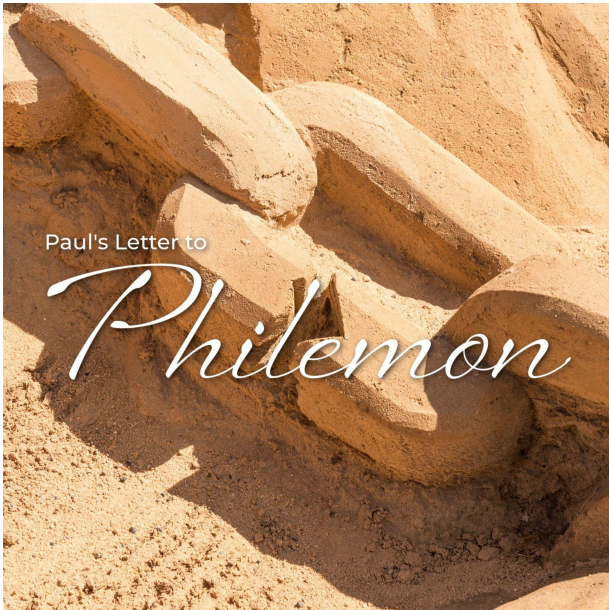


PHILEMON

November 13, 2022

Preaching: Michael Swartzentruber, Senior Minister



Philemon

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

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to 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.

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and

encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way,

South Elkhorn Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

4343 Harrodsburg Road, Lexington KY 40513

859-223-1433 southelkhorncc.org

or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow-workers.

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

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase or image stands out to you?
2. Paul provides every reason to reject the institution of slavery, especially as he exhorts Philemon to receive Onesimus “no longer as a slave... but as a beloved brother.” Still, Paul does not directly condemn the institution of slavery. Why might that be?
3. How have you experienced challenges or uncertainty about how best to resist injustice? What have you learned or how have you grown in your Christian witness for justice?
4. Some 1800 years after this letter was penned by Paul, it was used by Christian ministers and slave-holders to justify slavery as a practice sanctioned by the bible (especially paired with Colossians 3:22). But there are other parts of scripture where Paul, Jesus and the witness of scripture give voice to freedom and reasons to reject oppression (see Galatians 3:28, Luke 4:18, and the Exodus story of the Israelites in Egypt). Indeed, some abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, saw any defence of slavery using the bible as a sinful distortion of the gospel.

How do you sort through tensions like this in scripture? What words of scripture, stories of Jesus, or theological ideas are at the core of your spirituality?
5. Why might it be important to learn and acknowledge the troubled history of biblical interpretation? How might that grow and better our faith journey?