

Book of Philemon

A story of a freed slave sounds like an event that has happened a long time ago. However, if you think of yourself and other Christians today are “freed slave”, then it is a nowadays’ story. How is it that I was a slave and what does it mean now?

Let’s first look at the background of the book of Philemon. It was written in a form of a personal letter from Paul to Philemon. It was written about AD61-63 when Paul was under the house arrest in Rome after his 3rd missionary journeys (Acts 28:16-31). It is possibly a letter to a family (Philemon and his wife Apphia and son Archippus, verses 1 &2). In this letter, Paul interceded with Philemon, who was an outstanding member of the church at Colossae, for a runaway slave by the name of Onesimus whom has escaped from his master Philemon and made his way to Rome. There Onesimus met Paul and found Christ as his Savior. He became a dear co-worker of apostle Paul by his devoted service. But Paul knew he was Philemon’s lawful slave, and so Paul didn’t want to keep him permanently. Paul sent him home and requested Philemon to take him back. Forgiveness is one of the main themes for this book but we are going to focus on the topic of a freed slave today.

1) A truly freed slave is free in Spirit

Onesimus was a ran away slave. He thought by running away can free him. Yes, it was a physical freedom, but not a spiritual freedom. He eventually accepted Jesus as his savior so that he became truly free. With his freedom in spirit, he followed Paul to serve God.

We were slave to sin (John 8:34, Rom. 6:6). We were physical free but our spiritual dryness and meaningless of life showed Satan was our master (2 Cor. 4:4). Satan blinded our mind and spirit. However, once we accepted Jesus as our savior, we are free from the slavery of sin (Rom. 6:1-23, John 8:36). We are now spiritually free that is a freed slave.

2) A freed slave needs acceptance

A truly freed slave requires acceptance. God accept us through Jesus’ death for our sin. Paul accepted Onesimus. Paul would like or “earnestly suggested” Philemon to accept Onesimus. In fact, true forgiveness means acceptance of the

person that has wronged you. Through God's grace, both master and slave can fellowship with each other in love. In verse 16, Paul asked Philemon to accept Onesimus as "...both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord." When we forgive someone, we need to accept him/her especially if he/she is a brother/sister in the Lord (Matt. 5:23-24).

3) A freed slave can be used for good again

The name Onesimus means "useful". Paul used Onesimus after he was converted. In verse 11, Paul wrote "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me."

In the same way, we are freed slave now, and thus how can we be used for good deeds? Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God (I Peter 2:10). Titus 3:1-8 remind us to do good acts that is profitable to others.

Several key elements are needed to be useful for God as a freed slave: be holy, be humble, willing to do whatever and whenever God call you to do. Onesimus was willing be sent back and to obey the former master. He knew that was God's will for him to be sent back, and to perform whatever work Philemon would give him.

There are many stories of repented people who served God whole-heartedly after being spiritually reborn. Many former drug users became pastors and are helping those that are still in drug addiction. Mr. Maury Davis was a convicted murder but later he was released from jail and became a pastor to preach God's word.

Remember, you are a spiritually freed slave now, and may you perform good deeds that benefit others and bring glory to God.