

FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM

Philemon 1-25

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved
Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your
house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ. I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,
hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus
and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become
effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you
in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in your love,
because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.
Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what
is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a
one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ— I
appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my
chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to
you and to me. I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that
is, my own heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf
he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your
consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by
compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. For perhaps he departed for a
while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, 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.
If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. But
if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. I,
Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you
that you owe me even your own self besides. Yes, brother, let me have
joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. Having
confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will
do even more than I say. But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room
for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to
you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do
Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. The grace of our
Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

This is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to Philemon, and to his
house, which was used as a home church. Onesimus was a slave of
Philemon and had run away, and had possibly stolen from Philemon or
in some way or had caused financial harm to Philemon, maybe in just
the fact that he had run away, being property of Philemon, and had
left a job open that needed to be done. What we're going to be
addressing today in this message and in this Word that we have just
read is this: **"That you might receive him forever, no longer as a
slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother."** And in this message
comes several key things that we must all be able to receive and

operate in, to be able and willing be forgiven, to forgive others, and to share the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"That you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother."

To whom the Lord Jesus sets free, he is free indeed (John 8:36).

"Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." (Galatians 4:7) "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." (Ephesians 2:19). If you are in Christ Jesus, you are redeemed. If you are in Christ Jesus you are reconciled with God Almighty. If you are in Christ Jesus, you HAVE been set free and you are therefore a child of God, and you will be profitable to God and to the children of God! You are free indeed! Onesimus was ready and willing and looking to be forgiven, not only by God but by his fellow man, for it is shown in his actions.

Consequently, if you are set free in Christ Jesus, Paul says that you are no longer your own, "that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

Jesus, our Lord and Savior said, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 6:38) He also said, "And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges." Jesus Himself, the Son of God, One who is of God, who is a member of the Godhead of the God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, of whom all things consist, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, that is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, that is not three Gods but one God over all who is comprised of three persons—that Jesus, the Son of God, surrendered His will to do the will of the Father in heaven. Therefore if our Lord and Savior who is of God surrendered His will for the will of the Father, how much also must we who are called to abide in Him, to be one in Him (that is One in the Father and the Son, AND the Holy Spirit). When we are called unto Himself, to be one in Him, when He saves us, sets us free from the bondage of corruption unto the glorious liberty of the children of God.

That is where we find Onesimus in this letter, from the Apostle Paul to Philemon and the house of Philemon. This is also a letter of the testimony of Onesimus of being once in the bondage of sin and being set free in Christ. And as Paul said, **"that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother!"** He is no longer a slave in sin, he has been set free in Christ, he is a new creation, he is a child of God, a joint heir with Jesus, he was once lost but now is found. Glory to God, he is free indeed! This story, this message is not about the evils of slavery

with mankind. Slavery IS EVIL! No one is called or purposed by God to be enslaved by another human being nor of any evil spirits. God purposed us to live and walk in the fullness of the life. Just as Jesus said about divorce, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." The same can be said about slavery. Because of sin, the hardness of men's hearts, slavery became a thing. We are all called into that glorious liberty of the children of God. Onesimus himself repented of HIS sins so that he could walk in that liberty.

But what if Onesimus continued to act in sin and rebellion. What if he continued to drink, do drugs, chase after the lusts of his flesh (you can think up any number of sins that one can practice and partake in)? What if he continued to live according to the flesh and not the Spirit of Christ? Paul said in Romans 8:13, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." But what also did he say? "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Just as Onesimus became useful and an encouragement to Paul, he was then willing to be sent on to Philemon to be a blessing and an encouragement to him and his family. He was walking in the newness of life that Paul mentioned in Romans 6:4, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." He WAS a new creation. Paul recognized it and was letting the house of Philemon know, 'get ready guys, I'm sending you Onesimus, and be ready to be blessed as I have that he is a child of God, washed in the blood of the lamb. Onesimus was ready to be a new creation, fit for good works just as Paul said in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

You want to find your place in this world? Just as with Onesimus, we are not destined and called to be slaves of this world. As Paul said in Romans 6:16-18, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." Slaves to righteousness sounds like a bad thing based on the wording. How incredibly wrong that is! Paul was only speaking in those terms so that his readers would grasp what he was saying. He had to speak to them in a way that their carnal minds could comprehend. As he said in verse 19, "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. Being a slave to righteousness is not a burden unless

