



*January 2, 2022*

*“Who, or what, enslaves you?”*

*Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids.*

*NEWS*

Wednesday Night Classes resume... Annual Church meeting Sunday 1/23 at 9:30. Q&A at 12:00.

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**PHILEMON 1-25 ~**

It’s a generally true statement that no one in the ancient world did anything to end \_\_\_\_\_ or elevate the \_\_\_\_\_ of human life.

Christianity ended slavery and elevated human dignity, but it took 18 centuries to do so. The problem with Christianity was that the focus was other than one’s \_\_\_\_\_ circumstances.

Our first historical denunciation of slavery and elevation of life came from \_\_\_\_\_ of Nyssa in about 375 A.D.

1) No one’s perfect - we can still honor them for the good...

*Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.*

*God Bless You!*

2) Judging others for what you've never experienced is really condemning yourself.

3) No one is good, no not one (Psalm 14:1, 53:1, 143:2, Mark 10:18, Romans 3:11, I John 1:8, etc.).

4) Identity politics is tribalism and tribalism will only end in bloodshed.

Slavery is a sin, and every life is sacred. Yet, Paul was far more interested in each Christian faithfully serving the Lord as His slave regardless of any earthly circumstances (I Corinthians 7:21-24).

Try to make life better, but never at the expense of your highest priority (Colossians 3:22-4:1, Ephesians 6:5-9).

5) Balance.

6) Human dignity means respecting individual choice.

The name Onesimus means "Useful."

7) There are always consequences.

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Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

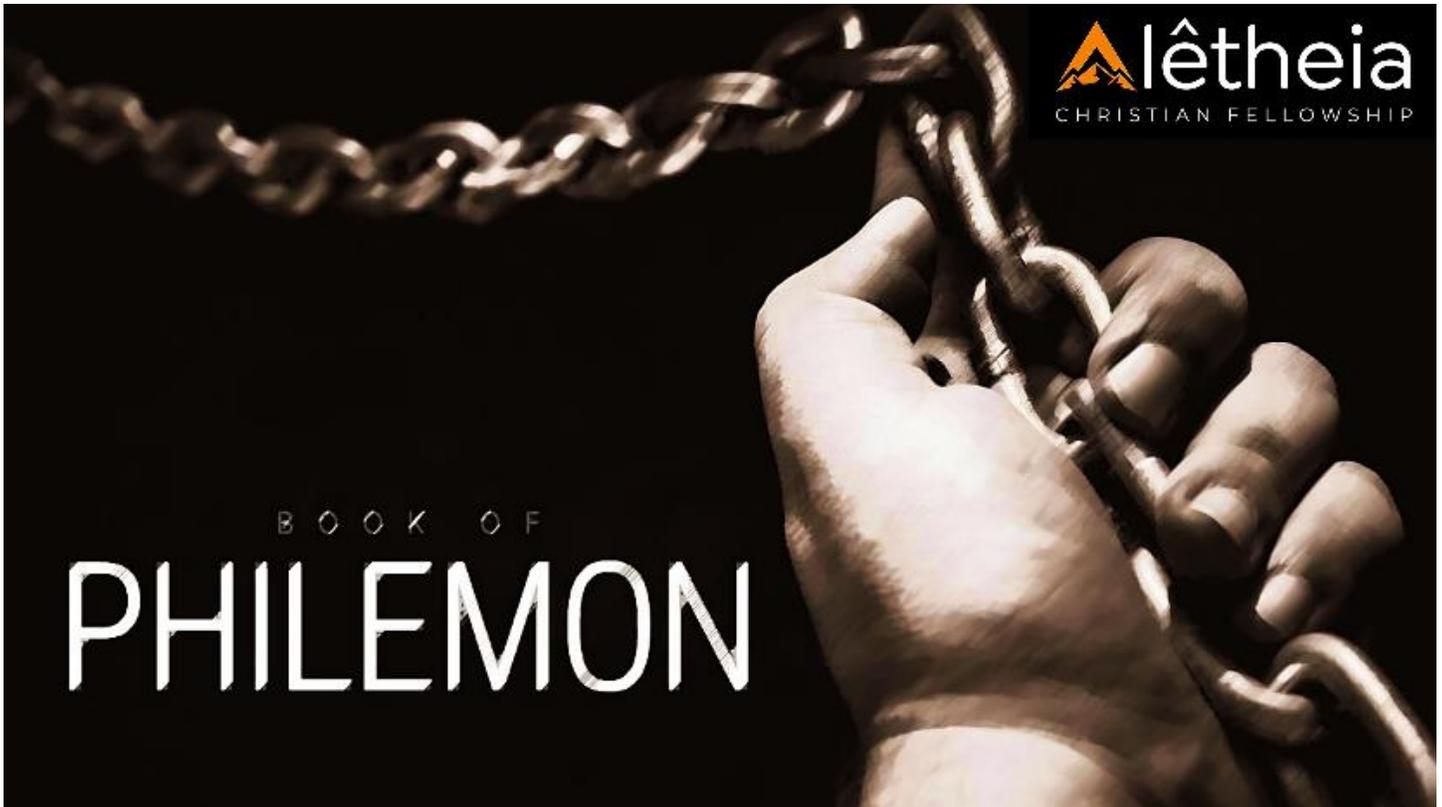
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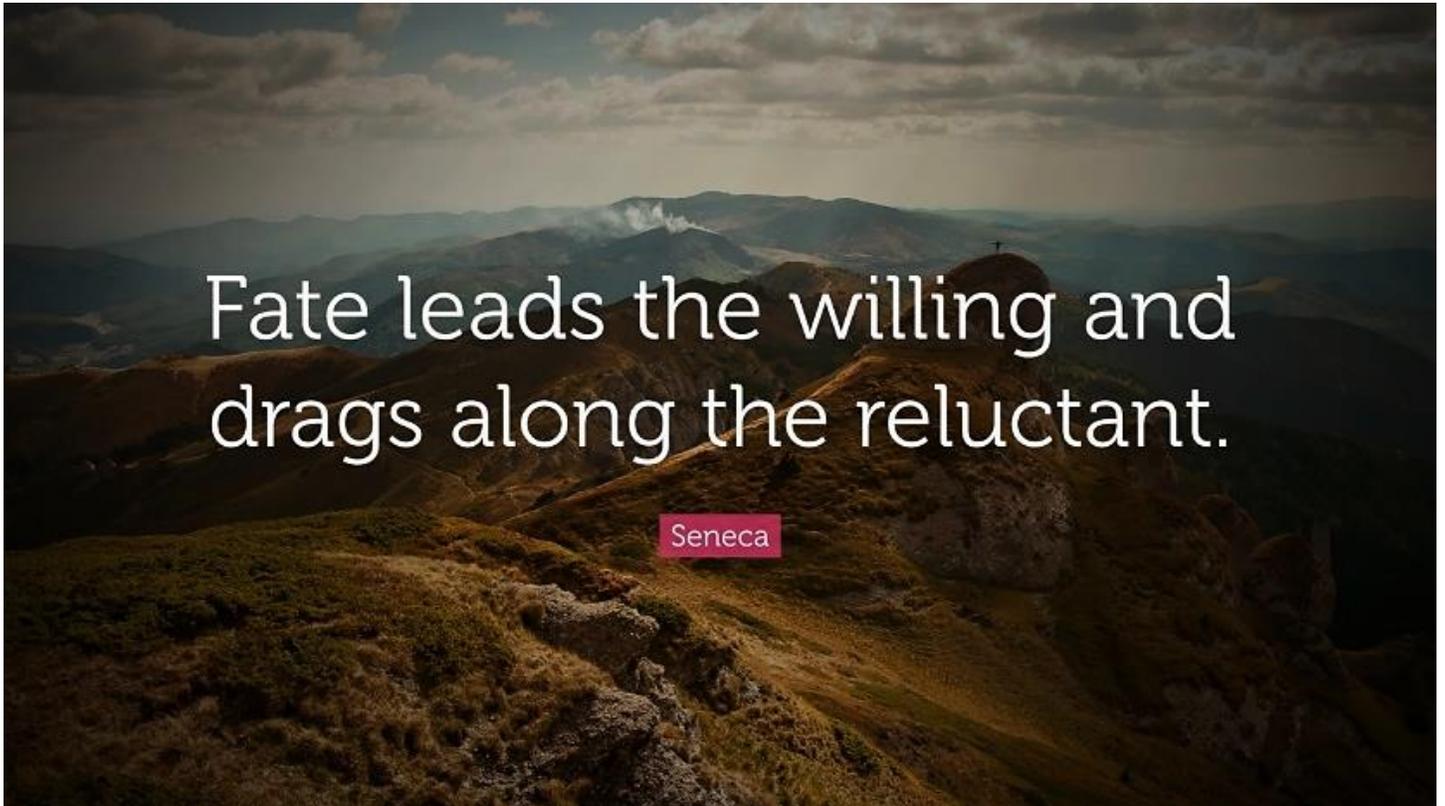
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Last week we talked about the background of the Letter and how we today can't really understand the culture back then, particularly when it comes to slavery and the disesteem for life. I want to talk about those two things, enslavement of people and the overall lack of esteem for human life. As I do, we'll hit on some other important concepts along the way.

