

## 2 Thessalonians

### AUDIENCE

The believers in Thessalonica.

Second Thessalonians was written to the same group of people to whom 1 Thessalonians was written: the believers in Thessalonica (for more on Thessalonica and the church there, see the [introduction to 1 Thessalonians](#)).

Because of the similarities between the two letters, some critical scholars have asserted that each letter was sent to a distinct group in the Thessalonian church: 1 Thessalonians to the Jewish Christians and 2 Thessalonians to the Gentile Christians. This may be a convenient explanation for the similarities between the two letters, but the evidence for this theory is meager. Second Thessalonians addresses no issue that is peculiarly Jewish. Moreover, Paul's other letters address Jews and Gentiles together, encouraging them to become one in Christ (see [Romans 10:12](#); [Galatians 3:28](#)). It would have been uncharacteristic of Paul to send two separate letters—one addressed to the Jewish Christians, the other to the Gentile Christians. That would have merely promoted more division in the church.

Other scholars have speculated that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to another church nearby that was experiencing persecution, such as the church at Berea or Philippi. This is total speculation since no manuscript evidence exists for this theory either. Instead, early manuscripts include the first verse of 2 Thessalonians, which simply states: "To the church of the Thessalonians" (NIV).

### OCCASION AND PURPOSE

To clear up confusion about the second coming of Christ.

After sending his first letter to the church in Thessalonians, Paul received additional news about the believers there. They were enduring intense persecution and great hardship ([1:4](#)), but despite their troubles, they were clinging to the faith. Some, however, were claiming that Jesus had already returned ([2:1-2](#)). These believers may have misunderstood Paul's statement that Christ's return would be as unexpected as a thief coming in the middle of the night ([1 Thessalonians 5:1-3](#)). Or perhaps they had received another letter, claiming to be from Paul, that simply declared that Christ had already returned ([2:2-3](#)). That rumor, along with persecution, was disrupting and weakening the young church. Thinking they were in the final days, some believers were refusing to work (compare [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#) with [2 Thessalonians 3:11-12](#)).

Paul knew that he had to write a second letter to dispel the rumors and to guide the young church. First he encouraged believers to continue to endure persecution. One day God himself would reward them and punish those who were persecuting them ([1:3-12](#)). Second he tried to clear up the confusion about Christ's second coming. He adamantly denied that Jesus had already returned ([2:1-2](#)). Believers should not listen to anyone who claimed that he had, for the man of lawlessness had not yet appeared. This man's reign of terror would precede the Second Coming ([2:1-12](#)).

Paul also had strong words for those believers who were refusing to work. He had already warned them to stop being lazy ([1 Thessalonians 4:11-12](#); [5:14](#)). This letter takes these lazy

ones more seriously. Apparently Paul believed that they were causing trouble because they were gossiping instead of working ([3:6](#), [11](#)). So Paul commanded the believers to stay away from anyone who refused to work after being admonished twice. Those people were simply troublemakers.

In summary, this letter reveals the heart of a concerned pastor. Paul didn't want any false teaching to distract his new converts from the Christian faith. They had already suffered too much for Christ to be sidetracked by idle gossip.

## MESSAGE

Persecution; Christ's return; great rebellion; persistence.

**Persecution ([1:4-12](#); [3:1-5](#)).** Knowing that believers were being persecuted for their faith, Paul encouraged the church to persevere despite their troubles and trials. He affirmed that God would bring victory to his faithful followers and judge those who persecute them.

*Importance for Today.* Christians are still being persecuted because of their strong faith in Christ. Some of the persecutions are overt and obvious. But many are subtle and secretive. In both cases, believers need to focus on God and his goodness, love, and call to faithfulness. God has promised to reward faith by giving believers his power and helping them bear persecution. Suffering for the faith will strengthen us to serve Christ. We must be faithful to him.

