**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***O n e s i m u s***

**January 8th, In the Year of Our Lord 2023**

**Pastor Matthew Diehl**

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

Read and/or print sermon notes from our website – roundtopchurch.org

The one-page book (letter) in your Bibles titled Philemon concerns the Apostle Paul corresponding about the slave Onesimus to his master that the New Testament Book is so named (Philemon).

What does the name Onesimus mean?

**Strong’s 3682 Ὀνήσιμος** *Onesimos*

**Meaning:** 'useful,' *Onesimus,* a Chr.

**Origin:** from **ονησις** *onesis (use, profit, advantage)*

**Usage:** Onesimus(2).

Paul also notes Onesimus in his letter to the Believers in Colossae.

**Colossians 4:7-9**

7 As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information.

8 For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts;

9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

It is good to bring clarification about slavery in the New Testament. For the most part, the title “slave” refers to a person who has sold themselves into an indentured servitude. A person owes a debt of some kind and willingly works off the debt over a period of time. The classic example is Jacob agrees to serve Laban for the right to marry his daughter. Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel" (Genesis. 29:18).

There were other forms of slavery such as prisoners of war. However, the “chattel” slavery Western Governments imposed on Africans and others was not the form of slavery Onesimus was under.

Obviously, there was some form of debt tied to Onesimus’ slave status. We see this reference in Paul’s words, “if he . . . owes you anything”.

18 But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; (Philemon 1:18)

Read Paul Copan’s book Is God a Moral Monster? for an in-depth study of slavery.

**Historical Background**

Historians note that Paul writes his letter and dispatches them by private carrier, namely those who have ministered with him in Rome. Remember, Paul writes four New Testament letters, of which we know, from his house arrest in Rome, about 61-62 A.D. One of the benefits of the Roman government, as oppressive as it was, was that a person could have confidence in walking the Roman roads to travel and carry correspondence. Historians call this era “Pax Romana”, so named for about a 200-year period (27 B.C. – 180 A.D). This timeframe is viewed as the golden age of the Roman Empire. During this sustained government of Roman imperialism, there was a relative order and peace affording people to travel in great confidence that their safety was assured by the overwhelming presence of the Roman army. It was the Roman army who built the roads which paved the way for the army to move about the Empire. It is estimated the Roman army built about 50,000 miles of road during the Roman era.

In America, it was President D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) who conceived the Interstate Highway System. He foresaw a need to evacuate cities if America came under atomic bomb attack. And the need to move the military quickly around the country. Therefore, like Rome, America’s defense and military use was the main reason for superior roads.

Since we will be reading the New Testament letter called Philemon. . . what does the word Philemon mean?

Philemon: Strong’s 5371 Φιλήμων Philemon Meaning: 'kindly,'

We need to note that Philemon is the person whose house the Church in Colossae met (verse 2).

**Philemon**

**1** Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker,

**2** and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier,

and to the church in **your** house:

We cannot miss the fact that Paul considers himself a prisoner of Christ Jesus. This means that he does not have a will of his own but is directed by the Lord. We see this all-encompassing management of Paul by God took place at his conversion chronicled in Acts 9:15.

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Even though this letter is primarily addressed to Philemon, Paul includes others in his audience. There is Apphia, Archippus and then all within the church (Ekklesia). This public audience is of great importance to observe because Paul is going to detail his request to Philemon regarding Onesimus in front of all the church in Colossae.

I see the introductory words of Grace/Peace that Paul uses in his letters contained within the New Testament are the basis of his commissioning and authority. The Lord was gracious to Paul who had persecuting members of the Way. But God reached-out and called to Paul, like He does all of us, and extended His grace that changed our lives and brought peace between us and Him. . . and us and our neighbor. The message is that God extends His grace and peace to you, therefore, what are you doing to be an instrument of that same grace and peace?

