

## Philemon Introduction

01/12/19

### New Life Brings New Challenges

#### **PRAY PRAY PRAY**

Open your Bibles, please to the book of Philemon. Hard to find, it is right before Hebrews....

In a moment we will read the entire letter..... but don't panic, it is only one chapter. Most of you know we just finished our advent season; and prior to that we spent 6 months asking and answering the question, "What is the church?" Today, we are going to start a new series, beginning with the book of Philemon, then we will work our way through the book of Colossians.

As we follow the command to preach the Word, our desire is to give all of us a steady diet of God's Word from all parts of the Scriptures

and for us to maintain a steady diet of the Word of God, then we need to be fed from all the major food groups.... Old Testament, New Testament, Gospel, narrative, epistle, commandments, poetry and so on.....

And since each part of the Bible is part of the greater story of God redeeming man from his lost, sinful rebellious condition.....as we faithfully preach God's Word, we will discover that no matter where we are in Scripture that there is a plot line that runs from Genesis to Revelation that points to our sin and our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ..... Remember, the Law introduces us to Jesus, the prophets predict Jesus, the Gospels reveal Jesus, the Acts preach Jesus, the epistles explain Jesus and the revelation anticipates Jesus.....

So, our philosophy as a church is that Sunday by Sunday, the Word of God must be proclaimed, Christ must be honored and exalted..... and, over time, what you will discover is that when you receive a steady diet of God's Word your appetite for healthy spiritual food will increase..... it will get you excited about what you are hearing, and motivate you to continue to read, study, feed yourself, and be a Berean.....you will be searching the Scriptures to see if these things are so.....

Now, I wanted to spend a moment and explain that so you will know why we do what we do..... and over the next many years, we will be moving around the Bible so we can preach what Paul called in Acts 20, the whole counsel of God.....

Philemon is usually considered in a group of books called the prison epistles. The prison epistles are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. They have been given this name

because Paul wrote them while he was in prison. And the reason we know that he was in prison is because in all 4 letters, he mentions his imprisonment, or his chains. Philemon and Colossians are two epistles that are really linked together. What will discover is that Philemon was a resident of the city Colossae, and the letter to the Colossians and the letter to Philemon were carried and delivered at the same time, by the same people. It appears that the church that was in Philemon's house was the Colossian church.

The letter to Philemon is the most unique letter in all the New Testament. It is an appeal from one man to another..... an appeal from one believer to another.....It is a letter from one friend to another.....Though we are only reading Paul's words, we don't hear from Philemon, the entire letter communicates that Paul and Philemon had a tremendous warmth, respect, admiration and love for one another

Some have taken this letter and broken it down to simply a demonstration as to how you use logic, rhetoric, and appeal in order to move someone to do what you want them to do..... Almost viewing Paul as having as sales pitch and pitching it so perfectly to Philemon that he cannot refuse Paul's request. Granted it is a beautiful letter, and a powerful appeal, but if we reduce the letter to an example of a perfect appeal, then we have lost the point of the book.

This book shows the tremendous cost of following Christ. It shows the importance and necessity of a clear conscience; how consequences don't just go away because you are a believer.....It shows that believers are subject to the laws of the nation they live in, even when they are unjust.....It shows that life with a clear conscience before God and man is more valued than the potential or possible punishment or even death.

It shows that Paul was not concerned about changing social ills; but he was concerned over believers living obediently.... and it shows, too that salvation will turn your world upside down..... or right side up, but it will feel upside down..... you will see that as we study the letter.....

Every book in the Bible needs to be set in its context..... Context is critical no matter if you are studying Ruth, Jonah, John or Ephesians..... but in this particular case, in this particular book, I think I can make a convincing argument to you when I say that in this book, more than any other book in the Bible, **everything in it** hinges on the context.....