**Christ's return ([1:5-7](#); [2:1-12](#)).** Because Paul had written that Christ could return at any moment, some of the Thessalonian believers had stopped working in order to wait for him. Certainly believers should be prepared for the Second Coming. But this preparation includes faithfully fulfilling the work to which God has called them, living upright and moral lives, and using their gifts and talents for God's glory.

*Importance for Today.* Christ will return and bring total victory to all who trust in him. This truth should give believers hope regardless of their circumstances. It also should motivate believers to make the most of the time they have left on earth, to use their gifts, and to spread the Good News. If we are ready, we need not be concerned about *when* he will return. We should stand firm, keep working, and wait for Christ.

**Great rebellion ([2:3-12](#)).** Before Christ's return, a great rebellion against God will be led by the man of lawlessness (the Antichrist). God will remove all the restraints on evil before he brings judgment on the rebels. The Antichrist will attempt to deceive many.

*Importance for Today.* We should not be afraid when we see evil increase. God is in control, no matter how evil the world becomes. God guards us during Satan's attacks. We can have victory over evil by remaining faithful to God.

**Persistence ([1:4](#), [11-12](#); [2:13-17](#); [3:1-15](#)).** Members of the Thessalonian church had quit working and had become disorderly and disobedient. Paul chastised them for their idleness. He called them to show courage and true Christian conduct. He also challenged them to pray for courage and for each other and to stand firm in their faith.

*Importance for Today.* Believers must never get so tired of doing right that they stop doing it. Instead, we should stand strong in our faith and continue to live the way God wants us to live. We can be persistent by making the most of our time and talent. Our endurance will be rewarded. When do you feel like giving up or giving in? What can you do to ensure your faithfulness to the Lord?

Life Application Bible Commentary - 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

## **Life Connect Lesson 1: You Can Say That Again!**

### **2 THESSALONIANS INTRODUCTION**

#### **Reflect on your life**

**1** What do you think the statement "I'll meet you there at half past" means?

**2** How could the above statement be misunderstood?

**3** Why do people sometimes misunderstand clear messages?

#### **Read the passage 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2 (NIV2011)**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read the introductory material to 2 Thessalonians and the following note:

□ [1:1](#)

**4** What message did the Thessalonians have trouble understanding correctly?

**5** What problems were created by this misunderstanding?

**6** How did persecution complicate the situation?

**7** How did Paul help them clear up the misunderstanding and the problems created by it?

#### **Realize the principle**

The Thessalonian Christians were like most of us—subject to misunderstanding the Word of God. When Paul taught them about the return of Christ, many of them misunderstood. As a result, they misinterpreted and misapplied what he had told them. Paul had to write again to clear up their confusion and head off the errors being created by it—especially laziness and fear. It is perfectly human to misunderstand a message. Sometimes we may misunderstand the Bible, read into it

what we want it to say, or use a passage out of context to support our opinion. That is why we, like the Thessalonians, need help understanding the message God has for us.

**8** Why do people misunderstand the Bible?

**9** What provision has God made for us to understand his message to us?

**10** Where can a Christian turn when confused about what God wants?

### **Respond to the message**

**11** What passages from the Bible have you found confusing or difficult to understand, either now or at some time in the past?

**12** What have you done to find answers to your questions about the Bible?

**13** Who might be able to help you understand biblical passages?

### **Resolve to take action**

**14** What passage or idea in Scripture is still difficult for you to understand?

**15** What will you do this week to gain a better understanding of this passage or idea?

### **More for studying other themes in this section**

**A** How can we strike a proper balance between serving Christ daily and waiting expectantly for his return?

**B** How can we keep our Christian friends mindful of the fact that Christ could return soon?

**C** If Christ were to come within the next three hours, what would you need to do to be ready?

## Life Connect Lesson 2: Out in the Cold

### 2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-12

#### Reflect on your life

1 If you were shopping for the following items, what defects would make you reject them?

A piece of fruit: \_\_\_\_\_

A house: \_\_\_\_\_

Clothes: \_\_\_\_\_

2 For what reasons do some people reject others?

#### Read the passage

#### 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 (NIV2011)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.

