

about reforming society, or about laws to eliminate slavery. Even before the time it became necessary to think about changing the laws, faith was already against treating slaves as “objects” or inferiors: because they were Christians, an increasing number of masters—in the Church—spontaneously renounced their rights and granted freedom to their slaves.

Many people think that the Christian community has nothing to say concerning their responsibilities to society. Here, on the contrary, we see how Paul involves the whole community in Philemon’s problem.

LETTER TO PHILEMON



¹ From Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy, to Philemon, our friend and fellow worker, ²to our dear sister Apphia, to Archippus, faithful companion in our soldiering, and to all the Church gathered in your house.

³ Grace and peace be with you from God, the Father, and Jesus Christ, the Lord.

⁴ I never cease to give thanks to my God when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵for I hear of your love and faith toward the Lord and all the holy ones. ⁶And I pray that the sharing of your faith may make known all the good that is ours in Christ. ⁷I had great satisfaction and comfort on hearing of your charity because the hearts of the saints have been cheered by you, brother.

⁸Because of this, although in Christ I have the freedom to command what you should do, ⁹yet I prefer to request you, in love. The one talking is Paul, the old man, now a prisoner for Christ. ¹⁰And my request is on behalf of Onesimus, whose father I have become while I was in prison.

¹¹This Onesimus has not been helpful to you, but now he will be helpful, both to you and to me. ¹²In returning him to you, I am sending you my own heart. ¹³I would have liked to keep him at my side, to serve me on your behalf while I am in prison for the gospel, ¹⁴but I did not want to do anything without your agreement, nor impose a good deed upon you without your free consent.

¹⁵Perhaps Onesimus has been parted from you for a while so that you may have him back forever, ¹⁶no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, for he is a very dear brother to me, and he will be even dearer to you. ¹⁷And so, because of our friendship, receive him as if he were I myself. ¹⁸And if he has caused any harm, or owes you anything, charge it

to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, write this and sign it with my own hand: I will pay it... without further mention of your debt to me, which is you yourself. ²⁰So, my brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this comfort in Christ.

²¹Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing you will do even more than I ask. ²²And one more thing, get a lodging ready for me because, thanks to all your prayers, I hope to return to you.

²³Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings. ²⁴So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my assistants.

²⁵May the grace of the Lord Christ be with you. Amen!

PHILEMON 1-25

Read: The slave Onesimus has become a Christian, and Paul makes a personal appeal to Philemon, Onesimus' master, that he may be accepted him back not as a runaway slave, but as a spiritual brother. Conversion to Christianity changes people and establishes a new relationship between them: we are all brothers and sisters since we all have the same Father: God.

Reflect: Do you feel the need to change the way you look at people and take them not for what they have or do but for what they really are? What kind of slavery do we have today that prevent a universal brotherhood? How can we eradicate it with the message of the Gospel?

Pray: Ask God to help you and your community to receive as brothers and sisters those who arrive at the faith, independently of their "enslavements."

Act: Be aware of the way you treat others, especially those who are going through some particular needs or have fewer material resources than yourself. Get close to them and talk to them with humility, respect, and generosity, knowing that before God we are all the same.