

Philemon

Paul wrote this letter to Philemon from Rome about AD60 when he was under house arrest, [Acts 28:30-31].

Onesimus was a slave who belonged to Philemon, a wealthy man and a member of the Church in Colosse.

Onesimus had run away from Philemon and made his way to Rome where he had met Paul, who apparently led him to Jesus Christ, [Philemon 1:10]. Paul convinced Onesimus that running away from his problems would not solve them and persuaded Onesimus to return to his master.

Paul wrote this letter to Philemon to ask him to be reconciled to his runaway slave.

Philemon 4:14 [New King James] *“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.”*

Paul reflected on Philemon’s faith and love, because Paul was an elder and apostle he could have used his authority commanding him to deal kindly with his runaway slave, for a master had a legal right to kill any runaway slave.

Onesimus was now a brother in the Church, not a mere possession.

Paul asked Philemon to go beyond forgiveness and to accept Onesimus as a brother.

As Christians we should forgive as we are forgiven, [Matthew 6:12; Ephesians 4:31-32].

Paul genuinely loved Onesimus and showed that love by personally guaranteeing payment for any stolen goods or wrongs that Onesimus might be responsible for.

Paul’s investment in the life of Onesimus, a new believer, is an example for all Christians, we can invest in the lives of others, helping them with Bible study, prayer, encouragement, support and friendship.

This small epistle is a masterpiece of grace and tact, together with a profound demonstration of the power of Jesus Christ and of true Christian fellowship in action.

We need to ask the question, what barriers are in our home, neighbourhood and church fellowship, that separates us from fellow believers? Race? Status? Wealth? Education? Personality?

As with Philemon, the Creator God calls you to seek unity, break down those walls and embrace your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Hebrews 12:14-15 [New King James] *“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;”*

Is this our goal in life?

Romans 12:10-18 [New King James] *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”*

Each of us should consider it to be our personal responsibility to foster peace and reconciliation among all people.