<sup>4</sup> Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. <sup>5</sup> All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.

<sup>6</sup> God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you

<sup>7</sup> and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

<sup>8</sup> He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might <sup>10</sup> on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

<sup>11</sup> With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. <sup>12</sup> We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**3** How is our society like the Thessalonian society?

**4** What were the Christians living in Thessalonica experiencing ([1:4-6](#))?

**5** How did Paul encourage them ([1:5-10](#))?

### **Realize the principle**

Much of what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians dealt directly with persecution. Because they believed in Christ, they were persecuted by friends, misunderstood by acquaintances, and scorned by work associates. Paul encouraged them to continue to trust God. In the end, God would reward those who believed in him and punish those who rejected and attacked his followers. It is easy to get discouraged when people reject or turn cold toward you because they have rejected God, his Word, his people, or his ways. At times the pain of rejection can be acute. But when you trust God, he gives you the grace to continue.

**6** What similarities do you see between your circumstances and those of the Thessalonian believers?

**7** How can Christians and churches benefit from persecution?

### **Respond to the message**

**8** What do believers need to remember most when they are persecuted for their faith?

**9** What are you tempted to do when you are persecuted (regardless of what you are persecuted for)?

**10** In what situations or at what times might you be persecuted for your faith in Christ?

**11** What will help you keep your focus on Christ when you respond to persecution?

**12** When your faith or values clash with those of others, what might you say or do in response to glorify God and be respectful to others?

**Resolve to take action**

**13** In what situations over the next few days might you be persecuted for your faith?

**14** What will help you be prepared?

**More for studying other themes in this section**

**A** What made Paul thankful for the Thessalonians ([1:3, 4](#))? What can you do to become a person for whom others thank God?

**B** When will God give his people relief from persecution ([1:6, 7](#))? How can God use suffering and persecution in your life?

**C** What will happen to those who don't know Christ when he returns ([1:6-10](#))? What can you do to help change the fate of an unbeliever you know?

Life Application Bible Studies.



## Life Connect Lesson 3: Just Checking

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-17

#### Reflect on your life

1 How do you verify...

a telephone number?\_\_\_\_\_

a quotation?\_\_\_\_\_

a destination?\_\_\_\_\_

historical facts?\_\_\_\_\_

2 Why might it be important to verify something?

#### 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 (NIV2011)

<sup>1</sup> Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, <sup>2</sup> not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. <sup>3</sup> Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

<sup>4</sup> He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. <sup>5</sup> Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? <sup>6</sup> And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time.

<sup>7</sup> For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. <sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. <sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, <sup>10</sup> and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

<sup>11</sup> For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie

<sup>12</sup> and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. <sup>13</sup> But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

<sup>14</sup> He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus

Christ.<sup>15</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.<sup>16</sup> May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,<sup>17</sup> encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

**3** What is the "day of the Lord" ([2:1](#), [2](#))?

**4** Why did some Thessalonian Christians think that the day of the Lord had already begun ([2:2](#))?

**5** How could they have avoided being fooled ([2:3](#), [5](#), [15](#))?

### **Realize the principle**

One snare that all Christians must avoid is deceivers. In Thessalonica certain people were saying (wrongly) that the day of the Lord had already begun. And many Christians believed them. "Don't be fooled by what they say," Paul told them ([2:3](#)), explaining how the day of the Lord would come about. Many people have claimed to speak for God. Because false prophets or teachers often sound convincing, even Christians can be fooled. We can avoid being led astray by measuring what a teacher says by the Word of God ([2:15](#)).