It's a generally true statement that no one in the ancient world did anything to end slavery or elevate the sanctity of human life. Most religions and belief systems thought slave ownership was virtuous - an owner of others was wealthy, powerful, and thought to

be blessed. While being a slave, was the judgment of the gods, or fate. You didn't want to interfere with either back then.

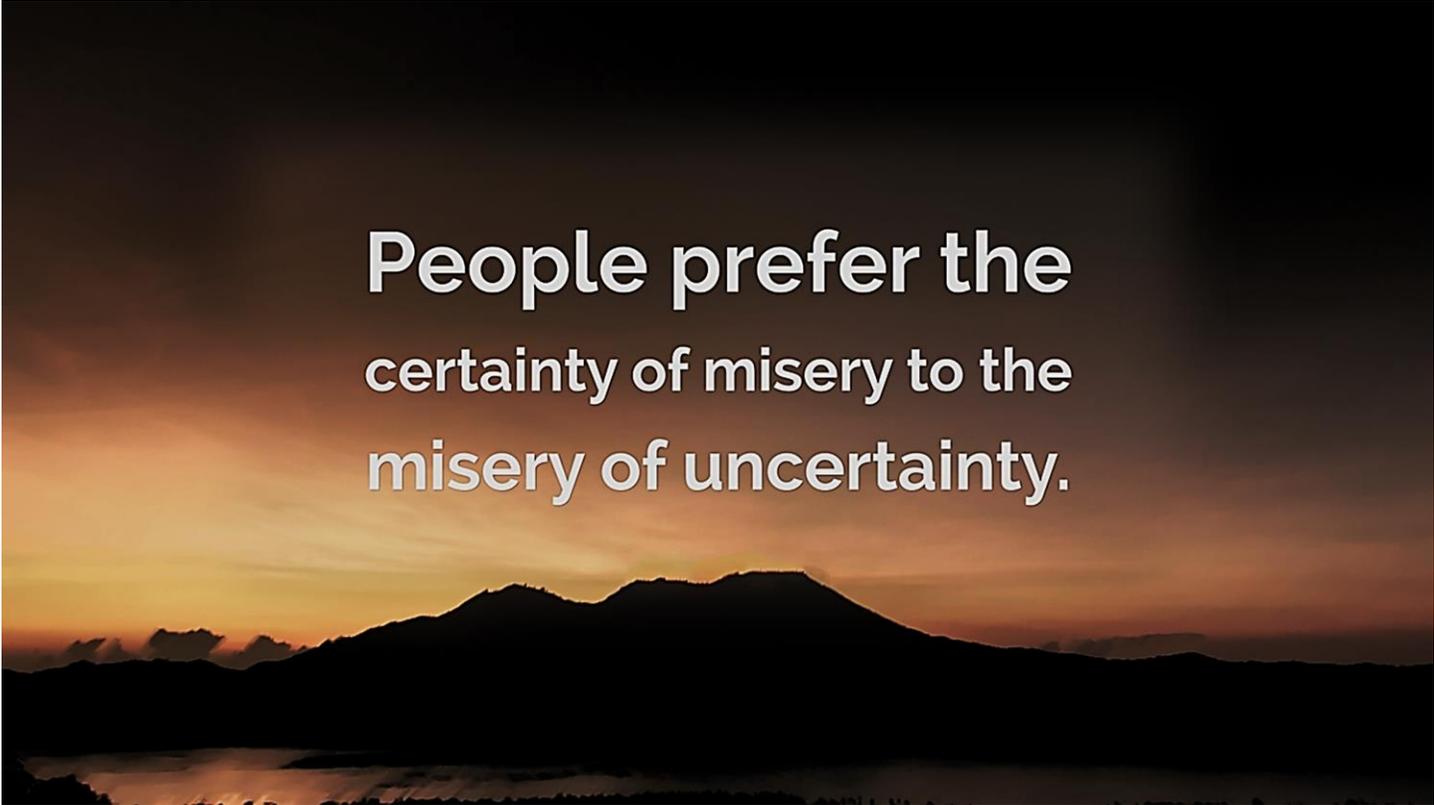


The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca summed up the position stoicism took on the matters. While slavery and the lack of respect for life was unfortunate, the point of their belief system was making the best of difficult circumstances - being free and alive mentally, not necessarily changing anything physically. Of slaves Seneca wrote that "Only their body is at mercy and disposition of the master; the mind is its own master, and is free."

