

May 23, 2022

Day 1: Philemon vs:10-11

I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

Paul has a personal relationship with Onesimus, who is a runaway slave. In a sense Onesimus became a slave for Paul, taking care of him while he was in prison. However, Paul insisted on treating him like a son. The obligation of a son to a father may be like a slave to a master but the reason for caring is different. A slave must obey. A son obeys out of love. Now that Onesimus knows Christ he can really be useful to Philemon because he will obey out of love.

Question: Why do you obey laws and rules?

Challenge: Think of all the people you have to obey. How many of those do you obey out of love?

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-20

Day 2: Philemon vs: 12

I am sending him--who is my very heart--back to you.

Paul demonstrates his belief that the community must deal with each other out of love by sending back Onesimus. This is not a simple act for Paul, but a very painful one. Paul says that he is sending his very heart. In today's terms we would say "Paul, what would you give up for your beliefs?" He would respond, "part of myself."

Question: If love is the basis for Christian living, how can you act that out in your church community?

Challenge: What beliefs are you willing to give up your heart for?

Scripture: Romans 5:1-25

Day 3: Philemon vs: 13

I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.

Paul wants to keep Onesimus, not to take care of his personal needs but to help in the ministry. Paul tells Philemon that his slave is now doing the same work that Philemon did. The slave is doing the masters work.

Question: What kind of help do you need to do your ministry?

Challenge: Have you ever had any negative things happen to you because of your Christian faith?

Scripture: Isaiah 53:1-12

Day 4: Philemon vs: 14

But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.

Because of Paul's relationship to Philemon, Paul could have insisted that Philemon free Onesimus. Paul is using this situation to help Philemon examine the extent of his gratitude to God for his freedom in Christ. The question for Philemon and all other Christian slaveholders is, how can you keep someone else when Christ has set you free?

Question: If Philemon would not accept his slave back, do you think Paul should insist that he do so?

Challenge: Make a list of the things you do in a day. How many do you enjoy and why?

Scripture: II Corinthians 6:9-15

Day 5: Philemon vs: 15

Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good

The reasons for Onesimus running away are not known. Perhaps he was trusted and given a lot of freedom. He took advantage of the situation and ran away. Paul believes that this was God's work so that Onesimus would find Christ and new life. His conversion must have been complete for he believes going back is a better witness than staying with Paul.

Question: What social customs or laws do you think Christians can break or should break?

Challenge: What is the best way for you to express your relationship with God?

Scripture: Psalm 90

Day 6: Philemon vs: 16

no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

There is a hint here that slave and master were close. However, their past relationship was built on an unequal power basis. As long as one is considered under the power of the other, closeness is not possible. In the Church we are all under the power of Christ, and brother and sister with each other. We have different skills but we are not better than one another. Philemon has learned that relationships must be built on love, humility not power, and pride.

Question: Who do you respect as a boss? Why?

Challenge: What do you think "servant leadership" means?

Scripture: Hebrews 2:1-18