**6** Why is it important to hold fast to the truth about God and what he wants?

**7** What has God given his people to keep them from being fooled?

### **Respond to the message**

**8** What makes people vulnerable to deception?

**9** To what kinds of deception are Christians vulnerable?

**10** What steps can a Christian take to keep from being fooled?

**11** What could you do to understand God's Word better?

## **Resolve to take action**

**12** For whom might you pray that God will keep from being fooled?

**13** This week, pray that God will point out errors in your thinking, beliefs, lifestyle, or actions.

## **More for studying other themes in this section**

**A** What does it mean that "this lawlessness is already at work secretly" ([2:7](#))? In what ways was it at work when Paul wrote? In what ways is it at work today?

**B** Why does God send some people "great deception" so that "they will believe all these lies" ([2:11](#))? How can you guard against this?

**C** God saves us by grace ([2:16](#)). How or why are we undeserving of God's special favor? What are some reasonable responses to God's special favor?

Life Application Bible Studies.

## Life Connect Lesson 4: Idle Worship

### **2 THESSALONIANS 3:1-18**

#### **Reflect on your life**

**1** Laziness is...

**2** Without using names, describe the laziest person you have ever worked with.

#### **Read the passage**

Read [2 Thessalonians 3:1-18](#)

#### **2 Thessalonians 3:1-18 (NIV2011)**

<sup>1</sup> As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. <sup>2</sup> And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. <sup>3</sup> But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. <sup>4</sup> We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.

<sup>5</sup> May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance. <sup>6</sup> In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

<sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

<sup>9</sup> We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." <sup>11</sup> We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.

<sup>13</sup> And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good. <sup>14</sup> Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer. <sup>16</sup> Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. <sup>17</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. <sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

**3** Who was shirking responsibility in Thessalonica ([3:6](#))?

**4** What should they have been doing instead ([3:7-10](#))?

**5** What was the cure for their laziness ([3:11-15](#))?

### **Realize the principle**

The Christians at Thessalonica were using the return of Christ as an excuse to be lazy. Believing that Christ would come back any day, they quit their jobs and waited. Paul wrote and told them to get back to work. Even if Christ were about to return, they were not absolved of their responsibilities. God wants us to fulfill all of the responsibilities he has given us while we wait for Christ to return. That is the way we carry out his will.

**6** What responsibilities has God given every Christian?

**7** What causes people to shirk their responsibilities?

**8** What excuses do people use to justify laziness?

**9** When is it best to "warn those who are lazy" ([1 Thessalonians 5:14](#))?

**10** When is it best to "stay away from any Christian who lives in idleness" ([2 Thessalonians 3:6](#))?

### **Respond to the message**

**11** What responsibilities has God given you?

**12** When are you tempted to shirk your responsibilities?

**13** What will it mean for you to be diligent and not lazy?

**14** How can you improve the way you use your time at work?

**15** What is satisfactory about the way you now use your free time?

**16** What adjustments do you need to make in the way you use rest or relaxation time?

### **Resolve to take action**

**17** How can you alter the use of your time this week to better reflect your responsibilities?

### **More for studying other themes in this section**

**A** Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray that he would be delivered from evil people ([3:2](#)). Why is it important to ask for prayer? What prayer requests do you need to share with others? Whose requests will you pray for this week?

**B** Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to never tire of doing good ([3:13](#)). What did Paul mean by this? Do you ever tire of doing good? If so, why? How can you continue to do good even when you don't want to or are tired of it?

Life Application Bible Studies.

## Philemon

Invisible walls divide people into the "ins and outs," the "haves and have nots," and an endless assortment of groups, cliques, and castes. Determined by race, skin color, nationality, money, background, education, status, religion, sex, or ability, individuals are judged, categorized, and put in their place. When those social barriers are crossed, usually it is at a great price.