The early Christian view wasn't a whole lot different. While it is true that Christianity ended slavery and elevated human dignity, it took 18 centuries for it to do so. We might ask why?

The problem with Christianity was that the focus, as with the Stoics, was other than one's physical circumstances. It wasn't as important, in the grand scheme - Accepting and then actively following Christ in whatever circumstances you were in was the issue, not fighting for social or governmental reform. It was far easier to feel that way when pagan Rome was in charge and were persecuting Christians. It got a whole lot harder when the Christians gained control.

It's easy to say that it's the government's fault. Or that it's just the way things are - what can I do about it? So, Christians concentrated on spiritual matters in this life and the promise of eternity in the next, largely ignoring the suffering all around them. Being enslaved, like being imprisoned wasn't any fun, but being a Christian was about serving the Lord through your difficulties. Getting fed to lions, or being used as a candle wasn't pleasant, but at least your suffering in this life was over and it was on to be with Jesus forevermore.



**People prefer the  
certainty of misery to the  
misery of uncertainty.**

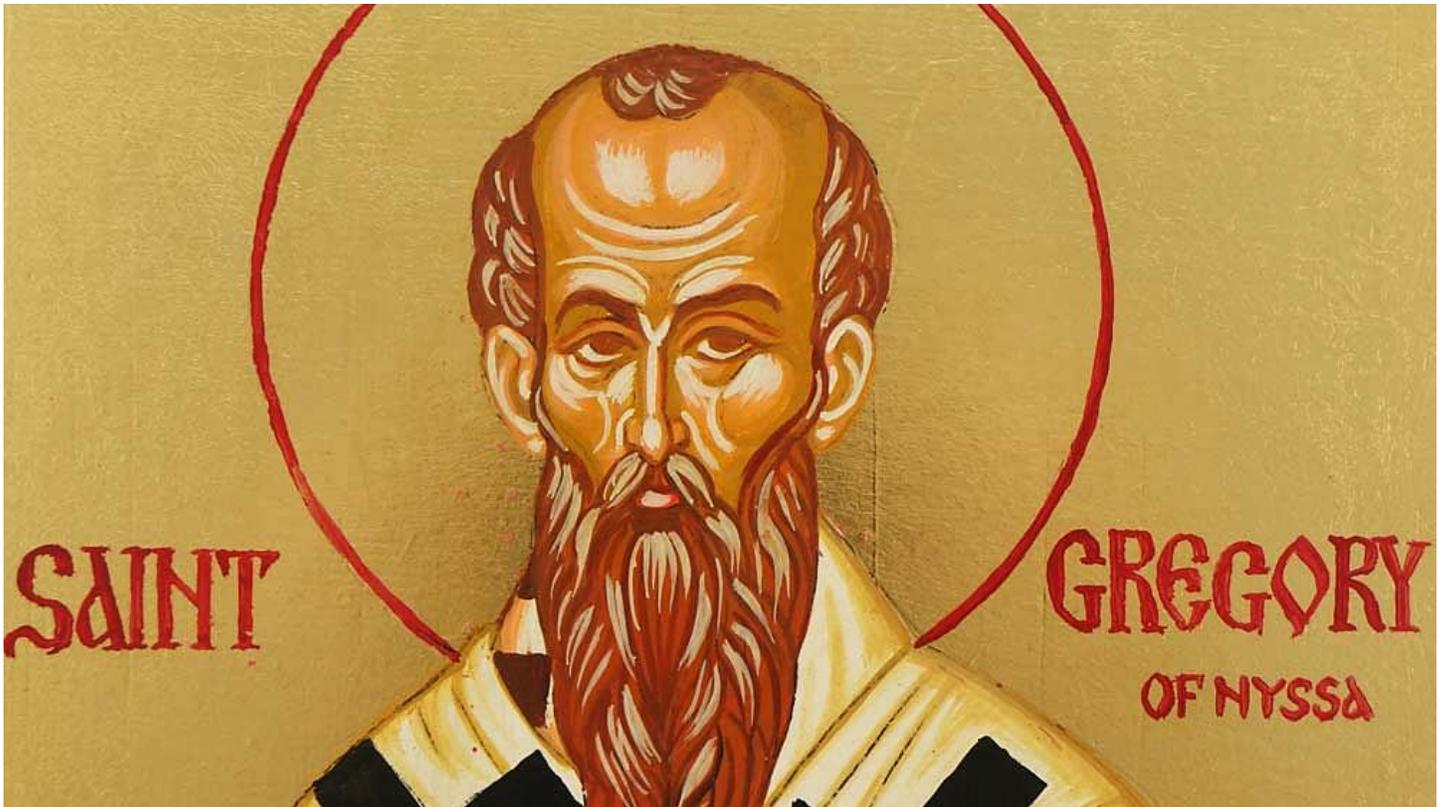
When Christians came to control the government in about 350 A.D., they couldn't blame the status quo on anyone else and things did begin to change. The problem after that, was two-fold. First, the people able to change the laws were the very people benefiting from slavery and a cavalier attitude towards life. Second, the idea of slavery was so ingrained and so universal it was hard for people back then to imagine a world without slavery.



I was born in the Cold War, grew up in the Cold War, fought in the Cold War. It was inconceivable to me that the Iron Curtain could come down, let alone would come down and yet, I personally flew to Berlin and chipped pieces off of that Wall. What I saw and did on that trip was entirely unimaginable a few months earlier when I was preflighting a jet with live nuclear weapons onboard. People have a difficult time seeing a different future.



It has been noted that when Rome suffered the slave revolts, most famously the Spartacus revolt in about 73 B.C., even the slave rebels enslaved others during their revolt. Those former slaves were fighting Rome, not to end slavery, but to turn the tables and enslave their former masters. It was engrained.



