

“Slavery”

Philemon 1:8-10

October 11, 2020

Philemon 1-7

- 1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker,
- 2 and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:
- 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,
- 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;
- 6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.
- 7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Philemon 8-10

- 8 **Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper,**
- 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you — since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus —
- 10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,
- 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.
- 12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;
- 14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.
- 15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,
- 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

“The most useful members of a church are usually those who would be doing harm if they were not doing good.”

- Charles Spurgeon

8 **Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper,**

- Based on Philemon’s character, Paul does not need to require him to do something.
- Although, Paul, being an Apostle, could command Philemon to do something, he does not.

Examples:

2 **Thess 3:6**

6 Now **we command** you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

2 **Thess 3:12**

12 Now such persons **we command** and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

1 **Tim 1:18**

18 This **command I entrust to you**, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, • Paul knows he could give a command and it would be right and proper. That’s really amazing.

- Don’t think, in relationships, you must always take a hard and fast stand in your approach to an issue. There may be a better way.
- Paul thought it through because this is a powder keg.

Philemon 8-16

8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper,

9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you — since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus —

10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,
11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.

12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart,
13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;

14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,

16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon 8-16

8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper,

9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you — since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus —

10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,

11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.

12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart,
13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;

14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,

16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you — since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus —

- So the appeal comes from Paul's heart of love.
- This issue can and should be resolved with love and not by force.

• Paul knows this will pay big dividends down the road – what if something blows up – how will Philemon deal with it?

So the appeal is based on 3 things:

1. Love.
2. Age.
3. Prisoner.

*After all, this letter will be read in public in Philemon's house-church of which Philemon was a member and leader.

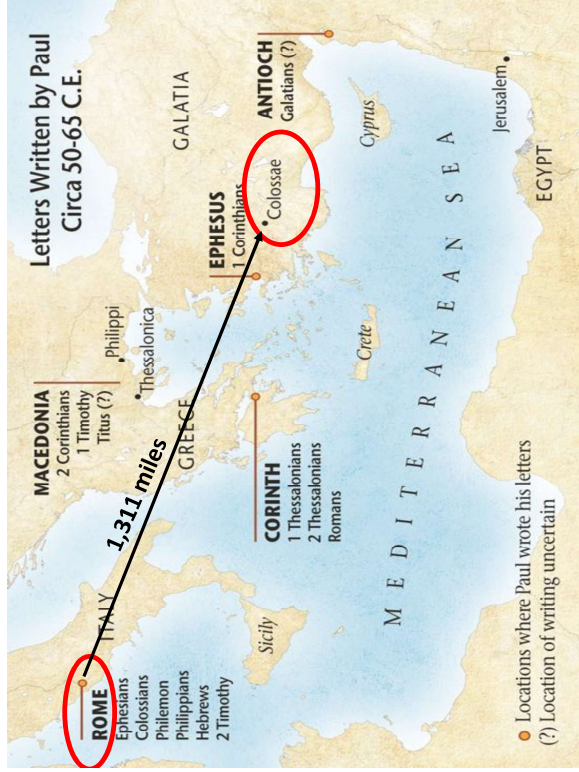
10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,

Here is the 3rd person of this letter –

Onesimus - “useful”

Background:

- Onesimus would have been obtained by Philemon either in a trade or a purchase.
- Onesimus at an opportune time, perhaps when left alone, decided to escape.
- Seeing the wealth around him, he decided to grab some for himself.
- He heads to the “big city” – Rome. He can get lost in the crowd.
- Big cities are known to harbor the dregs of a society.
- J. B. Lightfoot says, “Rome was the natural cesspool for these offscourings of humanity.”
- The Providence of God – Onesimus meets Paul.
- Paul leads him to Christ.
- God chose not to open Onesimus' heart in Philemon's house but to travel 1,300 miles, to meet Paul, and then God opens Onesimus' heart.



10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,

• Paul is careful how he writes this, putting Onesimus' name at the end of the sentence, after describing him in a positive light first.

ἡ παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, ὄντις μου, ἡ βεσῆσαί σου ἐν τῷ υἱῷ ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς.
I beseech thee for my son whom I have begotten in my bonds: Onesimus, τέκνον — “child”

• Used 2 ways: 1. Your spiritual position. 2. Your spiritual maturity. 3. Your human development.

- Paul often spoke of his converts as his “children.” Timothy (1 Corinthians 4:17), Titus (Titus 1:4), the Corinthian Christians (1 Corinthians 4:14) and the Galatian Christians (Galatians 4:19)
- “Remember, Philemon, however you deal with him, you are dealing with my child.”
- Onesimus is only a child as yet and in this condition needs much tender care lest his young spiritual life suffer or die.
- Think of this: Here is a former exclusive, self-righteous, Pharisee calling a Gentile scum-of-the-earth slave, a child.

