

SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Philemon

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- In the United States and Canada, slavery is illegal. Where do you see the attitudes, values, or oppression of slavery persisting in our culture and society even if slavery technically is not practiced?
- What is the meaning of reconciliation as you understand it?

Nowadays we view reading someone else's mail as an invasion of privacy, but for the early church letters were commonly passed around and shared. This practice contributed to the formation of our biblical canon and shaped theology. In the short, personal letter of Philemon, the Apostle Paul challenges people of faith to live unprecedented lives for the gospel, sacrificing what society and culture might say we're due in favor of Christ's love and grace.

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- In the middle segment, host Dave Bast asks the question, "How is it that the Gospel actually does bring social change eventually?" Think about it, reflect on your life and the life of your community. Where has the gospel influenced permanent change, even if it took months or years for that change to occur?
- What do you learn about Christ-like community for the book of Philemon? How does this foundation help when you're faced with tricky situations where acting with the love of Jesus will require sacrifice and may bring ridicule or scorn from peers?
- Do you have any relationships that need to be transformed or reconciled? In whom do you struggle to see the image of God? What barriers are in the way? How is God challenging you in the letter to Philemon?
- How can you grow toward Christ-like community? Reflect on the question host Scott Hoezee's poses at the end of the episode, "If Paul were to visit your church or community of believers, what kind of community would he find?"

Related Passages

- **Colossians 4:1-9**
- **Galatians 3:26-29**
- **2 Corinthians 5:11-21**
- **Luke 15:11-32**

Conclusion

Reflecting on Philemon in his commentary Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters, N.T. Wright notes:

...when people believe in Jesus and join his family through baptism, they become 'part' of him; and the sign of that is that they grow together in love, cutting right across all traditional barriers that separate one human being from another.

Pen a prayer for reconciliation. If you identified specific relationships needing transformation, or particular weaknesses in your community, pray for them in detail, by name. Seek God's wisdom. Ask God to send his Holy Spirit to lead, nudge, and challenge you in this journey of growth and reconciliation.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/sacrificial-love>

Printed on April 24, 2024