

THRU THE BIBLE SYNTHESIS
"Part LI: Philemon - An Edifying Response To Institutional Evil"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) The Supreme Court of the United States ruled in the Roe vs. Wade decision that abortion-on-demand was legal. Justice Harry Blackman who authored the 64-page document decision noted that objections to abortion came from two sources: (a) the oath of Hippocrates and (b) Christianity. In spite of the fact that the oath specifically forbids abortion, the court concluded nonetheless that since "ancient religions did not bar abortion," it was legal. Arguing for the separation of Church and State, the court overlooked Christianity's view. As a result, 1.5 million infants are put to death in abortion clinics every year, averaging 1 child every 20 seconds all year long! (De Voss, The Rebirth Of America, p. 86-87) **Question: How is the Christian supposed to respond to this evil in our government and society?!**

(2) The Bible teaches that God created the universe in six consecutive 24 hour periods of time without any evolutionary processes. Yet the Congress permits our tax dollars to support schools that suppress Biblical creation and promote evolutionism. **Question: How is the Christian supposed to respond to this evil?!**

(3) The President of the United States has used his powers to sanction the acceptance of homosexuality as a lifestyle, something that is declared abominable in Romans 1:24-32. **Question: How is the Christian supposed to react to this institutionalized evil?!**

(4) G. Brock Chisholm, Co-Founder of the World Federation of Mental Health in 1945 **allegedly** announced a plan for the future of psychiatry, stating: "To achieve world government, it is necessary to remove from the minds of men their individualism, loyalty to family traditions, national patriotism and religious dogmas." (Psychiatry Destroying Morals, International Association of Scientologists, p. 16) Additionally, reports exist about America's government stationing foreign troops on American soil in preparation for creating a single world government. **Question: In view of allegations about increased violations of Americans' rights on all fronts, allegations that we may not be able to substantiate readily, HOW IS THE CHRISTIAN SUPPOSED TO RESPOND, TO LIVE?!**

(We turn to the "Need" section . . .)

Need: "It's hard to know how to respond to reports of evil in our nation's institutions: the Supreme Court sanctions abortion, Congress tolerates anti-biblical evolution and the suppressing of creationism in schools that our taxes support and the President promotes honoring homosexuality! Besides, we hear rumors of other complex evils of the sell-out of American freedoms by top-flight officials that bother us! HOW are we to DEAL with it all?!"

- I. **When man departed from God, his INSTITUTIONS wherein he RELATED to his fellow man became corrupt with great evils due to the selfishness of individuals WITHIN them!**
 - A. Though God created the world and set man up as His deputy, sin deposed him, and Satan became ruler on earth, Gn. 1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4.
 - B. God renewed human history by the Noahic Flood, Gen. 6:1-9:7.
 - C. Yet, Noah's descendant, Nimrod, began an apostasy opposing God's rule on earth, Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9; Rev. 12:1-3.
 - D. God thus chose Abraham to start a nation to check his sin, Gn. 12:1-3.
 - E. Yet, the Old Testament records that nation, Israel's repeated failure to curb Nimrod's error and even to be corrupted by it, Gn. 12:4-Malachi.
 - F. With this on-going spiritual battle, man's **institutions** fomented great injustices and consequent unrest, coming to a head in Roman slavery:
 1. The Romans used slaves to perform labor they otherwise would do.
 2. They owned their slaves' bodies and would express their worst passions upon them, creating repressed anger and the proverb: "As many enemies as slaves," Lightfoot, Philemon, p. 323-324.
 3. By A.D. 61, the Romans executed 400 slaves of a senator who had been killed by just one of those slaves, using the Senatusconsultum Silonianum law, out of fear that the empire's slaves would otherwise have been emboldened to revolt, *Ibid.*, p. 322.
- II. **When God created the Church, He used Paul to address this evil so as to instruct us on dealing with ALL institutional evils as follows:**
 - A. An incident arose in the Christian Church between 61 and 63 A.D. which, coupled with its contemporary event mentioned above opened the door for a precedent in handling Rome's evil slavery institution:
 1. A slave, Onesimus apparently stole from his master, Philemon, and ran away to Rome to hide among its throngs, Phm. 10-16.
 2. In Rome, Paul led Onesimus to faith in Christ, Phm. 10.
 3. Now, had Paul sanctioned new convert, Onesimus' flight from Philemon, in the political environment **of the TIME**, he would have led Christianity into conflict with Rome's institutional jurisdiction.