10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,

“begotten” – γεννηθῶ – to procreate, to bear, to beget, be born, bring forth, to regenerate. Aorist tense – completed action at a point in the past.

• “in my imprisonment”

- Here is the appeal – Paul says, “Look at me, look where I am at, think of my condition, my surroundings.”

“Slavery”

Slavery

- Slavery in the O.T. and the N.T. was permitted.
- The Bible never condemns slavery.

O.T.

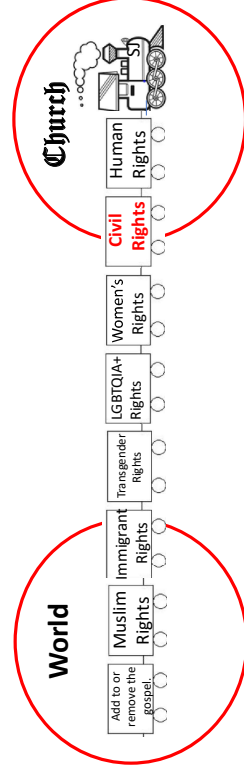
- Slavery in the O.T. was not capturing, or kidnapping or buying and selling people to make people slaves as happened in the Middle Ages by the slave traders. Solomon was guilty of this as evidenced when his son Rehoboam became king.
- Someone would come to the home of someone and say, “Can I live here in exchange for my service to you?”
- Why was slavery permitted? Because if done correctly it benefits both master and slave.
- It was Israel’s way of caring for the needy.

Benefits:

- It avoided, for the slave, a life of homelessness, destitution, and starvation.
- It not only cared for the slave, but provided a home and food, for his family and a life of security both now and in the future.
- In Israel every 7 years all slaves were set free (Jer. 34:14). Many would go back to their Master. What the Bible does condemn are masters who mistreat, abuse, take advantage of, or exploit slaves.

Lev 25:35-46

- 35 'Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.
- 36 'Do not take usurious interest from him, but reverse your God, that your countryman may live with you.
- 37 'You shall not give him your silver at interest, nor your food for gain.
- 38 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.
- 39 'If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's service.
- 40 'He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee.
- 41 'He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers.
- 42 'For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are not to be sold in a slave sale.
- 43 'You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God.
- 44 'As for your male and female slaves whom you may have — you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you.
- 45 'Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession.
- 46 'You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent slaves. But in respect to your countrymen, the sons of Israel, you shall not rule with severity over one another.



“We are victims of systemic oppression and discrimination.”

Equality, Access, Participation and Rights.

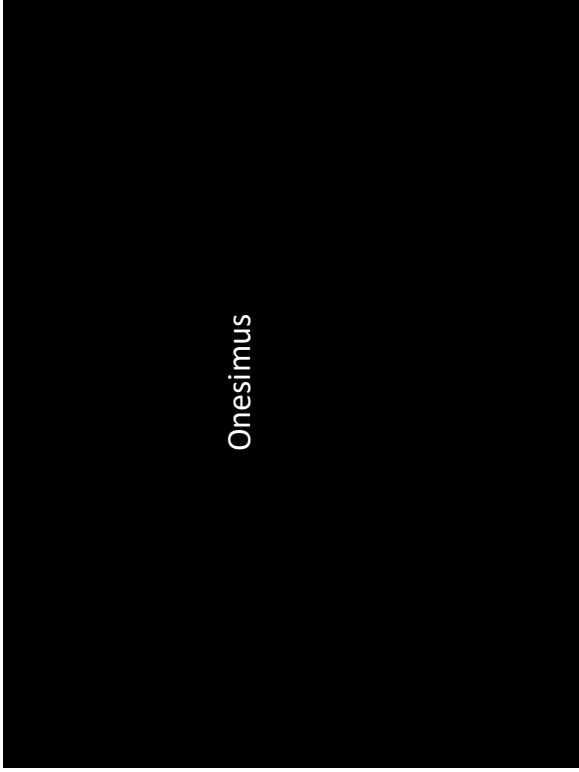
Woke, Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, White Privilege, Egalitarianism

N.T.

- Slavery was so commonplace in the 1st century, that its existence as an institution was never seriously questioned by anyone.
- During Paul’s time there were about twelve million slaves in the Roman empire. More slaves than free men.
- Slaves of all ages, genders, and ethnicities constituted an important socio-economic class in ancient Rome.
- The entire Roman economy was highly dependent on this sizable pool of both skilled and unskilled labor.
- Initially, the Roman slave population came through military conquests.
- As the empire expanded its borders, it captured huge numbers of people, who were subsequently sold into bondage.
- By the first century the majority of slaves inherited their place in society by being born into slavery.
- Most slaves, then, had never known freedom.
- For many slaves, life was difficult—especially for those who worked in the mines or on farms.

