

## "More than a Slave" By Russ Earl

In the book of Philemon we read of Paul and his great love he had for the brethren, especially Philemon. He refers to them as "beloved friend" and "fellow laborer." This shows how they are laborers as he is and he loves them for it.

Paul was especially appreciative of Philemon, as the church met in his house. Philemon doing this indicated that he had great wealth by being able to meet the needs of the church in his home. Philemon also owned at least one slave which was another indication of his wealth.

Onesimus, his slave, was thought to have runaway but, perhaps by providence of God, met Paul. He studied with and converted Onesimus. This was the point where the view of Onesimus changes, from a runaway slave to a person who is very important and is considered a great help for the kingdom of God. It was for this reason that Paul in verse eight begins his plea for Onesimus, so that Philemon would receive him back.

Paul spends the majority of his writing in his defense and plea to Philemon for Onesimus. Onesimus, being thought as a runaway slave, would make him a person who would be despised and likely punished for running away from the home of his owner. Paul, however, after converting Onesimus to the truth, begins his plea for the worthiness and the helpfulness of Onesimus. Philemon, being the owner of Onesimus, could rightfully ask for Philemon to make payment for anything that he owed him or for any problems that may have accrued because of his absence.

Paul, however, begins his plea for Onesimus by stating that he was no longer just a slave, but was now also a brother in Christ, verse sixteen. Paul tells Philemon of how Onesimus may have once been unprofitable, but now is profitable to his work and for Philemon's as well (v.11).

Paul even tells Philemon how Onesimus is so profitable to Paul; he'd like to keep him there with him. However, he does not want to burden Philemon by asking to keep his slave away even longer. This shows just how profitable and how much of a help and blessing Onesimus had become. A runaway slave, who once was unprofitable to anyone, was now such a blessing that Paul would have liked to keep him there with him even longer. However, Paul wanted to share his joy of Onesimus with Philemon.

Paul wanted to send Onesimus back so that Philemon could share in his joy. He wanted Philemon to share in the joy of Onesimus's conversion and his now being a slave of righteousness. He was pleading with Philemon to receive now this good brother in the faith. He even says that perhaps this was the purpose of Onesimus leaving so that by the providence of God he would be converted by Paul and become a profitable and faithful servant of the Lord.

Paul continues his plea by stating that Onesimus was now more than just a slave but a beloved brother in Christ. The brother in Christ, Onesimus, was profitable, who could be trusted and that he would be an aide to the spreading of the gospel. He tells Philemon (v.16), how Onesimus was now a profitable worker and also a profitable servant of the Lord.

Paul boldly proclaims that if Philemon counts him as a partner or a brother in Christ then you should count Onesimus also. If you receive me then you should also receive Onesimus, a now faithful and profitable servant of God. Paul had such love for Onesimus that he tells Philemon that if he owes anything to put in on his (Paul's) account. This was just another way to show how much Paul cared for Onesimus and how he wanted nothing to hinder him. He wanted Onesimus to be free from any previous burden he may have incurred.

Paul says in verse nineteen that he writes this with his own hand so that Philemon may know assuredly that Paul is the one endorsing Onesimus. He tells Onesimus that he has confidence that he will do that which is right, (v.21). Paul was confident in Philemon but still felt it necessary to make a plea for Onesimus. It was Onesimus after all who was known as a "runaway" slave. So, it is likely that it is for that reason that Paul makes such a plea for Onesimus to be received back as more than a slave, but now also a brother in Christ and a fellow laborer.

In verse twenty-one, Paul also lets Philemon know that he is coming to visit with him. He asks Philemon to prepare him a room. This, without a doubt, would have been very encouraging to Philemon. Not only was Paul coming to visit him and the congregation there, but he was also going to be rejoined with Onesimus, who was now a converted, faithful, and profitable servant in the Lord's Kingdom.

How encouraging it must have been to have been with someone like Paul. Onesimus was taught by Paul, converted by Paul and was to be considered a great help in the Lord's kingdom. He once was a slave to be thought of as unprofitable but, now, profitable to both Paul and Philemon.

For this reason, that He is now a profitable servant of the Lord, we should be eager to accept those who are new converts. It is these individuals that we can encourage and also find encouragement from them. We should see their zeal for the Lord, and to see just how truly profitable they are going to be for the kingdom of God. Let us never be found lacking in accepting new converts, but found happy and count it all joy that a soul has been brought to Christ, and happy a new laborer has joined in the work of the Lord.