So we need to do a little homework, and try to understand the place where Paul is writing from, which we know is from a Roman prison.....Who he is writing to, Philemon, who is a wealthy, believing church member ..... who he is writing about, Onesimus..... who is a Roman slave ..... and most importantly we need to understand the Roman culture in general and Roman slavery in particular..... and the reason why this is so critical is because Philemon owned slaves, Onesimus was a newly converted runaway slave, and Paul is encouraging him to

go back to his owner. Most of today will be background, so please follow along with your thinking caps on.....and you have no choice, you must come back next week to hear the conclusion of this sermon..... this is one long sermon over two weeks.....

So, allow me to read the letter to Philemon while you follow along.

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our beloved fellow worker <sup>2</sup>and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Philemon's Love and Faith**

<sup>4</sup> I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, <sup>6</sup> and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. <sup>7</sup> For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

### **Paul's Plea for Onesimus**

<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, <sup>9</sup> yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— <sup>10</sup> I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. <sup>11</sup> (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) <sup>12</sup> I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. <sup>13</sup> I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, <sup>14</sup> but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. <sup>15</sup> For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, <sup>16</sup> no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. <sup>18</sup> If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. <sup>20</sup> Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

<sup>21</sup> Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. <sup>22</sup> At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

### **Final Greetings**

<sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, <sup>24</sup> and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

<sup>25</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. <sup>1</sup>

Isn't that a beautiful letter? Beautiful, and powerful.... now the reason why we know there is a link between Philemon and Colossians has to do with the names listed in both letters..... in fact hold your place in the book of Philemon and turn over to Colossians 4 for a moment.....it is obvious that Paul wrote both letters at virtually the same time, and they were delivered at the same time..... verse 7 of chapter 4 begins

<sup>7</sup>Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. <sup>8</sup>I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, <sup>9</sup>and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

Onesimus, who the book of Philemon is literally about is apparently traveling with this fellow Tychicus when Tychicus delivers the letter to the Colossians.....In verse 10, Paul mentions that Aristarchus and Mark send their greetings..... they also send greetings to Philemon in verse 24....Paul mentions Epaphras here in verse 12, and Luke and Demas in verse 14..... all 3 of these men are also mentioned at the end of Paul's letter to Philemon..... I just mention all of that for you to understand that Paul wrote two letters and both were delivered to the same place at the same time....by the same people.... and this is why we are going to look first at Philemon, then at Colossians,.

Paul begins this short letter by identifying himself by both his location and current social status instead of using his apostolic office....., in verse 1, He is Paul, not "the apostle" as he states in most of his other epistles..... rather he is Paul, "a prisoner for Christ Jesus." And, as you read the letter, it is obvious that Paul identifies himself this way because he did not want to order Philemon or command that Philemon obey him

He states that in verse 8, doesn't he? "though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, <sup>9</sup>yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—<sup>2</sup>" and in verse 14 he states that he does not want Philemon to do anything "by compulsion but of his own accord." You see, had he started the letter as Paul, "an apostle of Jesus Christ....." the entire flavor of the letter would have been different..... and Paul would never have known if Philemon obeyed out of compulsion, or obeyed out of a willing heart to do the right thing.....and it really demonstrates the humility of Paul, who knew when his apostolic authority was needed and when it was not.....

So, Paul down played his authority, and played up his lack of any status whatsoever..... not only does he keep away from mentioning his apostolic office, he also gives himself the label of one who would be the lowest on the totem pole of social order...So, he is not just refraining from the use of the title apostle..... he is going to the other side of the spectrum and saying,

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Phm 8–9). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

"Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus." A prisoner has no rights, no status, and no identity in the Roman culture.....he is, on the one hand, stating that he has no identity of his own, and on the other, stating that all of his identity is in Christ..... because he is a prisoner **for** Christ Jesus.....