But Jesus broke the barriers that divide men and women from each other and from God. In a male-dominated society, he spoke freely with women ([Matthew 9:18-26](#); [Luke 8:1-3](#)). In the face of holier-than-thou hypocrites, he partied with sinners ([Matthew 9:10-13](#)). Ignoring years of prejudice and discrimination, he associated with Samaritans ([John 4:1-42](#)) and Gentiles ([Luke 7:1-10](#); [8:26-39](#)). And he continually sought to bring outcasts and the powerless into his fold: the crippled and lame ([Luke 6:1-11](#)), the desperately ill ([Matthew 8:1-4](#); [Luke 17:11-19](#)), the blind ([Luke 18:35-42](#); [Mark 8:22-26](#); [John 9:1-7](#)), children ([Mark 10:13-16](#)), swindlers and cheaters ([Mark 11:13-17](#); [Luke 19:1-10](#)), and the poor ([Mark 3:7-12](#); [Luke 21:1-4](#)).

Following in the footsteps of his Lord, Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles as he traveled extensively and shared Christ's message with all types of people. In fact, writing to the Galatians, Paul declared: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" ([Galatians 3:28](#) NIV).

Perhaps the greatest example of the barrier-shattering power of the gospel is here in Philemon, where Paul reunites a rich slave-owner and his runaway slave, now both members of God's family.

As you read this personal letter of reconciliation, consider what divides you from your brothers and sisters in Christ. Ask God to obliterate those walls and bring you together.

### *AUTHOR*

Paul (See the introduction to this volume.)

The very first word of this letter names Paul as the writer. In Colossians, Paul explained that, along with his letter to the believers in Colosse, he would be sending Onesimus ([4:9](#)). Tychicus would deliver both. This letter to Philemon focuses on this same Onesimus. Clearly, then, Paul wrote both letters at about the same time and sent them together.

### *SETTING*

Written from a Roman prison in about A.D. 60 (See the introduction to Philippians.)

This letter was written at about the same time as Ephesians and Colossians. Paul wrote that he was a prisoner (vv. 1, 9, 23) and in chains (vv. 10, 13), so clearly he was in prison. And the reference in [Colossians 4:9](#) implies that he would send this letter to Philemon along with his runaway slave, Onesimus.

### *AUDIENCE*

Philemon and the church at large

Philemon was a leader in the church at Colosse—the church met at his house (v. 2). Evidently Philemon was a wealthy slaveholder who had been converted to Christ under Paul's ministry (v. 19). Slaveholders had absolute power over their slaves. Whether or not Philemon was a kind owner, Onesimus had run away and could be beaten, jailed, or even killed for his offense according to Roman law.

People could become slaves by being born to a woman who was a slave, as punishment for a crime, by being kidnapped from another land, and by being conquered by another nation (slave dealers would buy captured prisoners and send them to the slave markets to be sold for a profit). Sometimes, however, parents would sell their children into slavery. And some would voluntarily become slaves in order to pay a debt.

Slavery was taken for granted in the first century—85 to 90 percent of the inhabitants of Italy were slaves. Usually those with financial means would own slaves. Under Roman law, a slave could expect to be set free in seven years. How slave owners treated their slaves could vary greatly, depending on the temperament of the owner and the performance of the slave. Owners could inflict cruel punishments upon slaves, considered as their property, usually by whipping or beating with a stick. Like thieves, runaway slaves were branded on the forehead. Others were imprisoned. Many slaves died from mistreatment or imprisonment, but it was illegal to take the life of a slave without a court order. Philemon had the power; Onesimus was powerless.

### *OCCASION AND PURPOSE FOR WRITING*

Onesimus had come to faith in Christ while in Rome and was returning to Colosse, to his master, Philemon.

Because of his unique imprisonment in a rented house, Paul was able to have a steady stream of visitors and to freely preach and teach the Word for two years ([Acts 28:17-31](#)). During that time, the young man Onesimus heard the gospel and became a follower of Christ (v. 10). Onesimus had stolen money from his master, Philemon, and had fled to Rome. Now, as a new Christian, he was preparing to return to Colosse and to Philemon.

