



# BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



## Summary

In this short and personal letter, Paul deals with slavery, freedom and reconciliation. These are not just big ideas here but important in personal relationships. We get to see an example of gospel thinking put into practice and the difference it can make to do this faithfully.

# Wednesday July 1: Philemon

## Forgiving with freedom

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

### What did I like about today's reading?

This is Saul's shortest letter and arguably his most personal. In it we see Saul grapple with the issue of slavery. Saul talks about slavery in his other letters, but in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3, Saul doesn't argue for the abolition of slavery, rather he offers advice to slaves and masters about how to conduct their relationship. Here though, in his letter to Philemon, he pleads with Philemon to release Onesimus from slavery and treat him like a brother!!

Wow! This raises a few questions. Why does Saul condone slavery in some of his letters, whilst campaigning for its abolition in the case of Onesimus in this letter? Is Onesimus a special case? If yes, why? Is Saul being inconsistent? If yes, then how much emphasis should we place on other contentious issues where Saul expresses his views forthrightly, for example equality between men and women and, of course, homosexuality?

Rather than try and answer those questions here, I want to encourage you to try and search for the answers yourself.

Aside from these questions, I love Saul's passion to reconcile Philemon with Onesimus. Onesimus has clearly wronged Philemon in the past which has caused him to run away from his master. Saul wants Philemon, not just to accept him back as a slave, but to accept him back as a brother. The Greek word here is "Koinonia" which means mutual participation - in other words, Jesus' death has made slave and slave master equals, which is why Saul pleads with Philemon to receive Onesimus as his brother.

### What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

It shows us that the heart of the 'gospel' of Jesus is reconciliation. Reconciliation between humanity and Yahweh (God) and reconciliation between every human being. Jesus brings all humanity together - there is no discrimination on the basis of skin colour, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, social and economic standing. Saul summarises it in Colossians 3:11, "*Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*"

### What am I going to do differently as a result?

I am going to work harder and more quickly for reconciliation wherever I am in conflict with another person.

### Who am I going to share this with?

I am going to share this with my wife, so that she can call me out when she sees me perpetuating a conflict and not seeking reconciliation quickly.