This is so opposite of how greater evangelicalism in our day works isn't it? Who has a title and doesn't use it? Why call yourself a prisoner, when you can call yourself an apostle? Why introduce yourself as John, when your name is Dr. John Smith? Do you ever read the bios of pastors and Christian leaders on church websites or their own websites? It is all about books, conferences, bigger, greater, and having a title.....and, yet Paul shows palpable humility in the opening line of this wonderful letter. "Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus...." leaving us an example to follow.....

Most Scholars agree that the prison Paul is referring to is the prison he experienced in Rome...If you turn to Acts 28 for a moment, I will read from there..... If you recall, the Jews falsely accused him of speaking against the law, the temple, and Caesar..... and he was arrested in Acts 21..... and because he was not receiving a fair hearing.....he appealed to Caesar ..... and the remainder of the book of Acts is all about his journey to Rome where he was to stand before Caesar's tribunal..... and when he finally arrives in chapter 28, notice verse 16 states that he has a soldier guarding him..... it states:

"And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him. <sup>3</sup>" Paul was guarded 24 hours a day 7 days a week.....

In verse 20, we notice that he is wearing a chain..... and in verse 23 we are told that where he lodged or lived was the kind of place where people were able to come and listen to him from morning to evening..... then finally, we are told in verse 30 that

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup> proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. <sup>4</sup>

it was like being under house arrest..... but, in this time period, he did not have an electronic collar attached to his ankle.....rather, he had a Roman guard attached to his ankle..... and he lived this way for 2 years..... but during this time, he was still productive..... He still taught daily, and he continued to write letters to churches ....

as we go back to Philemon.....

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3 *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ac 28:16). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

4 *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ac 28:30–31). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

So this is Paul..... not the apostle, but the prisoner..... later in the letter, he describes himself as an old man in verse 9.....a partner to Philemon in verse 17.....and a brother in verse 20..... again, these are not descriptions of a man trying to gain an authoritative edge over someone.....this is a man who is down playing his title who knows that he is nothing and Christ is everything....

So, what about Philemon.....who is he? We have enough information from the letter to recognize that he was quite a remarkable man..... In verse 1 Paul describes him as a fellow worker..... in verse 2, we are told that the church in Colossae meets in his home..... in verse 5, Paul tells us that Philemon loves the Lord Jesus and loves the people of God.... he loves the saints....and in verse 7, Paul is particularly encouraged by the refreshment believers receive when they are with Philemon.

What a wonderful testimony about this dear saint..... do you know anyone like this? Deb and I spent several years off and on, visiting our college age children in Minnesota and when we did, we were privileged to stay with some long time friends who lived about 5 miles or so from where our kids went to college..... we have often referred to our time at their home the way Paul describes Philemon..... it was a blessing to see our children, and we had the added blessing of our hearts always being refreshed with our visit with Tony and Sue Campagna.... and not just ours, but many, many believers who have had the opportunity to make their abode in the lower level bedroom.....

This is such an important part of Christian ministry and loving one another as believers in a local body..... Let me ask, "How often do you intentionally see or meet with other believers who are not part of your own family? Are you actively involved in encouraging and getting to know others here at Grace Fellowship?

It is so easy to come to church every week, and see and fellowship with only those you already know.....but, let me encourage you to branch out..... ask God for wisdom how you can refresh and encourage others in the body..... Give some thought to having someone over for dinner once a month or once every two months.... You will be blessed by it, and you will be a blessing to those you invite and get to know.... You will be Philemon like, refreshing the souls of the saints

Now, anyone who has had their home open for company on any kind of regular basis, knows how taxing this can be..... and having a church in your home, meeting week in and week out regardless of whether it is first century Colossae or 21st century in Gladwin..it is a huge commitment and a great labor of love..... According to one commentary, churches met in homes and did not meet in meeting halls or buildings other than homes until the 3rd century...

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And, this may be why Paul is quick to add Apphia to his initial greeting..... most believe that this may have been Philemon's wife.....since she is mentioned right after him..... and of course a church meeting in a home would certainly mean that the lady of the house had more than her fair share of work to do before and after the church met, and Paul adding her to the Greeting is an acknowledgment of her own service to the Lord.....