Paul wrote this letter on behalf of Onesimus, urging Philemon to see the young man not as a slave but as a "brother in the Lord" (v. 16 NIV). Thus Paul hoped that Philemon would welcome him (v. 17), forgive him (vv. 18-19), and perhaps even free him (v. 21).

Paul's appeal is based on their common love for Christ (v. 9), on their relationship (vv. 17-19), and on his authority as an apostle (v. 8). Philemon's response is unknown, but it would be difficult to imagine him not welcoming Onesimus as his new brother in Christ.

One of the lessons of this short letter is the example of Paul. He wrote as the advocate of Onesimus, trusting him to return, to submit to Philemon, and to live with the consequences of his actions. Paul believes in Onesimus, that he is a true brother in the faith. Paul does more than write and endorse this runaway slave, he also backs up his words with his money—Paul offers to pay for anything Onesimus may have broken or stolen (v. 18).

Another lesson concerns the power of the gospel to bring people together. At an opposite pole in the society stood Philemon and Onesimus, yet they became unified brothers through



their common faith in Christ. God can reconcile people, regardless of their differences or offenses.

With whom do you need to be reconciled? What new Christian needs your affirmation and support?

## *MESSAGE*

Forgiveness, Barriers, Respect

**Forgiveness (vv. 17-21).** Philemon was Paul's friend, but he also was the legal owner of the slave Onesimus. He could have punished Onesimus severely, as a runaway and as a thief. Paul asked this dear friend not only to withhold punishment, but to forgive Onesimus and to accept him as a new Christian brother, welcoming him into his home as he would welcome Paul (v. 17).

*Importance for Today.* Many factors divide people today, including disagreements, politics, arguments, and personal offenses. Yet Christians are to be unified, demonstrating the love of Christ by their love for each other ([John 13:34-35](#)). Thus Christian relationships must be filled with forgiveness and acceptance.

Who has wronged you? With what brother or sister in Christ do you feel estranged, distant, or angry? Who do you need to forgive? Build bridges, not walls.

**Barriers (vv. 10-16).** Slavery was widespread in the Roman Empire, but no one is lost to God or beyond his love, not even the poorest slave. Slavery was a thick barrier, but God can break through anything that divides people. And God tells us, as those committed to Christ, to love all kinds of people. Christian love and fellowship should overcome all barriers.

*Importance for Today.* In Christ, we are one family. No walls of racial, economic, political, or social differences should separate us. Christ wants to work through us to remove barriers between brothers and sisters.

What can you do to fellowship with Christians of other races? How can you reach out to those from different cultures and social standing?

**Respect (vv. 4-9, 21-25).** Paul was a friend of both Philemon and Onesimus. He had the authority as an apostle to tell Philemon what to do (v. 8). Yet Paul chose to appeal to his friend in Christian love rather than to order him what to do. Paul clearly made his desires known, but he treated Philemon with respect, as a peer and fellow believer.

*Importance for Today.* Tactful persuasion will accomplish much more than strong commands when dealing with people. No one appreciates being bossed around or ordered what to do. Remember to be courteous and to treat people with respect.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Philippians, Colossians, & Philemon.

## Life Connect Lesson 5 Super Service

### **PHILEMON 1:1-7**

#### **Reflect on your life**

**1** How would you describe excellent service...

from a gas station?\_\_\_\_\_

in a grocery store?\_\_\_\_\_

from a mail-order company?\_\_\_\_\_

at a church?\_\_\_\_\_

**2** Who or what makes the difference at these places?

#### **Read the passage**

Read the introductory material to Philemon, [Philemon 1:1-7](#),

**Philemon 1:1-7 (NIV2011)**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— <sup>2</sup> also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home: <sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. <sup>7</sup> Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

**3** Why did Paul thank God for Philemon ([1:4, 5](#))?

**4** How did Philemon, who was not a pastor, serve and minister to people in the church ([1:5-7](#))?

#### **Realize the principle**

We know from what Paul wrote that Philemon was not a pastor or a paid church staff member but just a Christian living in Colosse. Yet rather than merely attending church, Philemon opened his home to other Christians so they could meet together. And, as Paul says with praise, Philemon loved God's people. You do not have to hold a formal position in the church to serve God. God uses many people to accomplish his work. Some of them are formal leaders of local churches. Many others are simply Christians who have opened their homes and shown their love for believers in tangible ways.

