

Know Your Audience

Philemon 1:1-7

"I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus." - Philemon 1:4-5

Main Point: To understand Paul's letter and its impact on our faith, we must understand who he was addressing and the context

Introduction: Use the following questions to introduce the topic of discussion -

When have you walked to the mailbox and pulled out a letter that got you excited? Who was it from?

Have you ever written a letter of importance to someone, urging them to take your advice about something?

Although Paul's letter to Philemon is short in length it is great in wisdom and direction for our lives as Christians. To understand how we can apply its message we must take time to dissect the text to determine the audience and what was going on in the early church. It's also important to know the culture Paul lived in and the rules concerning slavery and the penalties for abandoning your master. The brief opening appeal is the subject of our study today in which we learn the cast of characters and the roles they play.

Read Philemon 1:1-7. The first thing we need to know is:

1) **THE RECIPIENTS OF THE LETTER. Refer back to v. 1-3.**

What can we gather about who Philemon is? And what is his relationship to Paul?

What fact does Paul mention at the end of v.2? Why is this important?

When you know others are watching your actions, how does it affect your decision making? How does this situation apply to Philemon as well as you and I?

What typically happens when we don't have a church family to hold us accountable to the teachings of Jesus?

2) **THE PRACTICE OF FAITH. Read v.4-5.**

Why does Paul say he is thankful for Philemon?

How was Paul about to put Philemon's faith to the test? What in particular was Paul hoping to deepen Philemon's understanding about (v.6)?

Philemon's demonstration of faith, or lack there of, would have affected the followers in his church. What do your actions say about you? How are you still living for yourself instead of living to honor the Lord?

3) THE EFFECT OF FAITH. Read v.6-7.

What kind of effect did Philemon's faith have on the people around him? What feelings did Paul express in regards to Philemon?

Who do you need to show an unconditional love to this week? How does letting them know you'll be there regardless of their actions or behavior put them at ease?

What are some ways we can lovingly point others in the right direction and be a safe resting place for others?

Apply It:

How well are you practicing your faith? Are you a "rest stop" for those who are weak, wounded, and weary? Pray for those around you and be an encouragement this week. Write a kind note, say a kind word, tell someone you are thankful for them. Invite someone to church to experience the love of Christ and His Body of believers.

Pray:

Lord thank you for forgiving us that we might have the opportunity to forgive others. Help us to let go of anger and bitterness toward those who have wronged us and allow our lives to be a beacon of hope to the world. May our faith reflect your love and goodness to the world. Amen.

Coming up at VillageChurch:

July 8th: Baptism