**3** Grace to you and peace

from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 4-5, we see that Paul identifies with the church in Colossae in prayer and lets them know he hears of their love and faith not only to God but to all Believers. This is important because Onesimus, the slave, has become a Believer in the presence of Paul.

**4** I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,

**5** because I hear of your love and of the faith

which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;

In verse 6, Paul continues to pour on the accolades of his prayers which petition God to grow the Believers at Colossae to become more effective because they grow in the knowledge of what? They grow in the knowledge of every good thing for the sake of Christ. Wow, we can see how this powerful accountability to/from God’s grace, peace and knowledge must impact Paul’s request regarding Onesimus, the Believer.

**6** and I pray that the fellowship of your faith

may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing

which is in you for Christ's sake.

In verse 7, Paul continues to lead to his request by evoking the human needs of joy, comfort and love and noting that the church in Colossae has refreshed Believers and identifies with them as brothers.

**7** For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love,

because the hearts of the saints

have been refreshed through you, brother.

In verses 8-9, “as such the persons”, Paul the Apostle of Christ, who has committed his life both physically and spiritually to God, who considers his own life to be a prisoner of the Lord, rests his upcoming request upon “love” and not an “order”. So, within love, Paul expresses his request, his appeal through Christ.

**8** Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ

to order you to do what is proper,

**9** yet for love's sake

I rather appeal to you—

since I am such a person as Paul,

the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

**The Love Appeal**

Finally, in verses 10-18, Paul makes his cause fully known to not only Philemon but the whole congregation. The prisoner Paul makes a love appeal.

In verse 10-11, Paul makes it clear that before Onesimus came to him, he was not a Believer and could not be of service to anyone in the Church. The English word used here is “begotten” (Greek gennao: means to bring forth as in bearing in birth children).

10 I appeal to you for my child **Onesimus,**

whom I have **begotten** in my imprisonment,

11 who formerly was useless to you,

but now is useful both to you and to me.

In Paul’s direct appeal, he presents the value of Onesimus as a person who ministered to him in his imprisonment for the sake of the Gospel and was so valuable to him that he considered retaining him in Rome. However, Paul wants Philemon to release Onesimus by his own free will.

**12** I have sent him back to you in person,

that is, sending my very heart,

**13** whom I wished to keep with me,

so that on your behalf he might minister to me

in my imprisonment for the gospel;

**14** but without your consent

I did not want to do anything,

so that your goodness would not be, in effect,

by compulsion but of your own free will.

In verses 15-17, Paul presents Onesimus back to Philemon as a more valuable person because of his humility to God and Believer standing. Therefore, Paul appeals to Philemon to change the status of Onesimus to be accepted as a brother in Christ and regard him as a partner as he would Paul.

**15** For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while,

that you would have him back forever,

**16** 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.

**17** If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.

**18** But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything,

charge that to my account;

Paul makes his letter even more personal by declaring he is writing Onesimus’ appeal in his own handwriting. And then Paul thanks Philemon in advance saying that he knows he will more than comply.

**19** I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand,

I will repay it

(not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).

**20** Yes, brother,

let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

**21** Having confidence in your obedience,

I write to you,

since I know that you will do even more than what I say.

In closing, Paul anticipates his release from his Roman imprisonment. Remember, Paul was waiting on his trial in front of Caesar. Historians believe there were not any witnesses from Jerusalem that appeared in Rome to testify against him. Therefore, he was released. Evidently, Paul anticipated his release to be shortly after he writes to Philemon.

22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging,

for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

In verses 23-24, we see that Paul is keeping good company in Rome. Paul names a number of people. Most people recognize the names of Mark and Luke. This gives historians great confidence in the accuracy of the New Testament letters that bear their names. Mark and Luke spent time with Paul in Rome and learned from him about Jesus Christ. It was Luke that wrote the letters we call Luke and Acts. And in the book of Acts, Luke chronicles the life of Paul that ends with his Roman imprisonment being recorded.

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

**AMEN**