

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

Capitol Community Small Group Bible Studies

- Women - Mondays, NOON, LB 2nd Floor
Jean Yost small group facilitator;
Capital Contact: Laura Sullivan McNeillla@ncleg.net

- Men, NOON, LB Chapel; Brad Harbaugh facilitator
Capital Contact: Laura Sullivan 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:

The past two weeks in our journey through Philemon we have looked at the Apostle Paul, who is the author, and last week Onesimus the runaway slave who carried this letter back to his slave owner Philemon. This week we will look at the work of God in the life of Philemon.

1. This Letter gives a Unique View

God the Spirit wrote the Bible through 40 human authors and in different styles of revelation. The Bible consists of history, poetry, prophecy, Gospels and the Epistles. The Epistles are a more personal and direct method of communication; some call them the love letters of Christ to us. There are two classifications of the Epistles, letters written to a church and personal letters. Philemon is a personal letter. It is an intimate conversation between brothers in Christ over a potentially disagreeing situation. It gives insight into how God was working in the lives of believers to transform them into his likeness. Like today, God is using the situations of life in the culture a person lives in, to work for good his perfecting work.

God begins a good work when a person puts their trust in Christ. Scripture presents that work of transformation in many passages in the New Testament but I will share two of them. “And I (Paul) am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). This faithful personal work of God in the life of His child, so much impressed the heart of Ruth Graham

Bell, that she asked her family to place the statement, “End of Construction, thanks for your patience”, on her tombstone. It also prompted Joel Hemphill to write the words of this chorus:

“He’s still working on me to make me what I ought to be.
It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars,
The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars.
How loving and patient He must be, He’s still working on me.”

The other passage, Romans 8:26-29 provides a big picture of God’s personal work in the lives of believers. Laying this lens over Philemon gives some great insight.

26 “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...”

Apply Romans 8:26,27 to God’s work in the life of Philemon.

- God brought Paul across Philemon’s path. Through Paul Philemon heard the good news of Christ.
- Philemon’s family also placed their trust in Christ. Apphia, his wife and Archippus, his son are mentioned in the greeting.
- Philemon opens his home to Paul and the church at Colosse meet there.
- According to the letter to the church at Colosse, there were many slaves in the church that came to know Christ, Colossians 3:22-24.
- Onesimus, which means profitable, seems to have become a detriment to Philemon, vs.11.

So let’s put ourselves in Philemon’s shoes. He was an affluent man who came to Christ. God transformed his life in the area of hospitality, giving and love for the saints. Onesimus becomes a problem to him. The indication from verse 11 is that he was useless to Philemon.

How do you think Philemon prayed? How do you think the Holy Spirit prayed for Philemon?

Here are some points to ponder:

1. The Spirit of God prayed for both slave and slave owner to come to know and be reconciled to God.
2. The Spirit of God prayed for slave Onesimus and slave owner Philemon to be put in a situation to meet face to face.
3. The Spirit of God prayed for Paul to engage both Philemon and Onesimus with the gospel.
4. The Spirit of God prayed for a situation that would require both Onesimus and Philemon to forgive each other and grow in their faith.
5. What would you add?

How might your prayers to God for the situations in your life or for addressing the needs of NC be different than the way the Spirit of God would pray?

Does this big picture help you and me with our everyday struggles and disagreements? How?

Here are few points of God's work in Philemon.

First, God loves despite imperfections.

This letter presents the life account of Onesimus, a runaway slave, and Philemon, a slave owner, who are both loved by God. After salvation, the Lord continues his work in their life despite their continuing growth in their faith and imperfections. God was doing His work of growing their faith.

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, Rom 5:8.”

Second, God's counsel leads beyond the cultural norm

This letter presents a God who solves class and racial division. There is one race- the human race. God leads people to see beyond the differences in their skin color and their status of life. Each person is a reflection of God's image. There is no racism at the foot of the cross. There is no slavery at the foot of the cross.

Slavery runs throughout history. The Bible presents the story of Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, 1900/1730 BC, (Gen 37-50). It points out the 400 years of Hebrew slavery in Egypt, 1845 – 1445 BC. The mindset of the First Century AD was that slavery was an accepted part of life. Slavery is ugly and wrong yet in that day it was culturally acceptable.

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. ¹ 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....estimated slave population

in Rome circa 1 AD, may have been as much as 300,000 to 350,000 of the 900,000 total inhabitants.² Man left to his own thinking throughout history classifies levels of human beings and moves into divisive groups. But the counsel of God works to resolve the issues of society. Paul, directed by the Spirit of God, did not write a political rant against slavery. God's wisdom approached a hardened world that could not see slavery as being wrong with a letter pointing out the value of both slave and slave owner as “beloved brothers in Christ”. How important is the wisdom and grace of God to resolving the greatest areas of division in our nation today?