Our first historical evidence of a new way to think about these things came from Gregory, the Bishop of Nyssa in about 375 A.D. Nyssa was a city in Cappadocia, which is in the middle of modern-day Turkey. We possess several of Gregory's writings. One is on the problem of child mortality and another on slavery.

His general argument flows from the "Image of God," and asserts that human life, all human life, except that of the "Jews, heathens and heretics," is sacred. Therefore, life should be protected, and Christians should not practice slavery.



1) No one's perfect - honor them for the good:  
The "Jews, heathens and heretics," bit reveals another truth that is important to grasp. We are all products of our time, our upbringing, culture, and experiences. To break away from the mainstream and see things differently is quite remarkable, to do something about it is rarer still.

It never comes without a personal cost and so is courageous. Yet, no person has ever been able to move to and fully implement the logical limits of their new way of thinking. As an example, we all owe an enormous debt to Martin Luther. He is truly the primary

driver in the Protestant Reformation. His ideas revolutionized the Christian Faith and ushered in a return to Biblical Christianity of individual personal relationship with God and with others. Yet, he brought with him a massive load of baggage. So much so, that I've heard people villainize him for not moving far enough towards a full Biblical Christianity. Such people have no clue how unbelievably difficult the movement he did make was and how impossible it was for him to see further than he did. The only reason we can see beyond him is because he gave us a starting point further down the road. I notice that people who condemn others for not going far enough, have never done anything to advance anything other than discontent. Any idiot can throw stones.



**Don't want to walk a mile in these – Then don't judge**

2) Judging others for what you've never experienced is really condemning yourself.

No one is perfect and to judge a person in past circumstances through a modern lens is idealistic, anachronistic and dumb. My dad, born in 1918, lived through the Depression and was a pilot in WWII. We were talking one day about America's internment of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor. He didn't try to defend it morally but did try to mitigate the horrific insanity of that policy. I said, "It was reprehensible then and it is indefensible now." He just said, "Well, you just had to be there." I thought, what a stupid excuse.

A few years later, after being diverted to Dallas on the morning of September 11, 2001, and watching the Towers come down on the airport TV, what I know to be true, is if our government had said we're rounding up all Muslim Americans and holding them until this is sorted out, I would have gone along with it... I would have absolutely been wrong to do so, but at the moment, I probably would have gone along with a reprehensible and indefensible policy. My point is you cannot really put yourself in someone else's shoes, until you've been in their shoes. No one is perfect. You can say you wouldn't do wrong, but until you're in that place you don't really know - be cautious - we're all capable of evil. Every great person we respect was imperfect - get over it. We can honor people for their positive contributions without condoning their negative ones. By all means condemn the evil, but applaud the good.

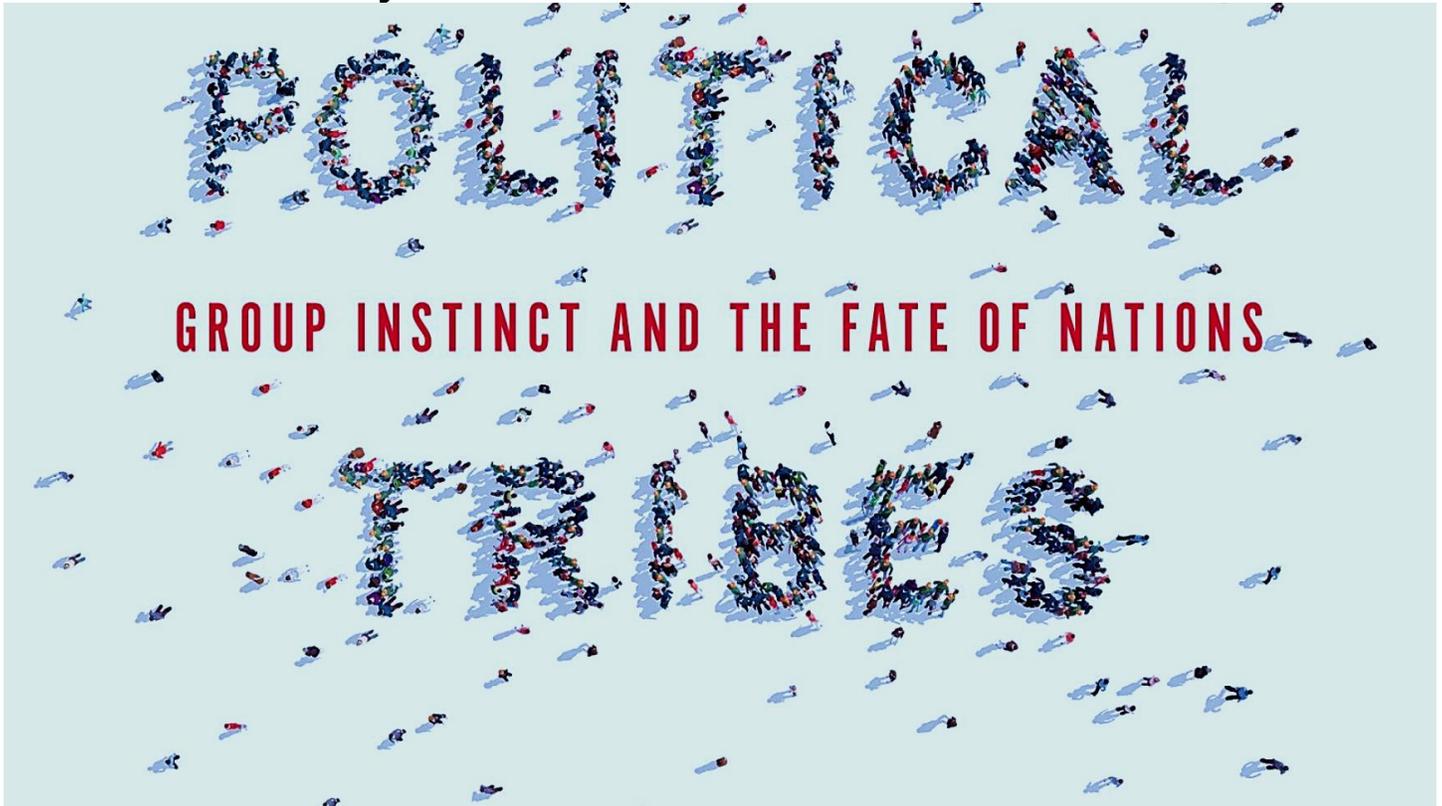
By judging my dad back then, I was only condemning myself. I was no better than him, no better than the idiots who came up with the vile policy. If you're under 30 you don't have enough humility to judge anyone. Slavery was a very difficult institution to overturn. Contrary to the revisionist anti-European lies taught in

our schools, slavery was everywhere. Pre-Columbian people here in the western hemisphere practiced slavery. African people, both north and south of the Sahara practiced slavery. Pre-Christian and post-Christian Europeans and western Asians practiced slavery. Central and eastern Asian people practiced slavery. It's not a white versus black problem, it is a human problem where the people with more power oppress the people with less.



