

J. Doctrine

The doctrinal thrust of the book to Philemon is the teaching concerning the oneness of believers and the love which should be manifested one for another. It is not stated so in didactic terms but is given by many indications. Philemon is to receive Onesimus as a brother--as he would receive Paul himself. There is clear teaching that in Christ all men are one (as one) and God does not respect the face of one above the other, perse.

By its very character the book shows the life which should be seen in every believer. Philemon has such love for the saints that he devotes himself to securing thier rest. Paul has such regard and love and consideration for Philemon that he will not act without his judgment even in a matter where he feels that he has perfect freedom to do so. Paul's love for Onesimus is such that as a believer he is willing to make good whatever loss he may have caused Philemon in the past and is willing to stake his good name as surety for the future conduct of the convert. Onesimus in turn has been moved by Christ's love that he is willing to return himself to captivity if that be the case as a matter of Christian obligation. This is the greatest thrust of the Epistle although the former should not be overlooked.

Behind everything else we see the doctrine of the sovereignty of God if in nothing else that the purpose clause to the effect that he "early departed for a season that he might be held forever." The things that happened to him fell out to the benefit of the Gospâ.