

Character - Good Reputation

Your *character* consists of many elements such as integrity, courage, discipline, vision, endurance, and compassion. One important aspect of character is a good reputation. It is often said that your reputation goes before you. Notable success often results in a noteworthy reputation but the opposite is also true.

Think of some examples of people with a good reputation and some with a bad reputation and discuss why their reputations are what they are. (Some suggestions: Sam Walton, Ted Turner, Michael Jackson, Bill Gates, Jon Corzine, Jane Fonda, Ted Kennedy, Hillary Clinton.)

Do you believe that the world needs men:

...who cannot be bought?

...whose word is their bond?

...who put character above wealth?

Do you think that others in the world believe this?

Read Philemon 1-25. In 60 A.D., during his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote this private, personal letter to a friend, Philemon, a wealthy member of the Colossian church. Its purpose was to convince Philemon to forgive his runaway slave, Onesimus, and to accept him as a brother in the faith. (Note that Paul does not condemn slavery, which was common in the Roman empire, but he does make a radical statement by calling this slave Philemon's brother in Christ.)

What kind of reputation did Onesimus have with Philemon, his employer, when he ran away?

Onesimus was not only a runaway employee but probably stole money from Philemon as well (suggested in vs 18). Why do you think that Paul would associate with such a disreputable person? (see Colossians 4:9)

How do you think that Onesimus must have changed so that he moved from being "useless" to "useful" (vs 11) to both Paul and Philemon?

Why do we, along with Philemon, have a very difficult time changing our minds about the previous poor reputation of someone, a boss, employee, fellow worker, or classmate?

The passage doesn't say whether Philemon rehired Onesimus or not. Pretend to be a member of Philemon's employee review committee. Would you rehire this former employee?

Why do you think that this unusual letter was included in the New Testament?

Action steps:

1. Think of someone you personally know that has a bad reputation (which may or may not be deserved). Pray for that person.

2. Get together with a close friend in confidence and ask him to help evaluate your reputation as seen by others.