3) No one is good, no not one (Psalm 14:1, 53:1, 143:2, Mark 10:18, Romans 3:11, I John 1:8, etc.). First further developing the reality that all humans are capable of unspeakable evil - no human being, from

infant to elderly, from white to black is good. That's not my opinion - that's precisely what Almighty God has said in His Holy Word.



4) Identity politics is tribalism and tribalism will only end in bloodshed.

The other thing is the immoral identity politics pervading our culture. The easiest thing in the world is to differentiate people groups in some way. Every person is categorized into their group - whatever their group is. The entire tendency is a primitive, depraved, human tendency to be tribal. Tribalism leads to us versus them, which leads to distrust and then to villainizing and ultimately to dehumanizing the

opposition groups. That leads to war, and to slavery, and to death.

Republican versus Democrat, Progressive versus Conservative, alphabet people versus binary heterosexual people, people of color versus color-challenged people. Wealthy versus poor. That last one drives the rest to a large degree. If 100 years of Communism has proved anything, it has proved that it was never for love of the oppressed, but for resentment of the oppressor. In every case, the oppressed overthrowing their oppressors became far worse oppressors themselves. There are 100 million brutally murdered people who will confirm that fact. You might think it's the other guys playing identity politics, not us. Yeah, why are they the other guys then? Refer back to rule 3 - we're all to blame.

My friends, there is one, and only one, race and that is the human race. "Until we are all free, none of us is free." Take the rights from a single human being and you reduce the freedom of all human beings. We are one tribe, and that one tribe, is made up of individual people - each unique and specially made by Almighty God Himself.

Slavery is a sin, and every life is sacred. Most of us in this room get that now, but please understand that it was a very difficult concept to grasp culturally and we're always in danger of going backwards because it is human nature to oppress or destroy others to get your way. It is estimated that right now as we sit here there are 400,000 slaves in America. Mostly young women and children - here in America - nearly half the population of our state enslaved. It is estimated that double that number of unborn babies are murdered, and few people even bat an eye. Yeah, we're always in danger of going backwards.



**We have  
bigger  
fish to  
fry**

The Apostle Paul was clearly not a fan of slavery, but he was far more interested in each Christian faithfully serving the Lord Jesus as His slave regardless of any earthly circumstances. He said as much in I Corinthians 7:21-24, 21Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. 23You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. 24Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called."



That ending bit means seek first the Kingdom of God - whatever the circumstances are that you find yourself in, be a Christian. Seeking first, means seeking most, seeking as your highest priority. Maybe your life is not going the way you want - go ahead and try to make it better, but never do that at the expense of your highest priority.

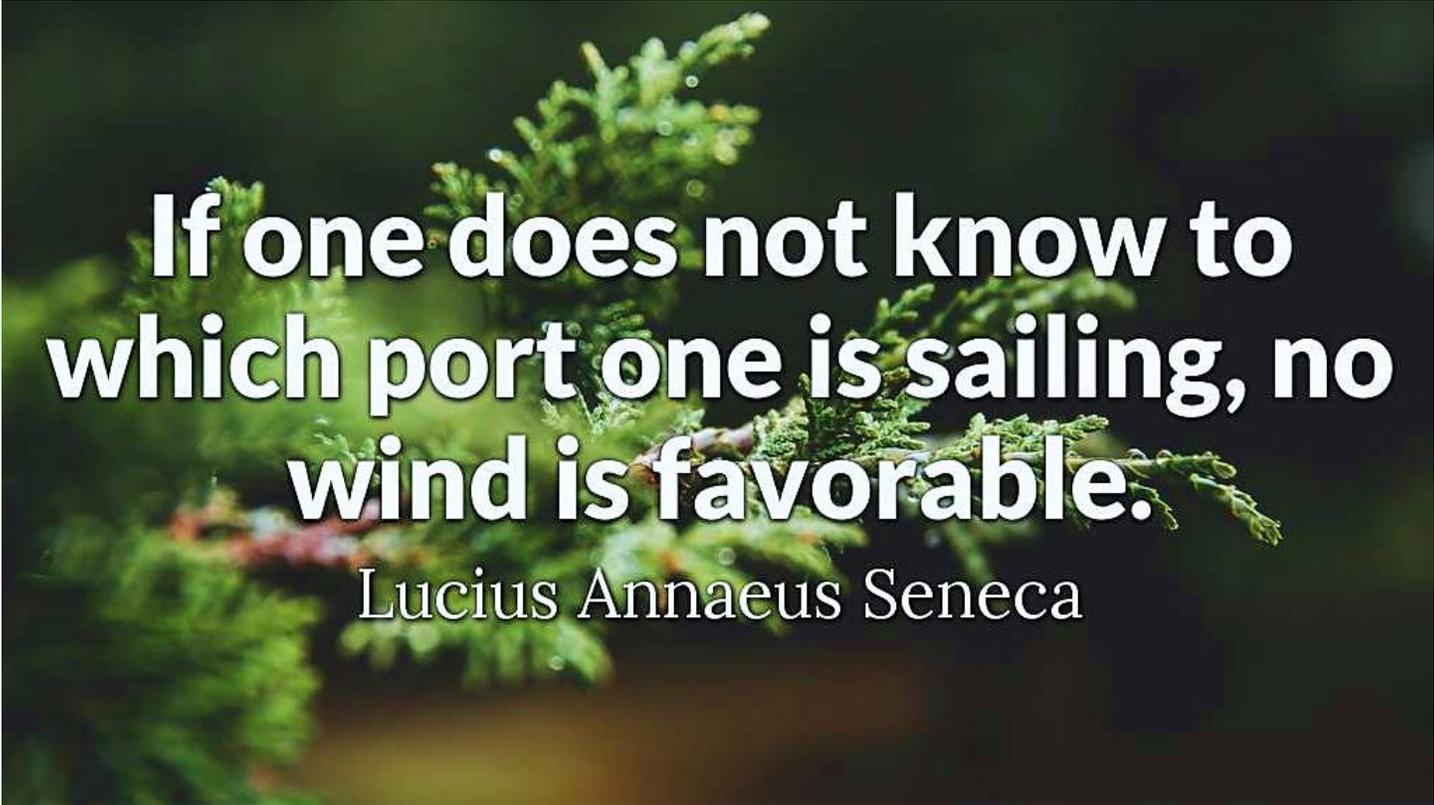
If you're a slave, and there's little worse than that, get free if you can do it properly without bringing dishonor to the Lord... Please notice neither Paul or any other Apostle or Christian leader for 15 centuries advocated that a slave run away, let alone start an insurrection.

