

GCC Daily Devotions

April 24 – Philemon 1

From what we can gather through reading this very short Epistle is that Onesimus was at one point the slave of Philemon, but after a series of undisclosed events, was separated from his master, became a believer, and faithfully was aiding Paul in his ministry. Paul's purpose in writing the letter is to appeal to Philemon, a believer and younger brother in the faith (to Paul), to take back Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. This passage is not meant to deal primarily on the evils of slavery, as that was a battle the church would not fight until the 18th century.

While reading this passage, I couldn't help but to wonder why doesn't Paul just keep Onesimus around to aid him in his ministry? Verse 11 "*Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.*" and verse 13 "*I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping while I am in chains for the gospel.*" seem to indicate that Paul like having Onesimus around. Then I read verse 14 "*But I did not want to do anything without your consent...*" Paul is humbling himself and appealing to Philemon in order to keep the *unity* and *fellowship* with him.

The beauty of this Book comes from the humility and tact Paul shows to Philemon. Paul could easily have pushed around his Spiritual influence or cashed in a favor (see verse 19), but he took the humble approach so that Philemon would not be left with bitter feelings. Onesimus also displays faith and a willingness to do the right thing. There are no guarantees that Philemon will accept the former slave as a brother. Onesimus faced the very real threat of jail or death, but he went back.

Jesus tells us to "love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35) Jesus prayed for believers to be one just as He and the Father are one (John 17:21). Paul continues Jesus' passionate prayer and sentiment. How about you? Are there any brothers/sisters you need to forgive/seek forgiveness from? Is there someone you are having a hard time loving? Just one last thought; Mark is writing this letter with Paul; the same Mark who deserted Paul earlier in he and Barnabas' ministry is now helping Paul in his current ministry. Paul is not asking Philemon to do anything he hasn't already done before. Just as Jesus isn't asking us to forgive and love before He first showed us how to.