must accept him as “a beloved brother” in Christ.
- He is “especially” such to Paul.
- He is even more so to Philemon—both in the flesh—physical relationships, and in the Lord—spiritual relationships.

II. WHY DID BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO TWO GOOD PEOPLE? (15)

A. Paul’s Imprisonment and necessary loss of a good helper (13)

B. Philemon’s loss of his servant (15)

1. Onesimus “was separated” from Philemon.
 - This was not something that Philemon chose or wanted to happen.
 - Paul does not accuse the slave of departing or running away or even of stealing from his master.
 - Paul uses “the **divine passive** here for the act of God in all of this.
 - He does not state it for certain, but says “perhaps.”
2. The separation was temporary—only for “an hour.”
3. The reunion would be “forever.”
 - a. This cannot be limited to the idea of permanent slavery to Philemon.
 - b. What a strange way to say it if Paul meant that your slave left you so that you could end up having him forever.
 - c. However, Onesimus ran away and ended up running right into the arms of Paul and of the Lord Jesus. He became saved and now was transformed.
 - d. Now he was truly “a beloved brother.”

CONCLUSION

Do you “love God”? Are you “called according to His purpose”?

Then, can’t you learn to totally trust His sovereign plan for your life? Can’t you make the important choices in your life in a godly way for the good of others and for His glory?

Paul did. We assume that Philemon did. So can you!

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