My friends, anyone, and I do mean anyone, can be a Fairweather Christian. It takes absolutely nothing to trust Jesus when everything is going your way. Only through trial, tribulation, challenge, pain, suffering and difficulties of all kinds do we demonstrate our character. More than that, it is through that adversity character is built.

Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians from prison. We know that some of the Christians in both of those communities were slaves - we know at least some of

those slaves were owned by their fellow parishioners. Colossians 3:22-4:1, 22Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. 4:1Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is almost identical in chapter 6, verses 5-9.

As I said, it was Christianity that finally put a stop to slavery and that's important, but the reason it took so long, is that besides men being evil in their inclinations, Christians knew all along that there was something more important than a person's temporary situation in this physical world.

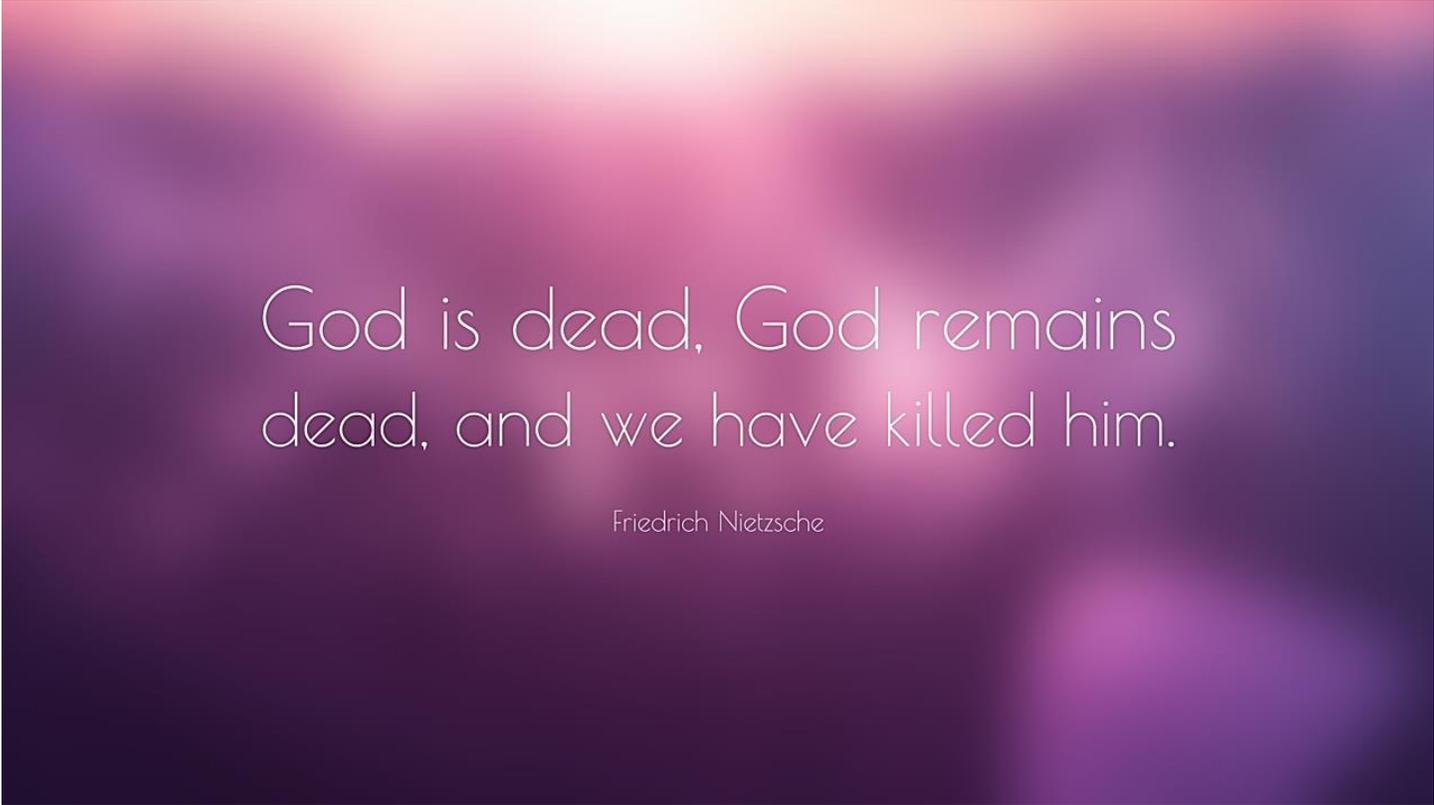


**If one does not know to  
which port one is sailing, no  
wind is favorable.**

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

#### 5) Balance.

Another great quote from Seneca - it's very good to occasionally stop and ask yourself what you're trying to accomplish. While it's absolutely true, that we should prioritize eternity, part of doing that is caring for others now. A spiritual, or eternal perspective cannot become an excuse to not care about the suffering due to the evil in this world, as it did for so many centuries. For one reason... That very thing is what led to God being declared dead.



God is dead, God remains  
dead, and we have killed him.

Friedrich Nietzsche

In many ways the Age of Reason was a Christian response to the fact that Christians, particularly Christian institutions, had used eternity to ignore the present. Christians in the West had been in charge for a very long time and the living conditions of people was horrible - perhaps worse than it was under pagan Roman rule.

Intelligent men using their Judeo-Christian background began looking for non-Christian solutions to the problems Christianity ignored and they birthed the new religion we call science. For most people in the West today, Christianity and science are incompatible and so

they either foolishly reject science, or even more foolishly reject Christ. That's how we've arrived in a culture that cares so little about the Savior... Most people, whether they realize it or not, think that science is their savior.