Archippus some believe, may have been their son..... but there is nothing conclusive one way or another.....and notice, too that this letter though about and directed to Philemon, is also addressed to the church..... this letter was a private letter, but Paul was in a sense making sure that his letter to Philemon was also read by his wife, his son, and the entire church family.....possibly for greater accountability.....

What I like about Paul's greeting in regards to Philemon is that he seems to that Philemon had a balanced life of ministering to believers in the local church, and still being involved with those who are outside the local church..... In verse 5, Paul comments on his love for Christ and ALL the saints (which would include the newest one, Onesimus). Then in verse 7, he mentions how Philemon refreshes the saints.....

and sandwiched in between this apparent commitment to love and serve God's people, Paul states in verse 6, " I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective... for the sake of Christ..." Which clearly demonstrates that he was living a balanced life..... along with his church activities, along with being involved with believers.....he rubbed shoulders with those outside the church and Paul knew that..... and Paul prayed that he would be an effective witness where ever he went.

Beloved, this is the heart and soul of genuine Christianity.....Being committed to a local body of believers, serving them, encouraging them..... and being a faithful ambassador or witness to those who do not know Christ..... sharing your faith as God gives opportunity.....

This may be at the place you get your hair cut, or your car worked on..... or interacting with those in the tax office, if you go in to pay your bill.....We represent Christ every where we go, and it seems that Philemon was able to move in and out of both arena's, with believers and unbelievers with relative ease.....

We don't discover the issue of the letter until we come to verse 8 through 10.....when Paul introduces us to a young man by the name of Onesimus.....who Paul describes as, "my child." and, of course, the reason why he calls him "my child" is because during Paul's imprisonment, Onesimus came to faith in Jesus Christ.....the young man was born again under Paul's ministry, and whenever that took place in Paul's life, he did refer to the new believer as his child, and himself as the new believers spiritual father.

Apparently, this young man left the city of Colossae, and made it all the way to Rome..... Rome was 1,312 miles from Colossae.....for us, maybe a 2 to 3 hour plane flight..... but in his day, it would have taken a couple of months to get there by walking and sailing..... and, though Paul was in a Roman prison, Onesimus met him as he taught the Word of God..... When we were in Acts 28 earlier, I did not read verse 23, which states.....

People “came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. <sup>24</sup> And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. <sup>51</sup>”

Well, Onesimus was one of the ones who obviously heard Paul preach and he was convinced of what Paul said.....he traveled along way from Colossae to Rome..... in God’s providence, in the hustle and bustle of a very large city, he heard about some Jewish prisoner talking about God or something..... so he stayed to hear what he had to say.....The spirit of God opened his heart and mind to hear and believe.....and lo and behold Oneismus repented of his sin, He put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ.....

so why is this a problem? Why is Paul even writing this letter to Philemon in the first place?

And, here we come back to the importance of understanding first century culture and first century Roman law..... this is an issue because Philemon, though a believer, and one who even has a church in his house, Philemon owned slaves..... I say slaves in the plural as an assumption..... I assume he owned slaves "plural" because it would have been unusual to only own one..... but we do know for sure that he owned Onesimus..... Onesimus was Philemon's property..... he was philemon’s slave..... He was Philemon's run away slave.....

and therefore, according to Roman law, Philemon owned him..... owned him the same way one would own a horse, a mule or cattle.....

Now, think for a moment about Onesimus.....He somehow came up with a plan that allowed him to escape from Philemon's house..... surely petrified, frightened, anxious, scared.....yet desiring freedom..... In verse 18, Paul writes something interesting..... he writes, "<sup>18</sup> If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account." Paul offering to pay what Oneimus owes communicates that he may have stole something on his way out of the house..... which would make perfect sense, since if his ambition was to get as far away from Colossae as possibly, he would need money to travel..... getting to Rome would not be free; even if you walked and somehow got on a cargo ship.....

