

**The Ripple Effect of a Forgiven Failure: Onesimus
Philemon 8-22**

Paul wrote the book of Philemon. It was likely written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. Onesimus had come to know Paul while the two were in prison. It was during that time that Onesimus found out about how Christ would forgive him for his sin and restore his life. Additionally, through spending time with Paul he felt an overwhelming sense of guilt for the sins and wrongdoing in his life. He had to make a change and seek the forgiveness of those he had sinned against. This would prove to be a costly decision for this young believer, but the cost of the decision could not be the determining factor; obedience was more important than potential consequence.

Onesimus was repentant. The very fact that he was standing there as Philemon read the letter proved his repentant attitude. He returned to face the master he had wronged and who had the power to punish him severely. Before he ever verbally repented, Onesimus demonstrated the fruit of genuine repentance (Matt. 3:8). Paul appeals for his child in the faith, begotten in his imprisonment, who now seeks restoration with the one he had wronged. The former fugitive is now Paul's spiritual offspring, like Timothy, Titus, and Philemon himself. His repentance shows the genuineness of his faith.

Onesimus was a common slave name that meant "useful". Notice the word play in use in verse 11.

Onesimus was proven faithful. So useful had he become to Paul that sending him back to Philemon was like sending Paul's very heart. Paul's feelings ran deep for this fugitive Phrygian slave. He had taken him in and found him to be a great man to know and love. Paul knew Philemon would find him the same, if he would take him back.

Paul did not seek emancipation for Onesimus, nor did he assume it would be forthcoming. Paul looked beyond this earth and its relationships to other more important relationships. Onesimus was family—a brother. Before, his position as a slave meant that he was in the household, but he did not enjoy the privilege of sons. Now Paul introduced him as a brother—a full member of the Christian household.

NOTES

Growth Questions for 9/6 – 9/13

1. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend's message did you find most helpful, eye-opening, troubling?
2. The relationship between Onesimus and Philemon was certainly strained and possibly permanently fractured by past actions. Have you experienced or are you a part of a relationship beyond repair? What would it cost you personally to restore the relationship to health?
3. From relative obscurity as a slave to the subject of a book of the Bible, Onesimus' life drastically changed after meeting Jesus while in prison. What other examples from the Bible and from life are similar to the life change of Onesimus?
4. Both Onesimus and Philemon needed an unnatural amount of humility to function in the situation they found themselves in. Share an example of extreme humility that you have encountered personally or heard of.
5. Paul's words in verses 17 and 18 teach an important doctrine of the Bible; substitution. How do Paul's words mirror the work of Christ?

Proclaim...Reach...Connect...Go

Living on Mission

1. Repentance is a marker of true transformation for Christians. Is repentance a part of your life daily? Realizing the work of Christ fully reconciles the believer to God how does daily repentance function in the life of the believer?
2. The situation and station in life of the writer, Paul, influenced the selection of words and tone of the letter to Philemon. Paul appeals to Philemon by his deep love for him, not a command of authority (vs. 8). Consider how your appeal to others is influencing their response.
3. How can your actions **this** week potentially start a ripple effect in your place of work, community, and home? How could a word of encouragement, act of kindness, or act of service change a relationship or give hope this week? Develop a plan to start a ripple effect and share.

...to proclaim the Gospel and reach those far from God.