

“VOICE OF PAUL-x-LUKE” SERIES

This series shows how the writings of the apostle Paul and his traveling-&-writing assistant Luke, all tie in together to construct “the basic frame of the entire New Testament” from 16 of its books. Under Paul’s unique influence, all these writings emphasize *God forging His People into a new kind of Followership whose “growth policy” involves embodying every kind of people & heritage.* It is within the framework of this people-building endeavor that (1) the Forgiving-&-Restoring Power of Jesus especially gets to be displayed, and where (2) its best participants are those whose lives have God’s Presence “pouring forth” within them.

study #31: Paul Writes **Philemon**: “Complete the Fellowship-Triangle”

— covering **Philemon** —

ACTION #1. After *reading these 2 background stories* to Paul’s NT book-letter of **Philemon**, what questions or curiosities (specifically) do these backstories raise before we even start reading the book?

BACKGROUND STORY #1. This letter is the apostle Paul, while a prisoner in Rome... writing to **Philemon**, a church leader far away in Colossae whom Paul earlier had brought to Christ... asking Philemon to “properly receive back” his runaway slave **Onesimus** whom Paul had met and led to Christ while in Rome.

BACKGROUND STORY #2. Since Paul was sending his trusted helpers (and Onesimus) to deliver this letter to **Philemon** in Colossae a thousand miles away, Paul felt motivated to also write *two additional letters* to churches they had to travel through along the way: **Colossians** and **Ephesians**.

ACTION #2. Read Paul’s book-letter of **Philemon** and then discuss:

- describe in your own words what Paul’s letter says overall, and what ideas especially stand out to you.
- scholars have debated this for centuries: what *exactly* do you think Paul wants Philemon to do?
- look carefully: what are all the details in the letter that tell us about Philemon and what he was like?
- probably the 2 biggest messages in this letter are (1) Paul nurturing Philemon’s “own free will” which is “more effective” than being “forced” to do something, and (2) Paul showing what it takes to bring brothers-in-Christ together. *Which of these 2 messages do you think comes through the strongest?*

ACTION #3. It could be argued that Paul’s book-letter of **Philemon** represents **the culmination of all that the Scriptures are ultimately trying to get us to do** with one another (worth reading twice). Read **Philemon** as a group again and discuss what *new sense or new idea* you had reading it through the second time; also, how would you improve the title of the name of this study (compared to the title above)?

ACTION #4. What about Slavery!!! To the Roman world in Paul’s day, slavery was both common and also controversial, and slaves were treated both *as-family* in one house and *with-cruelty* in the next house (it was all very inconsistent). The biggest consistency, though, came from religions, which generally (1) did not take a hard-line approach against banning something they believed could not be banned, and (2) actively sought to improve slaves’ situation through laws, improved relations, and better valuing of them as equals. Discuss: What do you think about how Paul dealt with “the slavery” issue here... and what did he mean by “more” in **v.21**?

EXTRA... FOR THOSE MOTIVATED, DEVOTED, & WITH SOME SELF-COMMAND:

GOLD CHALLENGE ...read ahead (& maybe journal about) for next study: **Colossians + Ephesians**

PENGUIN CHALLENGE ... (=daily reading + cover full NT+Psalms during series): read **GC** plus **Revelation 1-3**