Third, obedience to God's counsel changes your world

Reconciliation and restoration occur in this letter because both Onesimus and Philemon understood and obeyed the counsel of the Lord. Think about how easy it would have been to not obey. There were many great aspects of Philemon's walk with the Lord. He was giving, hospitable, loving to others, and wanted to honor Christ in his life, (Philemon 4,5). These were honorable attributes. This letter was calling him to grow in his faith. It called him to give grace and forgiveness. It called him to set aside his right as a Roman citizen to exact lawful punishment to his slave. It called him to see Onesimus as his brother. Paul stated he was confident he would do even more than he was asked, (Philemon 21). History bears out that there was a Bishop in Ephesus named Onesimus. Ignatius who lived AD 35-105 visited this Bishop and the timing of the visit can easily fit this same Onesimus.

God put his finger on something in Philemon's life that he probably did not pray for in his request for Onesimus. God the Spirit prayed for more!

Philemon's sensitivity to listen to and obey God allowed God's best work to occur. His small step of humble obedience changed his world! The ripple effect of this letter immediately would have changed Philemon's relationship to the slaves in the church at Colosse. It would change the Roman Empire and ripple through time. It rippled in the hearts of Orville Wilberforce and Abraham Lincoln.

May it ripple today! Our need is to hear wisdom from our Creator on the challenges before us and do more than hear.

Obey his counsel!

Let God do his best work first in you! Then watch Him change your world!

¹http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/slaves_freemen.html accessed 2/8/17

² <http://www.unrv.com/culture/roman-slavery.php> accessed 2/8/17

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to change nations. The ripple effect of God pointing out the value of each person

But more than that, think of the ripple affect of their obedience to God.

The immediate ripple of the church at Colosse, which heard this letter to Philemon read. Furthermore, they witnessed the forgiving response of Philemon to Onesimus.

They saw Philemon do more than Paul asked. I believe that more was th

Each person is a person for whom God loves so much that God sent His own son into this world to be the substitute for th Above Cultural Beloved? How can Paul call Philemon beloved?

Paul writes this letter to Philemon and addresses him as his beloved fellow worker, (vs.1). The word means dearly loved and cherished. It was spoken by God the Father to God the Son, Matthew 12:18. It is used when God says He loves you, (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Paul uses this same word beloved for Epaphras, Colossians 1:7; and of Onesimus,(vs 16). Now, you might struggle with this greeting to a slave owner. Especially, a slave owner who after placing his trust in Christ, and serving Christ allowing Paul to have the church at Colosse meet in his home, still be a slave owner. Philemon may even be deplorable to you. As much as slavery is deplorable, condemning Philemon for maintaining slaves after he came to know the Lord may be looking at the situation through the lens of our time rather than the historical context of 1st Century AD.

Can you think of culturally acceptable ugly and wrong things in our culture today? What makes them ugly and wrong?

Philemon 4-7 (ESV)

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ 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. ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Martin Luther said, “we are all Onesimus’s”, speaking to the need for every person to be redeemed, literally bought back from slavery, by God.

If in the sense of our need to be redeemed by the blood of Christ and made right with God we are all Onesimus’s then indeed we who are “declared righteous and reconciled to God are also all “Philemon’s”.

This letter to Philemon is part of that continued work of God in the life of Philemon, Onesimus, Paul, the church at Colosse and those that have studied Philemon.

This letter addresses a cultural blindspot in Philemon’s life and teaches him how to move forward. His slave was not his property in the eyes of God, in the eyes of God Onesimus was his forever brother. How did God work to get to both Onesimus and Philemon to see this truth?

The primary prayer of the Spirit of God in the life of Paul, Onesimus and Philemon was to work out their life situations for their good. Good is defined as becoming like Christ, (Rom 8:29). You could say God the creator wants human beings created in his image to be just like Him!

Observation: God often prays for the area of our life that we overlook.

Notice that there were many great aspects of Philemon’s walk with the Lord. He was giving, hospitable, loving to others, and wanted to honor Christ in his life, (Philemon 4,5). These were honorable attributes. Yet this letter was calling him to address an area he may never have wrestled with before.

Culture would not have pointed out what God pointed out.

God the Spirit wrote this letter through Paul and called Philemon to treat his runaway slave with grace and forgiveness.

Years later Ephesians 4:30-32 would be written “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit...Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger...be put away from you...Be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.”

Philemon had tasted the forgiveness of God through Christ and it was because of that forgiveness that Philemon realized he too must forgive Onesimus for whatever was stolen or damaged and for his breaking Roman law by running away. The letter called him to set aside his right as a Roman citizen to exact lawful punishment on his slave. It called him to see Onesimus as his brother. Paul stated he was confident he would do even more than he was asked, (Philemon 21). I believe that more was setting him free. History bears out that there was a pastor in Ephesus named Onesimus. Ignatius who lived AD 35-105 visited this pastor and the timing of the visit can easily fit this Onesimus.

