

Mediation #8: Transforming Human

What does it say? –

STUDY: The whole brief letter to Philemon

GOLDEN TEXT: Philemon 15 and 16 = *Perhaps the reason he [Onesimus] was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.*

What does it mean?

Christmas transforms everything: *If God could become a human, then all humanity is precious.* However, far too often we allow human institutions to define and limit what we see and how we feel. When those human institutions are as perverted as slavery, which continues even today in some places, those institutions can even insidiously help blind us from seeing gross injustices around us. Similarly, ecological injustices are hard to address when we neither recognize the wrongs, nor see what can be done to repair the evils. In this short letter, the Apostle Paul was especially skillful at asking the right questions to help open Philemon's eyes—to see the obvious injustices of the slavery he had endorsed and exploited and to experience Jesus' transformation of all relationships.

1. Crises often are the greatest opportunities to see God and one another anew. Did Philemon have to lose Onesimus, “his slave,” in order to see him in a correct light and, welcome him and treat him as “a dear brother”?
2. How could Philemon believe in Jesus and still have a slave? Is the Creator's light sometimes hidden by our own bad behavior and biases? (See Matthew 5:14-16)
3. Beginning at the first Christmas, was even Jesus rejected by most of the leaders, partly because of his poor socio-economic condition? Does the deep goodness of all God makes help pave the way for Philemon's personal transformations? And ours?
4. Should the Apostle Paul have used stronger words against slavery? Why or why not? Social change regarding slavery was painfully slow. *Must social change be as slow now with respect to our dangerous pollution and depletion of other people's environments?*

What are we going to do about it?

5. What are the justice issues concerning people's lives around you now? Was the Apostle Paul a good model for justice action when he told Philemon to treat Onesimus as a dear brother? How did Paul use subtle persuasion? Is this Jesus' model, too? Why is Christmastime a good time to renew justice action?
6. Transformation comes in the process of recognizing our shared relationship with the Lord. The slave is now the “brother in the Lord.” Will seeing other people as God's children, too, help us to care more about them and their environments?
7. Was the Apostle Paul shy about asking for social change, putting his valuable friendship with Philemon at stake for another child of God—in this case, Onesimus? What lessons can we learn about protecting other people, including their environments?

Truth to Celebrate: *God can do whatever he wants, but he chooses us as his children to join him in making the world a better place.*

Advent-Action: *Time most of your cooking and laundry tasks to when other people use less electricity: evenings and weekends. That way, the power companies will be less likely to expand their own energy production.*

