

**Wednesday March 8th  
Prayer Breakfast for  
Legislators and Staff  
7:30 -8:30 AM  
Legislators Cafeteria**

Capitol Commission Bible Studies are non-partisan, non-denominational. They meet weekly.

- Legislator Only Bible studies, Tuesdays. 7:30 AM LOB  
414 Capital Contact: Kathy Voss, [Sandersonla@ncleg.net](mailto:Sandersonla@ncleg.net)

Capitol Community Small Group Bible Studies

- Women - Mondays, NOON, LOB 409  
Jean Yost small group facilitator;  
Capital Contact: Laura Sullivan [McNeillla@ncleg.net](mailto:McNeillla@ncleg.net)

- Men, NOON, LB Chapel; Brad Harbaugh facilitator  
Capital Contact: Laura Sullivan [McNeillla@ncleg.net](mailto:McNeillla@ncleg.net)

I pray that these Bible studies will be edifying to you. My sole intent is to serve you, and to be a resource to you for pastoral care, counsel, and prayer. Please accept my study in the Word of God, as evidence of my desire to serve you.

– Rev. Brad Harbaugh, North Carolina State Minister

### Philemon

Introduction:

Onesimus, a runaway slave from Colosse, came to Rome, a city of a million people. Although hundreds of miles away, in Rome Onesimus came across a familiar face. The text does not reveal but in some way Onesimus made a visit to the Apostle Paul who was under house arrest in Rome. Now Onesimus, is returning back to his slave master Philemon with this letter in hand. It is a 211 hour walk that faces his fear. *What or who is giving him the power to do this?* Let's find out.



Here is the letter Onesimus carried. Perhaps you can find some clues in it to help you understand the power of faith over fear! Philemon is the slave master to whom the letter is primarily addressed.

*Philemon 1–25 (ESV) <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker <sup>2</sup> and Apphia our sister*

*and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, <sup>6</sup> and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. <sup>7</sup> For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you. <sup>8</sup> Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, <sup>9</sup> yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— <sup>10</sup> I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. <sup>11</sup> (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) <sup>12</sup> I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. <sup>13</sup> I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, <sup>14</sup> but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. <sup>15</sup> For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, <sup>16</sup> no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. <sup>17</sup> So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. <sup>18</sup> If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. <sup>20</sup> Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>21</sup> Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. <sup>22</sup> At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you. <sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, <sup>24</sup> and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. <sup>25</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

### How did Onesimus face his fears?

#### 1. Something Greater described Onesimus's life.

In verse 10, Paul speaks of Onesimus becoming his child during his imprisonment. Since this house arrest is two years, (referenced in Acts 27), this is speaking of something other than physical birth. Verses 15 and 16 give clues to what happened. Note: “forever,” “brother,” “in the Lord;” these terms point to an encounter that changed who Onesimus was. Note: verse 16 “no longer as a bondservant, but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother...”. Onesimus' life was characterized by the fact that he was a slave. Now, something more characterized his life. What was that?

#### 2. Someone Greater was guiding his steps.

Verse 18 gives a clue to how Onesimus fled from Philemon. Onesimus thought he could run away from his life situation and be free. A runaway slave in that day faced very serious legal action. God used the frustration of being a slave, the hope to be free and the fear of Roman law in Onesimus' life. God had also placed Paul in Onesimus' life years before in the house of Philemon, the slave master Onesimus served. Now, God brought Onesimus across Paul once again in Rome. How? We are not told. But it is possible that Mark, Aristarchus, Demas or Luke (Philemon 24) could have come across Onesimus in the Roman