**5** Why is it important for all Christians—not just formal leaders—to minister?

### **Respond to the message**

**6** In your church, what holds people back from serving?

**7** How can Christians be motivated to serve more?

**8** What are some of the ways you now serve in your church?

**9** How might you open your home for ministry?

**10** How else can you serve God's people?

### **Resolve to take action**

**11** What act of service could you perform in the next week or two?

### **More for studying other themes in this section**

**A** How did Philemon use his wealth to serve God ([1:1, 2](#))? What resources do you have to serve God? Whom could you help with these resources?

**B** What effect did Philemon's life have on others ([1:4-7](#))? What effect does your life have on others? What could you do to be more conscious of your example to others?

## Life Connect Lesson 6: Tearing Down Barriers

### **PHILEMON 1:8-25**

#### **Reflect on your life**

**1** What kind of barrier would you put up if you wanted to...

keep your house warm in the winter?\_\_\_\_\_

divert floodwaters?\_\_\_\_\_

separate fighting siblings?\_\_\_\_\_

**2** What sort of barriers do people put up between each other?

#### **Read the passage**

Read [Philemon 1:8-25](#)

#### **Philemon 1:8-25 (NIV2011)**

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, <sup>9</sup> yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—<sup>10</sup> that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

<sup>11</sup> Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. <sup>12</sup> I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. <sup>13</sup> I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup> But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—<sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. <sup>17</sup> So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup> If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.

<sup>19</sup> I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. <sup>20</sup> I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>21</sup> Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. <sup>22</sup> And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. <sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. <sup>24</sup> And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

<sup>25</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

3 Onesimus had run away but later agreed to go back to slavery. What happened to bring about this change ([1:10](#))?

4 What assurance did Paul have that Philemon would take Onesimus back ([1:19-21](#))?

5 Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon each made a sacrifice of some kind. What was each one's difficult decision?

Paul: \_\_\_\_\_

Onesimus: \_\_\_\_\_

Philemon: \_\_\_\_\_

6 Who do you think paid the biggest price?

### **Realize the principle**

Philemon had every reason to be harsh with Onesimus. In fact, according to Roman law at that time, he could have had Onesimus killed for running away. And very few people would have faulted him for it. But God's love—accepted by Philemon first and later by Onesimus—simply took away those reasons. Christ breaks down the barriers we build between each other. Race, ethnicity, gender, social status, and many other human factors divide ordinary people. Love for Christ moves us to tear down the barriers that can otherwise cause so much grief.

7 What is the basis for tearing down the barriers that the world uses to divide people?

### **Respond to the message**

8 What barriers divide many people today?

9 What can we learn about tearing down barriers...

from Paul? \_\_\_\_\_

from Onesimus? \_\_\_\_\_

from Philemon? \_\_\_\_\_

**10** With what person or people can you tear down a barrier?

**Resolve to take action**

**11** What can you do or say this week to build a bridge between you and others?

**More for studying other themes in this section**

**A** In what ways is the letter to Philemon a model for employer-employee relationships?

How might you modify your actions toward your employer in obedience to Christ?

**B** Paul used tact in this letter to Philemon. What can we learn from Paul about approaching people with whom we have a difficult or unpleasant matter to discuss? In what situations do you need tact? How can you use honest praise or affirmation to help in these situations?

**C** Paul was taking some risks by appealing to Philemon. What risks do we take when we try to help people resolve their differences? What practical steps can a mediator take to lessen the risk?

Life Application Bible Studies.