Our Christian predecessors were wrong to focus so much on eternity that they ignored doing what was reasonable to end human suffering in the present. And our humanistic predecessors were wrong to focus so much on human suffering, that they killed God. It's why we are now returning to a less civil society. Just as Dostoyevsky said, "If God is dead, everything is allowed."



What can we learn? Christians should absolutely advocate for people. For compassionate kindness, for true equality, for impartial justice, for noble ethics and respectful morality. We above all people should fight for the oppressed. Yet, we need to temper that, because we above all people should recognize that there really are even more important things.

We will never end suffering in this physical world - never. No matter how much we devote ourselves to that endeavor, we will never eradicate suffering entirely. While we should do what we can, we must work even

harder at securing our future. The only thing worse than suffering now, is suffering for eternity.



IT'S YOUR CHOICE

6) Human dignity means respecting individual choice. We must grant to the oppressed their right to refuse the help we offer. In other words, the reason all people should be treated fairly is because we are all individuals made in God's Image and as such, we have been given by Him, free agency. We all get our choices. We must respect a person's choice to be whatever and whoever they want to be - that's part of the deal.

That informs how we help. Change for the better is usually a very long time coming. Helping others must be done gently, respectfully, and patiently. We must do what we can to honor people enough to help them, and also honor them enough to leave them alone, if they don't want our help.

PHILEMON 1-25, 10I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, 13whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; 14but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. 15For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, 16no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. 17If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. 18But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19I, Paul, am writing this with my

own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). 20Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. 22At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you. 23Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. 25The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.



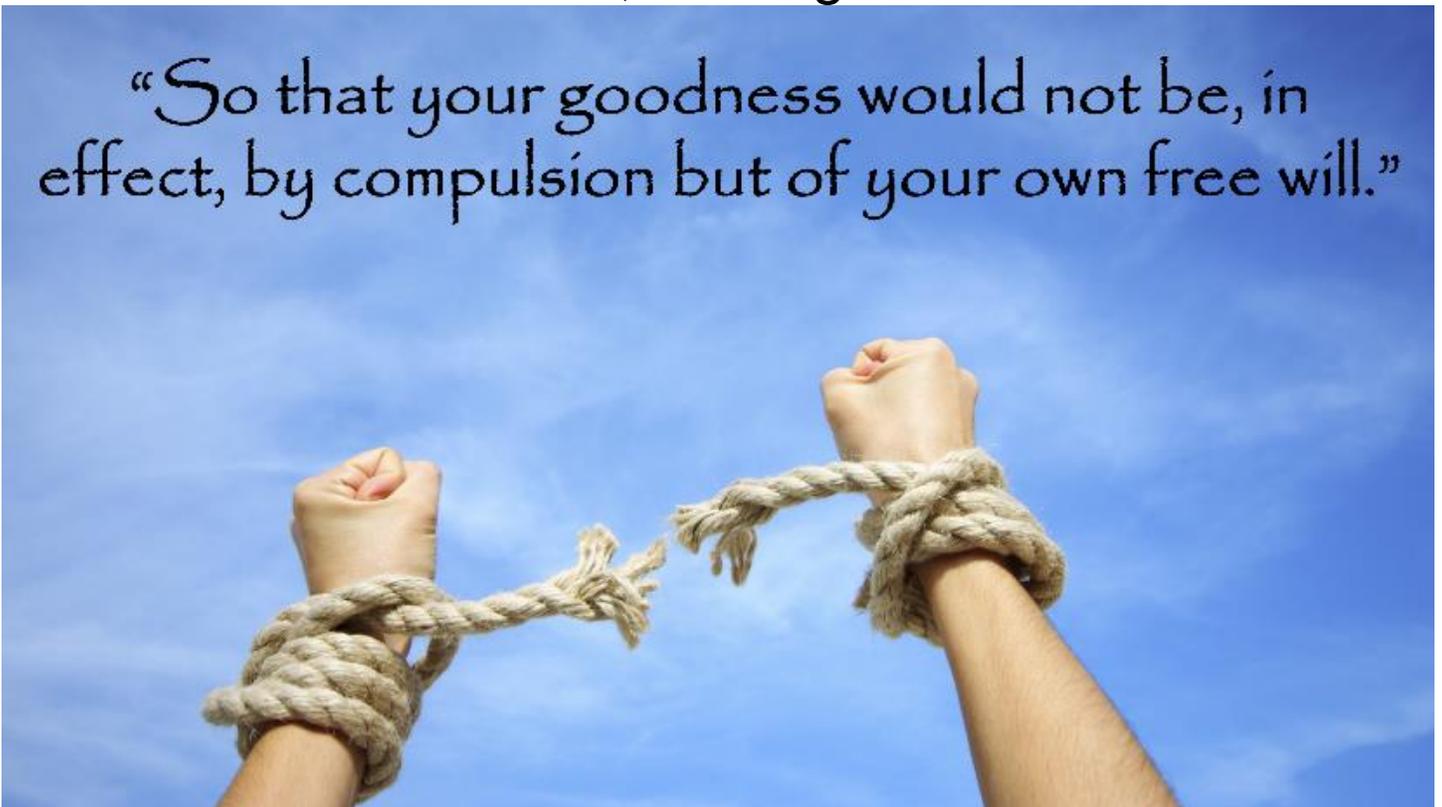
Onesimus went to Paul to get his help as a mediator between him and his master Philemon. God had other

plans and through Paul, God loved Onesimus, and Onesimus was Saved.

There is a play on words here. The name Onesimus, a common one among slaves, means “Useful.” Paul basically said, “Useful was useless to you, but now he is more than useful to both you and to me.”

Paul uses a lot of well-crafted phrases and words to encourage Philemon not just to take Onesimus back without negative consequences, not just to accept him as a brother in the Faith, but to grant him his freedom.

*“So that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.”*



Yet Paul will not demand that - he leaves the choice to Philemon. Paul does not take Philemon's agency away from him. He doesn't disrespect him. He doesn't insist on anything, but he does bring to bear every argument for treating Onesimus well that he can muster. From Apostolic authority that he hints at, to wisdom as an Elder that he made explicit, to reminding Philemon that he was in Paul's debt, to Paul promising to pay whatever debt Onesimus owed.

Paul also provided as many positive options as possible short of freedom. He implied that if Philemon wouldn't free Onesimus and couldn't stand to have him under his roof any longer could send him back to Paul as a form of giving to the ministry of Paul. In verse 14, Paul actually used a term that means a free-will offering, as in the Jewish votive offering. Philemon could consider Onesimus a free-will offering to Almighty God by sending him back to assist Paul. If unwilling to make him a gift to God, Paul would pay for the loss himself.

