

At Home in the Community

Key Verse: “*Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.*”

—**Philemon 21**

Selected Scripture:
Philemon

ONE CHARACTERISTIC OF worship in the Early Church was that believers often met together in private homes. In this epistle, Paul, identifying himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus, addresses it primarily to Philemon in whose home the believers gathered together for prayer and Bible study.—Philem. 1,2

In his prayers, Paul thanked God for having Philemon as a fellow laborer in Christ, mentioning especially his demonstrated love and faith towards other saints who were refreshed by this beloved brother.—vss. 4-7

The heart of Paul's letter was to plead to Philemon to receive back and forgive Onesimus, a runaway slave of his who had been converted to Christ as a result of the apostle's ministry while he was in prison. Paul also mentioned his own aged condition, appealing to Philemon perhaps as a father would to his son in the faith.—vss. 8-10

At the time when Onesimus had fled from Philemon as a slave, he would not have been viewed in a favorable light by his master. However, Paul mentioned how useful Onesimus had been to him personally during his confinement in bonds, since his conversion, thus

implying if Philemon would receive him back, he would prove to be a better slave than he was at the time he ran away.—vs.11

In his letter to Philemon, Paul suggested the Lord might have permitted this experience to result in some greater good (Rom. 8:28) and that Onesimus should be regarded by his master, not as a slave, but rather as a brother in Christ with whom he would now be able to share mutually rewarding spiritual fellowship. The apostle also punctuates his appeal by indicating if Philemon considered Paul as his partner in Christ, to receive Onesimus on the same basis.—vss. 15-17

In order to remove any potential obstacles for complying with his request, Paul indicated his willingness to assume responsibility for any loss that Philemon might have sustained, and therefore indicated, “Put that on mine account.”—vs. 18

Our Key Verse reflects Paul’s confidence in Philemon that he would do even more than the apostle had requested. The matter of denouncing slavery might naturally be a concern in the minds of some who might wonder why the apostle did not criticize Philemon for having slaves. As an inspired servant of God, Paul recognized that the kingdom of God would be the time when all such practices would be done away with, and his primary concern was that of preaching the Gospel and helping to establish the church which, under Christ, would eradicate every practice on earth that would not be approved by the Heavenly Father.

Whether or not Onesimus was ultimately given his freedom is not revealed in this epistle. Of greater importance, perhaps, was that of encouraging Philemon to fulfill the spirit of a scripture that is applicable to all believers in so many situations they experience during their Christian sojourn. “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”—Eph. 4:32 ■