

Dr. Scot McKnight
The Letter of Philemon
Sermon Study Guide

Open in Prayer.

Read Galatians 3:28. ²⁸ *There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Diversity challenges us in different ways. As believers, we can transcend those differences as we worship Christ together and live out our faith on a daily basis.

- What is our response when faced with racial, ethnic, political, socioeconomic divisions?
- What can we do as Christians when faced with these differences?

Dr. Scot McKnight shared a quote from C.S. Lewis, *“Forgiveness is such a lovely idea until you have something to forgive.”* Dr. McKnight takes it a step further, *“Unity in the church is such a lovely idea, until someone you don’t like decides to come to your church or move into your neighborhood.”*

- Why is unity in the church difficult to achieve? What are the obstacles in the way?

Dr. McKnight read through the letter of Philemon. Take time to read the letter together as a group.

Onesimus is a slave that has presumably run away. He met Paul and became a believer.

His owner is Philemon. It’s important to remember that 30% of the Roman empire were slaves. 250,000 slaves were sold every year in the Roman forum. Slavery, in this context, was not based on race, it was based on status.

When Paul meets Onesimus and converts him to the gospel, he sees an opportunity to put Philemon to the test. Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon with the letter, that Paul wrote himself rather than using a scribe. This is important because it reveals Paul is “sealing” the letter with his own pen. The letter is read by Tychichus. Paul would have instructed him to purposely pause and emphasize certain points throughout reading so that those in the room would truly understand the message in the letter.

- What was the purpose of this letter?
- *Paul wants to make sure that this house church is truly living the gospel, united as one, coming together despite differences.*
- What does it mean to be consistent with the gospel?
- How do you live out the gospel and not just talk about it?