It is a beautifully crafted letter, and I don't know how Paul could have done more to help Philemon, his wife, his pastor and his whole church welcome Onesimus

back with open arms and love him as part of their church family. It's all there.

In case you were wondering, verse 19, would have functioned as a perfectly legal IOU from the Apostle Paul to Philemon that would have held up in the courts of that day. Paul was basically offering to pay any debt Philemon felt he was owed from Onesimus including his purchase price if necessary.

In verse 20 Paul uses another play on Onesimus' name by saying to Philemon, "Yes, brother, let me benefit (ὀνίνημι) from you in the Lord."

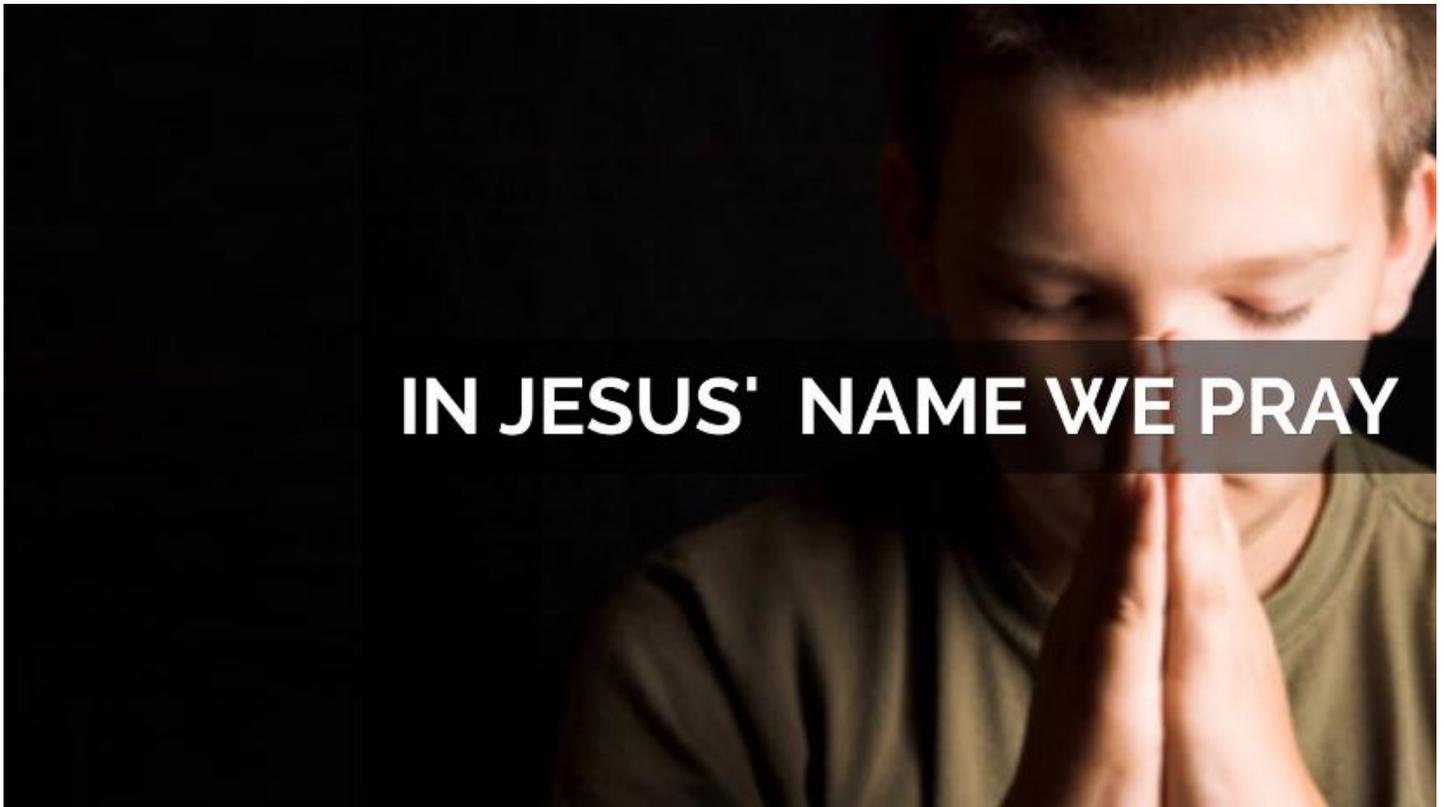


7) There are always consequences.

Paul concludes with stating his great confidence in Philemon - that he would, of his own accord, do, not what was right by Onesimus, not even what was right by Paul, but most critically, what is right by Christ. Paul wasn't going to demand and Onesimus deserved to be punished... Don't miss that reality. Onesimus had broken the law and Philemon had every legal right to have him executed on the spot without a trial.

Ultimately, Paul was asking Philemon to grant grace and forgiveness to Onesimus, just like the Grace and forgiveness the Lord had granted him.

That's always the call. Show me an unforgiving person and I'll show you a person who has not grasped God's forgiveness of them. There are always consequences. Avoid punishment, incur a debt. Forgive others, be forgiven. "Make your choice and embrace the consequences."



The standard closing follows, but even though it was standard, it served a purpose. When we pray, we conclude with the standard closing, “In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.” Just because we say it without thinking doesn’t mean that it doesn’t have meaning. We do it to remind ourselves of the prayer caveat... “Ask anything according to the Will of God and He will hear you and He will answer yes.” The caveat? His Will. Likewise, Paul closing the way he did brings up several things, four of which, I want to touch on briefly.

First, within it, Paul makes a plea to continue to pray for him, as he always prays for them. Difficult to deny a

person who is asking for prayer to be released from an unjust imprisonment.

Second, prepare a lodging for me because I intend to visit soon. Difficult to treat Onesimus poorly when Paul may show up in person later on.

Third, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, also know full-well what's going on with this issue. Difficult to act badly, when you know these other amazing evangelists will be interested in your decision as well.

Fourth, the final phrase is both heartfelt and honest. Genuinely, I pray that the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ minister to your very soul.

Church tradition tells us that Philemon did the right thing and freed Onesimus. The freed slave went on to serve Paul and eventually became Bishop of Ephesus following the murder of Timothy. Onesimus was arrested during the reign of Domitian and stoned to death. Both he and his former master Philemon are considered Catholic Saints.