- Slaves were teachers, cooks, shopkeepers, doctors, artists, all kinds of occupations. Any line of work a free person might do, a slave might also do.
- It would have been difficult to distinguish between slaves and non-slaves. No difference in dress; neither were there significant differences in responsibilities.
- Household slaves worked more closely with their masters.
- As members of the household, they were intimately involved in every part of family life— from taking care of the master’s children to managing his house or even administering his business interests.
- Meals, clothing and a place to live were provided for the slave.

- To be a slave was to be in someone else’s possession.
- The Greek philosopher Aristotle defined a slave as “a human being who was considered an article of property, someone who belonged completely to another person.”
- The slave had, in principle, no rights, no legal status whatsoever.
- What you had and how you were treated as a slave depended solely on the demands and goodness of the master.
- For the slightest offenses they could be scourged, mutilated, crucified, or thrown to the wild beasts.
- Whether or not slaves eventually gained their freedom; and whether the quality of their daily existence was positive or negative— everything rested in the hands of the master.
- So slavery in the Roman world was as diverse as the number of masters who owned slaves.
- Jesus drew many of His illustrations and parables from the slave world of His day. Slaves might be working in the fields, collecting produce from a vineyard, inviting guests to a wedding, overseeing household duties, or assisting with special occasions for the family.
- Roman slavery was not racially defined, such that first-century slaves were generally indistinguishable from free men both in physical appearance and in dress. Moreover, Roman slaves often had the opportunity to earn their freedom—eventually becoming citizens and even masters themselves.



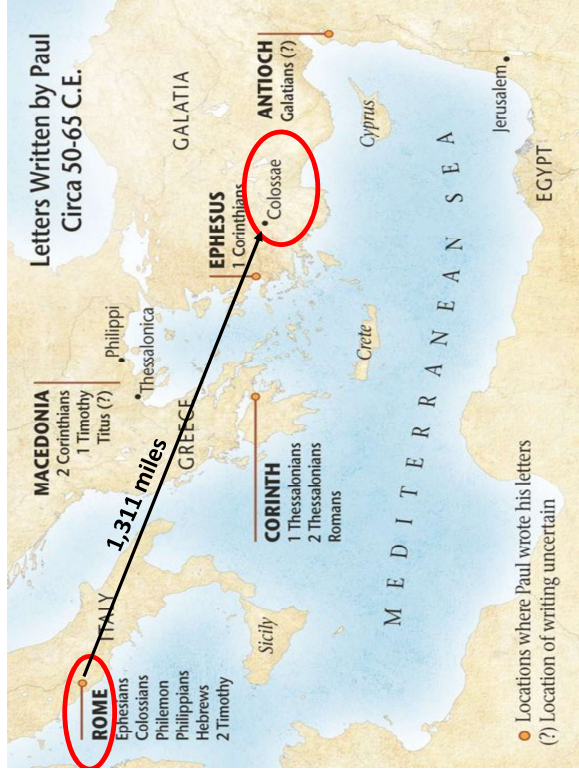
Onesimus

Background

- Onesimus was either:
 1. Purchased by Philemon.
 2. Traded for by Philemon

*There was an investment.

- He would have stayed with other slaves in their own “dormitory.”
- Food and clothing would have been provided.
- According to Walter Hawkins slaves constantly talked about the possibility of escape: “There arose in some an irrepresible desire for freedom which no danger or power could restrain, no hardship deterred, and no bloodhound could alarm. This desire haunted them night and day; they talked about it to each other in confidence.”
- Slaves escaped:
 1. Because of a cruel master.
 2. Desire for freedom.
 3. Fear of punishment.
 4. Seeing a lapse in security.



Escape: What is at stake for Onesimus?

1. You are in danger. As a fugitive you will be running from everyone in society.

- Master would register the name and description with the officials, and the slave would be on the “wanted” list.
- Wanted posters.
- Town criers.
- Soldiers.
- Roman security officials.
- Outpost troops.
- Harbormasters.
- Local police.
- Slave-catchers.
- General public.

*Penalties for harboring or not reporting a runaway slave. If you discovered one, you had 20 days to report him.

2. If caught, the penalty was severe.

- Death.
- Crucified.
- Mutilated.
- Thrown to wild beasts.
- Branded with a hot iron.
- Tattooed.
- Put in chains.
- Collar with metal tag.
- Whipped.
- Never could obtain freedom.
- Looked at as scum.
- Sold as defective.
- Could not come within 100 miles of Rome.

*I appeal to you for my child Onesimus,
whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,*

- Paul