How important to see that when the instruction of God is brought into life dilemmas it resolves, clarifies and sets us free!

Writer(s) Benji Cowart, and Michael Weaver have written these words to describe God’s marvelous work of redemption through Christ. "Redeemed"

Seems like all I could see was the struggle
Haunted by ghosts that lived in my past
Bound up in shackles of all my failures

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Wondering how long is this gonna last
Then You look at this prisoner and say to me "son
Stop fighting a fight it's already been won"

I am redeemed, You set me free
So I'll shake off these heavy chains
Wipe away every stain, now I'm not who I used to be
I am redeemed, I'm redeemed

All my life I have been called unworthy
Named by the voice of my shame and regret
But when I hear You whisper, "Child lift up your head"
I remember, oh God, You're not done with me yet

I am redeemed, You set me free
So I'll shake off these heavy chains
Wipe away every stain, now I'm not who I used to be

Because I don't have to be the old man inside of me
'Cause his day is long dead and gone
Because I've got a new name, a new life, I'm not the same
And a hope that will carry me home

I am redeemed, You set me free
So I'll shake off these heavy chains
Wipe away every stain, 'cause I'm not who I used to be(2x)

Oh, God, I'm not who I used to be
Jesus, I'm not who I used to be
'Cause I am redeemed
Thank God, redeemed

STOP

God was putting his finger on something in Philemon's life through this letter. Philemon reveals something important to you and me. He yielded to the Lord in the area God was pointing out. This could not have been easy. Put yourself in Philemon's shoes, what internal struggles might he have had?

Both were beloved by Paul and both beloved first by God. It is easy to look back throughout history and see blindspots of era's gone by, but today despite sensitivity to ugly acceptable practices of the past, there are continued ugly culturally accepted practices that do not live up to God's . What are some that previous cultural the era? What are cultural blindspots today?

because God continues his work of salvation beyond the point in time that a person the work of salvation beyond the moment of ork of transforming a person in to the image of Christ. Let's make some observations of growing in Christ from this letter to Philemon, a believer who has been a believer for many years.

First, there are blindspots in every believers life. Philemon was caught up in a societal norm. You could even say he was politically correct as a slave owner, but he was not where God wanted him to be. The Bible calls this ignorant sin. Peter writes; "...and do not be conformed to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance, (I Peter 1:14). God was using Onesimus salvation to work on one of Philemon's blindspots. This letter was a convicting work of God.

So God w We are unconditionally loved and the grace of God teaches us loved by God even before we come to know him personally. When we are born into the family of God, we are beloved, but have come to know Christ with baggage that the Lord through His sanctifying grace addresses. one of Philemon's blindspots. This letter was a convicting work of God.

How easy would it have been for Philemon to rationalize obeying God but doing less rather than the more?

The letter to Philemon may at first glance look weak in its approach because it does not give an outcry to end slavery. But do not miss the power and the wisdom in this letter. It

The Spirit of God is praying for you

addressed a culture blinded to the value of people. Blinded to the mind of Christ.

mindset blinded culture to the value of Paul, guided by the Spirit of God speaks the truth in love. Onesimus and Philemon are both beloved.

How did humanity get to this place?

There is an important point to be made. When people suppress the truth of God by their unrighteousness general point to be made. Humanity when it moves away from the heart instruction of God de-values people. The mental construct of the mind of man without acknowledgment of God and his wisdom does not lead to freedom, but rather when man listens to the heart instruction of our Creator and acknowledges Him and gives Him his rightful place, freedom returns to society.

This letter to Philemon is a powerful statement to the value of all people, both the slave and the slave owner. They are people for whom God the Son died and people created in the image of God.

The letter written to Philemon shows the wisdom of God to a slave owner living in an entire culture blinded to understand that people are not to be property.

God's approach to the thinking of that day does not stoop to an ineffective rant against slavery. It goes beyond being critical of acceptable sinful lifestyle. It lifts the reader to see grace. The grace of treating people the way God has treated every person in the world, better than we deserve. It beckons Philemon to see beyond cultural blindness and to see the mind of Christ. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit love people, all people. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life, John 3:16."

The work of this letter is the work of God moving in the heart of a believer to conform to the image of Christ. This is the work mentioned in the oft mis-quoted Romans 8:28

The grace of God to people has been from the beginning. God could have destroyed the world after Adam and Eve sinned, (Gen 3). But God chose instead to provide hope through a coming Messiah, (Gen 3:15) He could have destroyed the world and everything in it at the time of Noah, but instead provided a way for people to be saved from the world flood. Noah built the ark for 100 years. The door was open for 100 years. Noah and his family were on the Ark and were spared from the wrath of God. The Rainbow in the sky depicts the wonderful promise of God that He will never destroy the world through a worldwide flood again. It points out the way of salvation. It is a bow arched pointing back up to God. As if, God is saying, I am not going to shoot the arrow of judgment upon the earth again, instead I am going to take the arrow of judgment myself. God the Son would be born into this world to be the "Lamb of God" that would take the wrath of God meant for the world. Here are a few prophecies. A savior would come who was from ancient times, (Micah 5:2), born of a virgin, (Isaiah 7), one who was God and was with God who created all things, (John 1:1-3).

