

LESSON 2

TEARING DOWN BARRIERS

PHILEMON 1:8–25



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 Philemon 1:8–25 and the following notes:

☐ 1:10ff ☐ 1:11–15 ☐ 1:16 ☐ 1:19 ☐ 1:25

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?

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?



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?

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



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?

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