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5 *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ac 28:23–24). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

and since the trip would take at least 2 months or more..... you would need money to eat..... the trip from Colossae all the way to Rome would be like you and I walking from Gladwin to San Antonio

So, he makes it to Rome..... and honestly, he was probably feeling more free than he has ever felt..... major city..... new opportunities..... no one knows who he is..... no one knows he is a slave..... no one knows he is a runaway..... and he is so far away from his master that in his mind that life is a distant memory.....

Free in his mind from slavery..... yet still a slave of sin.....and what did he hear Paul say when he went up to the place Paul was staying?.....what did Onesimus hear this little Jewish man say who was guarded and chained, yet free to speak?..... I read it earlier from Acts 28 verse 23.....

"Every evening Paul expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets." and verse 31 states, "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."<sup>6</sup>

Philemon heard Paul talk not about having a better life on this earth..... rather he heard Paul talk about a kingdom that has no end..... a kingdom that is eternal.....where there is no more sin, and no more sorrow, no more tears, and no more death.....I am sure that that he told him and all who would listen that in order to enter this kingdom, the kingdom of God, you would have to be born again..... you would have to repent and believe the good news that Jesus Christ came into the world lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial death to save or rescue His people from their sin.....

Surely Paul the writer of the book of Romans told him that there is none righteous, not one.....and Paul, the writer of Ephesians surely told him that he was dead in his trespasses and sin and under the just wrath of a holy god. And surely, he also told him that God being rich in mercy sent His son, the Lord Jesus to die in your place..... that he who knew no sin became sin for you Onesimus so that in Christ, you might be declared righteous before a holy god.....

Onesimus, you can't earn salvation, you don't merit salvation, you do not have enough goodness to make yourself pure before a holy god, and you must cry out to him to save you and be merciful to you.....Confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that god raised Him from the dead and you will be saved.....

And I am saying this to you this morning..... Any of you who are hearing my voice, and do not know Christ, have not experienced His mercy or forgiveness.... By God's grace, I want to convince you that you must confess and believe in Christ, or you will perish in your sin.....

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<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ac 28:31). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

You need the same thing Onesimus needed. What we all need.... You need to be reconciled to God and that only takes place through Jesus.

And the more Paul spoke and the more this runaway slave heard, he was finally convinced of his need for Jesus Christ to save him from his sin..... and when he did believe this, when He trusted Christ as the only One who could save him, then he experienced true freedom..... not freedom from slavery and oppression..... rather freedom from sin and all the guilt and shame that goes with it....

And, at this point, in his mind, I am sure that he was overwhelmed over his new life.....He was free from being a Roman slave..... and couple that with his new found freedom from slavery from sin..... what Joy! What hope for the future! a new life, living for Christ, waiting for the hope of the resurrection and eternal life with Jesus forever.....

Can you imagine the conversation?.....Paul may have said, "Hey Onesimus..... what a blessing that you traveled 1300 miles, two months over land and sea..... and in God's providence you land at my doorstep and you hear the good news about Jesus and you repent and believe."

"You are right, Paul. I can't believe it. You know I heard people talking about this where I came from.....in fact, there was a church that met in the house I was staying that met every week..... and some of the things that you have been saying, I have heard before... but, at that time, I really didn't care.... I hated being there."

"Really, why did you hate it?"

"I was slave in that house."

"You were a slave? Did you buy your freedom?"

"Not exactly..... I ran, I escaped, and I am now free here in Rome..... and I have been born again, forgiven, and I have new life in Christ..... Amazing."

"Onesimus"

"yes"

"You are free in that you have new life in Christ..... but You are not free, you have not been given your freedom, you have not purchased your freedom..... and your master still owns you..... you are a runaway slave.....Roman law tells you that You need to go back....."