you continue to want to sin against God. If you do want to be set free from the bondage of sin, to walk in the glorious liberty of the children of God, to be free indeed, then WALK IN IT. Jesus died on the cross for our sins so that we can be set free from sin. Jesus took our sin upon us on Calvary. He shed His blood for the remission of, or the taking away of our sins. He died on that cross so that death would be conquered so that we can have eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Paul instructed Philemon to recognize him, no longer as a slave but as a child of God. How so do we recognize those around us who have been enslaved in sin, just as we also had been a slave to sin. When Jesus sets them free they become profitable then not only to God but also to us. Just as Onesimus was set free from sin (and also from slavery of man), it is a message to us to recognize the forgiveness of God goes for all of us, for His Word says that, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) We must recognize that if one IS walking in the newness of life, that we must forgive our new brothers and sisters in Christ. We must allow them to be blessed and to be a blessing to the body of Christ. We must also realize that as if "one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26) Paul also said, that as WE are the body of Christ, "If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

Paul was obviously not saying that we are literally feet and hands, eyes, and toes of the body of Christ. He was saying that each part of the body of Christ plays an important role for the kingdom of God. Each part of the body of Christ is blessed by God, by the grace of God, to do good works, to be a blessing to others, and to give glory to God. This message is to each of us to continue to walk in that newness of life, or as Peter put it when speaking to the people of Israel, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Times of refreshing to not only you but to all those around you. If one part of the body of Christ continues to operate in sin, does not the body of Christ suffer for it? Does not the people around that person suffer for it? We MUST ALL realize that our actions as children of God does make a difference in the body of

Christ and for the kingdom of God. So, once again, this message is to encourage us all continue to be led by His Spirit to do the will of God. We therefore should always be looking to be in the right place to be forgiven and also to forgive. Each role requires action. Just like our faith, it must be put into action. With being forgiven we must walk in that forgiveness, forsaking the sin of our past and continue to walk in the newness of life and with forgiving others, it also requires action and effort on our part. But realize this. As it says in Proverbs 18:19, "A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle." YOU may have repented and gotten right with God but be ready for when others aren't quite ready to believe or accept that. I've heard time and time again in, working with guys in prison, to where they had completely burned down that bridge of trust with their family members and even their friends. By the sixth or seventh time, they will only give them a "ya, ya, sure, your a new man, ya sure you won't go back to drugs or drinking." You may know that you ARE INDEED forgiven by God and walking in the newness of life in Christ Jesus, but unfortunately you may just have to prove it to others by day in and day out, day after day show that by walking in that victory. It's like the alcoholic father that finally decides to sober up and then take the role as the man in the house after the wife had been operating in that role for him for years and the children have learned how to operate in that situation. It is going to take time and trusting in God to bring about that restoration and reconciliation in that man's relationships within his family. So, it may be for us. We can't just expect other people to believe that we are suddenly saved and are a new creation in Christ when we keep violating their trust by falling back into our old ways of practicing the sin that brought about the damage in the first place. The persons that need to forgive will have to go through a process just like the forgiven of the Father God. They have to go to the Lord also and receive healing and forgiveness from Him to be able to forgive the one who harmed them. It's a process, and as humans, with us it just takes time. Ultimately though who should we be getting affirmation from? Our Father right? He alone makes us right and sets us on firm ground and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

This message then to encourage one another toward that liberty that we find in Christ Jesus by the grace of God, to continue to be blessed by God so that we can be a blessing, and to forgive one another and to pray for one another that we CAN be healed. For as the Word says, "The effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man avails much." We are all righteous who have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus, who have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Let us continue to walk in the light and life of Jesus and be always willing and ready to share the love and gospel of Jesus Christ. For as Paul was ready, even in prison to welcome Onesimus, to share the

gospel of Jesus with him, and to help him to be restored to the household of Philemon, let us be ready to share that same love and forgiveness so that we all can rejoice in the glorious liberty of being children of God, to operate more fully as the body of Christ, and that we may joyfully receive one another into His kingdom, which is forever, and to regard one another as beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Forsake sin and follow Christ. That is what we must do. Love and forgive, that is also what we must do. Sharing the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is our primary objective as children of God. One day, we will all be made perfect in Him, and we will reign with Him for all of eternity. That day is coming. Keep the faith and continue to love one another.

This time that we are bound on this earth is but for a short time. So while we are still here on this earth, just as Paul said of Onesimus that Philemon should "receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother," God also says that of those who have been born-again, born of the Spirit of Christ, who are then in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but in the Spirit, who are a new creation in Christ Jesus, that as He has received them forever so must we too receive one another into the body of Christ. So the conclusion of the matter is this. Let us honor God and let us love and forgive one another and let us walk in the fullness of what He has called us to and to let go of those sins that so easily entangles us but be led by His Spirit in His righteousness and good works. Then one day He will hopefully say to each of us, well done my good and faithful servant. Amen.