marketplace and spoke of Paul in conversation. What we do know is that God orchestrated the connection and through it Paul shared the most important characteristic of God with Onesimus. God loved him and desired to have a relationship with him. God had created Onesimus to be relational, rational, and responsible like every human being. Paul shared the same message of reconciliation to Onesimus that he shared with Kings. *Jesus Christ was the Messiah, God has become a man to be our Savior. The love of God was demonstrated by the cross of Christ. "God is love, . . . there is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. . . (1 John 4:16b, 18a)." God's love overcomes fear. At the cross, God's love took every sin that was bringing the fear of God's judgment and settled the debt, paid in full.* Onesimus was a slave to physical labor and like all born in the world, a slave to sin spiritually. At Onesimus' moment of faith God set him free from being a slave to sin immediately, (Romans 6). Onesimus trusted the word of God. He put his trust in what Christ had done. At that moment Onesimus became a new creature in Christ. The terms; "brother," "in the Lord," and "forever" all describe his transformation. These further describe the change described in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come." Onesimus was family, a brother, a son. This change in Onesimus spiritually was a change in reality. God loved him so much that he led him to the place of repentance and salvation. The hard situations of life were nothing compared to what freedom he now had in Christ. Onesimus had now come to the place in his spiritual life where he knew for certain that he would spend eternity in heaven with God! *Have you?*

### 3. Somewhere Greater was calling Onesimus

Onesimus, from the very moment of his salvation, realized that being born again was the beginning of a great adventure in Christ. His life had purpose. His life circumstance had not yet changed but he had a new, loving master in the world to serve. He realized that "all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose, (Rom. 8:28)." God used his past to bring him this far and would use his past for the plan ahead. As Onesimus was taught by Paul, he willingly served Paul in his need. Paul would later write to the church in Ephesus, "You are His workmanship **created in Christ Jesus to do good works which He purposed beforehand for you to do, (2:10).**" Paul helped Onesimus see the great calling to his life, God's purpose. A purpose that rose above all the fears of his past, or his life situation. God had a plan for Onesimus life. Just as the Lord God led Onesimus to the point of his salvation, God was going to lead him forward to the somewhere greater purpose ahead. This was the call to Onesimus! It was a call to walk each day with Jesus by faith! This reality, his being a child of God, and his being called to a specific purpose gave Onesimus the power to go back to Philemon. This summarizes the power Onesimus had to face his fears - God loved him purely and unconditionally and God was in charge. His faith had grown as he grew in his understanding of who he was and who God is, and God's plan. **Yours will too!**

Two clues tell us the rest of the story.

First, the letter of Philemon is in the Bible. How did it get there? It was written to Philemon. Philemon's response is never mentioned but the fact that the letter appears in Scripture speaks loudly that Paul's request was honored. Second, a historical document written by Eusebius of Caesaria, writes of Ignatius (35-108 AD) coming to Ephesus to visit a Bishop named Onesimus!

*5 So when he [Ignatius] came to Smyrna, where Polycarp was, he wrote an epistle to the church of Ephesus, in which he mentions Onesimus, its pastor; Onesimus did not walk alone from Rome to Colosse. He walked with Jesus who walked the long road from heaven to the cross for Onesimus! Perfect Love casts out all Fear!*

#### **Historical background:**

Slavery in ancient Rome differed from its modern forms in that it was not based on race.

But like modern slavery, it was an abusive and degrading institution. Cruelty was commonplace. Slavery had a long history in the ancient world and was practiced in Ancient Egypt and Greece, as well as Rome. Most slaves during the Roman Empire were foreigners and, unlike in modern times, Roman slavery was not based on race. Slaves in Rome might include prisoners of war, sailors captured and sold by pirates, or slaves bought outside Roman territory. In hard times, it was not uncommon for desperate Roman citizens to raise money by selling their children into slavery.<sup>2</sup> The slave population [of Rome] was at least equal to that of freedmen (non citizens), and has been estimated at anywhere from 25 to 40% of the population of the city as a whole. One such estimate suggests that the slave population in Rome circa 1 AD, may have been as much as 300,000 to 350,000 of the 900,000 total inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius of Caesaria. (1890). The Church History of Eusebius. In P. Schaff & H. Wace (Eds.), A. C. McGiffert (Trans.), *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine* (Vol. 1, pp. 167-168). New York: Christian Literature Company.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.romanempire.com/roman-slaves-freedmen.html> accessed 2/8/17

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.culture.com/roman-slavery.html> accessed 2/8/17

**CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES**

**TUESDAY (21<sup>ST</sup> OF FEBRUARY) @ 7:30AM - 8:00AM, LOB**

414

**MONDAY (20<sup>TH</sup> OF FEBRUARY) @ 12:00PM - 1:00PM**



I faced my fears in a 211 hour  
walk of faith! -Onesimus

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