"Paul, are you kidding me? Do you know what they will do to me if I go back? In order for me to have the money to get here, I stole some things from the main house, too..... I have a new life, I am a new Christian..... God directed me right to you to hear about salvation in Jesus

Christ..... now I am born again, and you are saying I need to go back into slavery? Why can't I be your servant? Why can't I stay here with you and help present the gospel?"

"Listen, Onesimus..... God has ordained governments to have laws that we as believers are required to obey, unless they ask us to sin or violate God's commands..... I have had this discussion with other believers.....

in fact, I told those who were slaves in Corinth that if they could legally gain their freedom, that is great..... but if they can't, that they should remain in the condition they are currently in..... And serve your master, as if you are serving Christ.

I have also written quite a bit commanding slave owners to treat their slaves with respect and dignity.....and for slaves to work hard for their masters, even when they are not watching..... you see, at the end of the day both freemen and slaves who are Christians are bondservants of Jesus.....

so, regardless of what the consequences might be, we need to trust God to work on your behalf as you go back to your master, ask his forgiveness, pay back what you stole, and accept whatever consequences come your way. This is part of giving up everything and following Christ...."

"What if he beats me? what if he maims or disfigures me? What if he kills me?"

"While Jesus was still on earth, he reminded us, "Do not fear him who can kill the body, but is unable to kill the soul..... rather fear him who can destroy soul and body in hell..... then he went on to say that God cares for the sparrows, and he will care for you. Do not fear your master or any consequences that might come..... God will be with you.....and regardless of the outcome, your home is not on this earth, it is in heaven.....

What is your masters name and where are you from?"

"His name is Philemon, and he lives in Colossae."

"I know him; he is a believer.....I am in the middle of writing a letter to the church that meets in his house.... I will write a letter to him, too..... and we will have to trust God to work out the details and consequences..... but listen carefully..... Becoming a Christian makes you right with God, but it does not erase any past crimes or offenses against others..... You knew and you still know that you were wrong to run, and you need to go back.....and explain why you came back..... because you wanted to ask His forgiveness and make restoration for what you stole..... and you want to be a faithful slave....."

Now, we don't know if this was the exact conversation that took place..... but I am certain at least part of this fictitious conversation could have been true..... I wonder what your counsel would have been? Knowing that the potential outcome could be very bad, what would you have advised Onesimus to do?

I think the one overarching point of this letter to Philemon would indicate that being made right with God should compel us to take responsibility for the sins of our past that we are able to.....trusting God for the outcome.....

That is a pretty broad statement, and some things in our past are very, very complicated..... I know a man who was a thief for years before he became a Christian.....he broke in to hundreds of homes, stole cash when it was laying around, and he finally got caught. He paid his debt to society in prison, he became a Christian, and it would be virtually impossible for him to back track and pay back everyone he stole from.....

But, as a general principal, the book of Philemon clearly shows that salvation frees us from our sin against God, and we are now righteous before Him.....but we are still accountable for the sins we may have committed against others, and when possible, we should make them right..... going back and making things right, paying people back, or making restitution does not save you, but you are motivated to do these things because you are saved.

Remember Zacheaus, the notorious tax collector who had robbed many in Israel by over taxing them? We know in Luke 19 that When he came to Christ, he told Jesus, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."<sup>7</sup> His new found faith did not wipe out what he owed others because of his own greed and thievery..... and making restitution did not save Him..... rather his new found faith moved him to go back and ask for forgiveness and make restitution of those he had sinned against.

And, this is what Paul is encouraging Onesimus to do.....I wonder I that has ever crossed your mind? Is there anyone in your past that you need to contact and make things right with?

Beloved, this is not easy.....We know that Roman slavery was not any less cruel than the slavery that was in England or the United States..... there were some differences, but slaves were still considered property..... One writer reports,

"Slavery in ancient Rome differed from its modern forms in that it was not based on race. But like modern slavery, it was an abusive and degrading institution. Cruelty was commonplace."