Jesus, in 29/30 AD stood in his hometown of Nazareth and read a prophetic passage from Isaiah 61. The passage He turned to in Isaiah pointed out Messiah's full work, but Jesus stopped in the middle of text and rolled up the scroll. This was not a normal thing to do. Normally a text was read in totality. Jesus was making a point in his hometown synagogue. He said, today this text is fulfilled in your hearing!

This declaration was that Messiah had come and had fulfilled the first of the Messianic prophecies. This is what the text said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, (Luke 4:18-19)."

The point is that Jesus Christ was this Messiah. The words of Christ to the shocked synagogue crowd further exemplified clearly Jesus point. He spoke to their blindness, saying things that only God would have known about in Elijah and Elisha's day, which was a thousand years before.

Who were the blind? Who were the prisoners? Who were the poor? Who were the oppressed? In context it was the nation of Israel who rejected Jesus Christ, their Messiah. In application it is everyone born into this world. Born poor in spirit, unable to set themselves free from bondage to sin, oppressed by the false shepherds and saviors of this world. Paul has shared that message of Christ to Onesimus and Philemon. It is important to see that when each of these men received Christ that their circumstance in life did not immediately change. The gospel was not a change in circumstance. There was not a freedom of the slave or a change in the slave owner regarding slavery. But the power of the gospel that transformed their hearts, changed them as they matured in Christ. The gospel that transformed Philemon and Onesimus is the same gospel that brought about bold change both in England and the United States regarding slavery. Orville Wilberforce and Abraham Lincoln both based their arguments against slavery on God's Word. They pointed to the Creator who created all men point to the Bible and the message of God creating all people in his image

It is the message of reconciliation to God. It is a message that transforms a person from the inside out. Paul's letter to Philemon elevates the transforming power of the gospel above all other efforts. honors the power of the gospel.

spiritually, a prisoner of sin, These were the people of Israel? Jesus in his sermon on the mount made it clear, it was every person in this world. The poor are the poor in spirit. The prisoners pointed out that the Beatitudes see are every person born into this world. There is no one the people of this world who cannot see or seek after God. People who are spiritually poor, , for who He is a

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Philemon is a representation of the work that God begins in every new believer. A work of transforming a person in to the image of Christ. Let's make some observations of growing in Christ from this letter to Philemon, a believer who has been a believer for many years.

First, there are blindspots in every believers life. Philemon was caught up in a societal norm. You could even say he was politically correct as a slave owner, but he was not where God wanted him to be. The Bible calls this ignorant sin. Peter writes; "...and do not be conformed to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance, (I Peter 1:14). God was using Onesimus salvation to work on one of Philemon's blindspots. This letter was a convicting work of God.

God begins a good work when a person puts their trust in Christ. He continues that work of transformation till the believer goes home to be with his Lord, (Philippians 1:6). This fact was so impressed upon the heart of Ruth Graham Bell, that she asked her family to place the statement, "End of Construction, thanks for your patience", on her tombstone.

Second, notice that God calls each believer to grow in Christ. Sometimes change, in an area of needed change, is battled because you have great obedience to the Lord in many other areas of your life. How easy is it to rationalize holding on to sin in one area because you are obedient to the Lord in many other?

Paul approached the subject of slavery The letter in the Bible also declares that Philemon was obedient to Paul's approach in th

You see despite the many good attributes of Philemon's walk with Christ, there was an area that needed to change. How true that is in every believer's life. How easy it is to reject the convicting work of God in our life by rationalizing all the great aspects of our life with the area of needed change.

Philemon 1–25 (ESV) ¹ Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ² and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I bear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ 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. ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you. ⁸ Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹ yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order

that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵ For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. ²² 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. ²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵ 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...(I 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;*³ 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!

³ 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.

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. ⁴ 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.⁵

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES
TUESDAY (28TH OF FEBRUARY) @ 7:30AM – 8:00AM, LOB 414
MONDAY (27TH OF FEBRUARY) @ 12:00PM – 1:00PM, LB 2ND FLR
MONDAY (20TH OF FEBRUARY) @ 12:45PM (Accessed 2/8/17)
<http://www.unrv.com/culture/roman-slavery.php> accessed 2/8/17



Allowing God to do His Best Work – Philemon

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MONDAY (20TH OF FEBRUARY) @ 12 NOON – 12:45PM, CHAPEL