

Spiritual Family

Philemon

In Paul's many travels, he met a man named Philemon, and led him to Jesus. Some time later, Paul came across one of Philemon's slaves who had probably run away. His name was "Useful." Paul also led "Useful" to Jesus, and "Useful" truly became useful to Paul in prison. When Paul wrote his letter to the church in Colosse where Philemon lived, he sent Useful back as well, along with another letter—a personal letter to Philemon, asking him to accept "Useful" back into his household.

Philemon 8-12

⁸ That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do. ⁹ But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.

¹⁰ I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus (Useful). I became his father in the faith while here in prison. ¹¹ Onesimus (Useful) hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. ¹² I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

Philemon 13-19

¹³ I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. ¹⁴ But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced. ¹⁵ It seems you lost Onesimus (Useful) for a little while so that you could have him back forever. ¹⁶ He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, PAUL, WRITE THIS WITH MY OWN HAND: I WILL REPAY IT. AND I WON'T MENTION THAT YOU OWE ME YOUR VERY SOUL!

Philemon 21

²¹ I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more!

Transition

This situation with Philemon and Useful meant a new understanding among the believers of what it really meant to be a spiritual community...Paul wrote to the wider church at Colosse and said,

Colossians 3:1-3

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. ² Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. ³ For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:10-11

¹⁰ Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. ¹¹ In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile,* circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized,* slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Colossians 3:14-17

¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.

¹⁵ And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

¹⁶ Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.