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7 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 19:8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

What we are used to, and what we have seen historically during America's years of slavery was that men were stolen from mostly Africa, brought to the states, treated as sub human animals, and bought and sold like cattle....

In Rome, slaves for the most part were prisoners of war.....whenever Rome conquered a territory, all the people they captured became slaves..... some were sold on the market..... some were kept as slaves of the government.....and it was not unusual for some wealthy families to have hundreds of slaves....

According to PBS.org

"All slaves and their families were the property of their owners, who could sell or rent them out at any time. Their lives were harsh. Slaves were often whipped, branded or cruelly mistreated. Their owners could also kill them for any reason, and would face no punishment.

When a runaway was found, caught, and brought back by a "head hunter" the slave would get branded or tattooed with a mark on his forehead depending on his crime – FUR for a thief, FUG for a runaway. Even the gladiators had markings, so they would easily be recognized if they take flight."

Paul may have said, "Onesimus, you are the property of Philemon. and regardless of the outcome, I need to send you back..... if I don't send you back, then I am harboring a fugitive.....but I will make an appeal on your behalf and we will trust God, who watches the sparrows and knows the hairs on your head.....we will trust Him for the outcome."

And, Onesimus must have said "Okay" because he was hand delivering his own letter to his master

Do you see why I titled the sermon "New life in Christ brings new challenges?"

A pastor of a large church was telling me of some of the unique challenges they face in regards to premarital counseling..... you have a couple who has been living together for 1 year..... they decide to attend church..... and soon, decide to get married..... and during the premarital counseling, the man becomes a Christian, and the woman does not.....and, now the counselor has the difficult task of letting the man know that he should not marry the woman he has loved for the past year because she is not a Christian believer and if they did get married, he would be violating the command to not be yoked to an unbeliever.....

So, does he reject his faith, and marry the unsaved girl who he has been with for the past year? Or does he obey the God who saved him, and follow His commands, even if it hurts?

Or, maybe someone has lied for years on their income tax and becomes a believing Christian, and comes to the place where he knows he owes the government several thousand dollars.....or someone who lied on a resume in order to get a job..... and he turns from His son

and trust Christ to save him..... would you advise him to go to his boss and tell him, that he was hired under a false pretense?

You see, new life in Christ brings new challenges..... It should create an honesty, truthfulness, purity, and a desire to obey Christ..... I am certain that most people who knew the story of Onesimus would have told him he was a fool to go back.....

which reminds me of the words of Jim Elliot

It was Jim Elliot who was killed by the Aucua Indians when he and his companions attempted to bring the gospel to them..... he is the one who said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Jim in His desire to serve the Lord Jesus, gave up, his life which he cannot keep in order to gain eternal life which he cannot lose.....

Onesimus was willing to give up his freedom here on earth.....he had already gained an inheritance in heaven which he will never lose...

The Gospel is not presented this way as often as it should be.....there is a cost in following Christ..... there is a cost in obeying Christ.....You are not saved by your works.... You are not saved by self denial.....But the call to come to Christ requires you to lose everything, deny yourself, turn from your sin and follow Him.....

Luther captures this in A Mighty Fortress is our God, when he wrote, "Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also, the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still..... His kingdom is forever."

Genuine salvation produces a love for God that moves us to obedience, even when it hurts, even when we may suffer.....

our hope, our trust, our confidence, is in the God who sees, who knows..... and even if we face great difficulty for doing what is right, here on earth..... we are promised that we will never be separated from the love of our great Savior.....We are to live our lives believing in Christ and Christ alone, for now and for all eternity.....

Now, may the God who has saved you, who knows you, who comes to your aid, who has promised to bring you where He is..... May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ continue to purify you, strengthen you, and bring you to the place where you can declare, "No power of hell, nor scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand, til he returns and calls me home, here in the power of Christ I stand."