

Study Questions
From Useless to Useful
Philemon 8-25
Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Can you think of a time when someone extended unexpected grace to you? What was the impact on your life?
2. Have you ever been criticized for extending grace to someone else? Why do people seem to accept justice but criticize grace?
3. In the first century culture, slavery was so much a part of the Roman culture that even Christians often failed to see the true moral nature of the issue. Centuries later it was common for both European and American Christians to own slaves without the slightest moral conviction. It's easy to believe we, as Christians, would have known better but chances are we would not have.

What can we do to prevent being so immersed in our culture that we fail to see the true nature of moral issues around us?

How can we make sure we're not justifying things that God would say are morally wrong?

Bible Study

1. Read Philemon 8-25. What is Paul's approach to Philemon? How does this compare for example with Paul's letter to the Corinthians which is filled with commands to be obeyed? What determines the difference between commanding and appealing?
2. Why does Paul share such a concern for a useless, runaway slave? Compare Colossians 1:13, 14. What are the practical implications of believing Jesus has the power to change someone from useless to useful?
3. Paul's appeal to Philemon is to respond to Onesimus on the basis of grace, believing he has changed, rather than according to justice which would mean some level of punishment. What do we learn from this? How does this affect how we approach our children, family members, work associates, etc.? What seems to be the key determining factor between responding with grace or justice?
4. Why does Paul put his reputation on the line for the sake of Onesimus? Compare Acts 9:26-31. What do the repentant runaway slaves around us need from us? Practically, what might this look like for us?
5. What is the picture of grace being painted in 17-20? Compare with Matthew 18:21-35. What should motivate us to extend grace to others, even at great personal cost?

Application

1. Is there an “Onesimus” in your life now that needs some love and grace? What would that look like for you to extend this person grace?
2. Is there a situation you are dealing with now where you are not sure what grace might look like or not sure how to respond rightly? Share it with the group and maybe others can help you sort out a right response.
3. Is there a pre-converted “Onesimus” in your life now that is “useless” and it’s hard to imagine this person as changed and “useful?” Take some time as a group and pray for God to change that person by His grace.