4. Yet, had he unconditionally restored Onesimus to Philemon, Onesimus could have been executed by Philemon under Roman jurisdiction, violating Christ's law of brotherly love, Jn. 13:34-35.
 5. Summary: Paul needed to rule (a) respecting Rome's jurisdiction as taught in 1 Peter 2:13 (b) while **also** heeding the law of Christian love in John 13:34-35. **He had to honor God AND Caesar.**
- B. God led Paul to a verdict on Onesimus' relation to Philemon that shows how Christians should relate well to **ALL** evil institutions:
1. Scripture reveals that **all existing secular powers** are ministers of God to do His bidding (directly or permissively), Romans 13:1-4.
 2. **Within** the realm of these governments, Christ **still always** works **with** the believer and **builds** His Church, Mtt. 28:20b; 16:18b.
 3. Thus, God directed through Paul that (a) Onesimus **SELFLESSLY return** to his legal Roman slave position, but that (b) **Philemon SELFLESSLY treat** Onesimus as a Christian **brother**, vrs. 10-17. (c) Any **cost** to Philemon of Onesimus' flight would **SELFLESSLY** be intercepted by **Paul**, countering Philemon's temptation to use legal Roman court action resulting in Onesimus' execution, v. 18.
 4. **Summary: even evil institutions are divinely recognized, but they should be PURIFIED through INDIVIDUALS coming to CHRIST and then selflessly absorbing the COSTS of past evils!**
- III. **Philemon adds to the "thread of redemption" by showing man's UNION with CHRIST and resulting SELFLESSNESS can LAWFULLY and efficiently PURIFY human INSTITUTIONS!**

***Application:** To address institutional evil, (1) individually believe on Christ as Savior from sin to receive a heart of selflessness, Jn. 3:16 with Rom. 8:9 with 2 Cor. 5:14-15. (2) Then, (a) confess any sins we do (1 Jn. 1:9) and (b) depend upon the Holy Spirit for a mind of selfless obedience to Scripture, Gal. 5:16-23; 1 Jn. 2:1-6. (3) Then (a) absorb what costs evil in institutions bring our way by individual experience (Prov. 11:25), thus neutralizing fury in other individuals IN evil institutions, and (b) promote discipling them through Christ. (c) In time, these INSTITUTIONS will REFLECT a "grass roots" change in their INDIVIDUALS to God's glory.*

***Lesson:** We are to address man's evil institutions through absorbing their INDIVIDUAL selfish evil expressions with our INDIVIDUAL selflessness responses, opening doors to discipling that changes INSTITUTIONS!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the solution . . .)

(1) There has long been a competitive power struggle between management and labor in the business field.

A rare exception occurred recently in Lawrence, Massachusetts. On December 11, 1995, Aaron Fuerstein's profitable business, Malden Mills burned down, leaving 3,000 people out of work.

Mr. Fuerstein had a decision to make. He could have used the fire as an opportunity to move his business south where there was cheap labor, or stay, giving his former employees work. The latter would cost him dearly where the former would be financially to his advantage. Aaron's father had always told him: "Your friend's property should be as precious to you as your own," so Aaron Fuerstein decided on a plan. In a packed meeting with employees three days after the fire, he announced: "I'll get right to the announcement. For the next 30 days--it might be longer--all employees will be paid full salaries . . . The most important thing Malden Mills can do for our workers is to get you back to work. By January 2, we will restart operations."

Pandemonium broke out with people crying & shouting for joy.

But, to all of this, the mill's executives decided on an unusual recall that violated their union contract. They called their most experienced, versatile employees back first, regardless of old jobs or seniority. But since Aaron Fuerstein had made his self-sacrificing commitment to the workers, the president of the local union waived the rules, saying, "We've got to work together on this."

Read. Dig., Oct. '96, p. 94-96)

The commitment of a selfless employer to his 3,000 employees, at the cost of millions of **unreclaimable dollars to himself sparked unity and love from the community. Such selflessness, as portrayed through Christians would go a long way toward reforming evil social institutions at the "grass roots."**

(2) Regarding the promoted evils of abortion on demand, the teaching of evolution and honoring of homosexuality and other things, we can beef up our Church ministries particularly to youth, intercepting pregnancies, false beliefs on evolution and homo sexual lifestyles, etc., effectively neutralizing these evils at the "grass roots."