

A Real Power Trip

The book of Philemon

“The most powerful REAL-LIFE PARABLE in the New Testament”

- *Kunve Niunt Kwoat*

Please break into groups *(3-4 people if possible)*

LEADER:

The 2nd youngest
will be the
leader.



The USHERS will pass out bags of (individually wrapped) CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES.
Everyone MUST take one cookie. Even if you don't want to eat it (vegan, keto, diet, etc.).

Who's a hero/celebrity (alive), who'd you'd be honored to invite into your home if they showed up at your door?
What would your first 3 sentences be?



The Main Players in the letter to Philemon

(Philemon written ~ 62 CE)

The Apostle Paul



In Roman prison

Onesimus



Serving Paul in Rome

Philemon



Living in Colossae

The Main Players

(The letter to Philemon was written ~ 62 CE)

The Apostle Paul



Converted **32 CE**
(probably died 67 CE)

Onesimus



Converted **60 CE ?**
(2 years in Christ)

Philemon



Converted **55 CE**
(7 years in Christ)

Paul is in jail in Rome.

Paul gets to know this talented young man, **Onesimus**.

Timothy introduces him to a young convert, **Onesimus**.

Onesimus reveals to Paul that he used to be a slave, a bond-servant.

And as they discuss more, this amazing coincidence gets revealed:

It turns out that **Philemon** is the master of the household that Onesimus had run away from (*prior to paying off his debt*).

And **Paul knows him** from a previous visit to Colossae.



Map of NT church plantings



ROME

Philippi

Thessalonica

Ephesus

Colossae

GALATIA

Tarsus

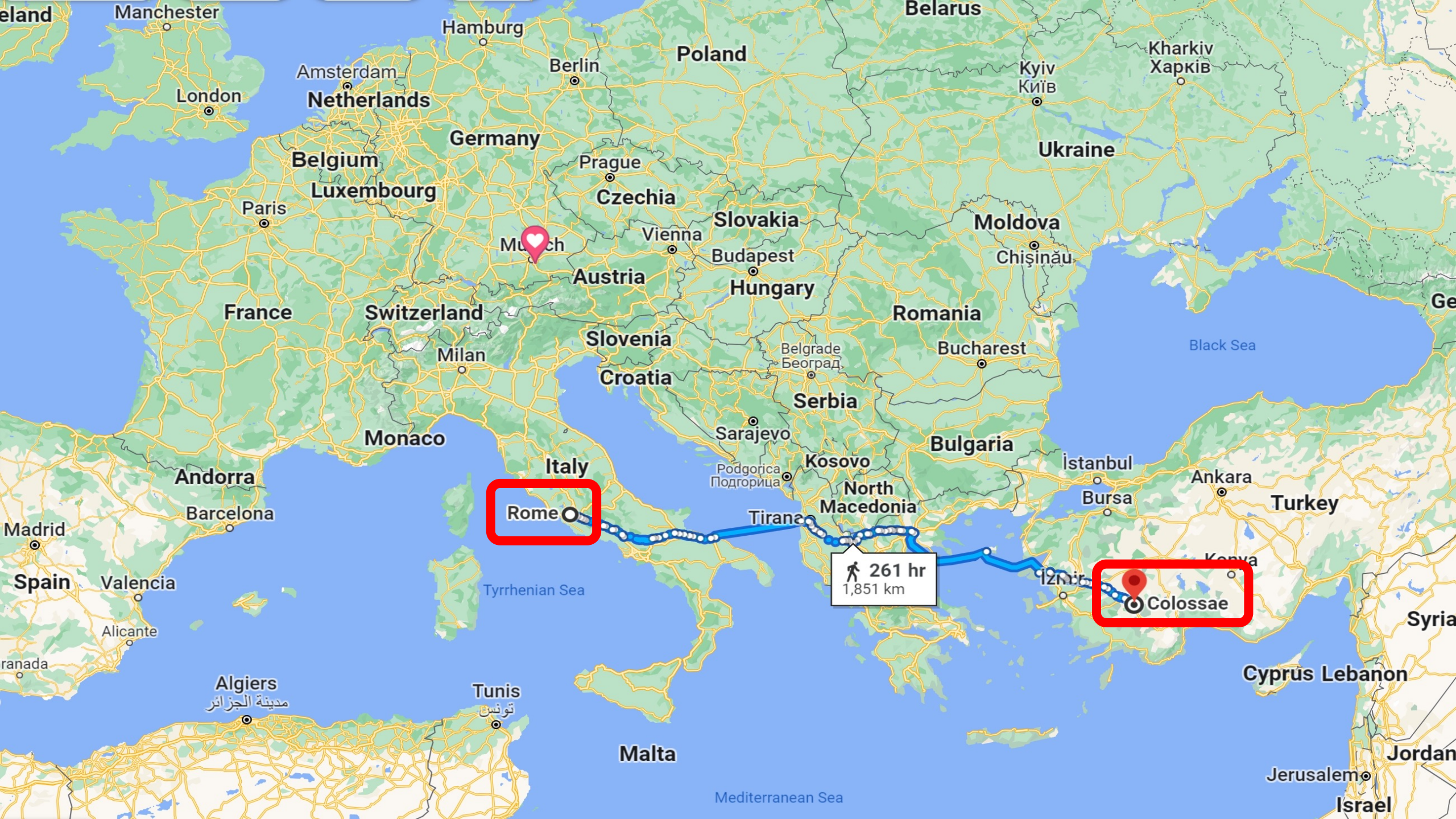
Antioch

Damascus

Jerusalem

~ 62 CE

Paul sends this letter from Rome to Colossae



Rome

261 hr
1,851 km

Colossae

Scot McKnight (NT Scholar): Regarding the book of
Revelation, "Power itself deserves to be addressed. It is
of power and authority



"The entire Roman Empire would be upended by
this one situation, where **one man HAS power**,
and he was wronged by another man who he
had power OVER. Now what would he do?"
siblingship are not
siblings of one another."

Most things that get you riled up – are about POWER.

Here's a list of some of the top things that get people mad...

- Being treated unfairly and feeling powerless to do anything about it.
- Feeling threatened or attacked.
- Other people not respecting your authority, feelings or property.
- Being interrupted when you are trying to achieve a goal.
- Your/others' rights being ignored
- Your/others' rights being removed
- Injustice being permitted/tolerated
- Being blamed for something you didn't do
- People who take credit for your work
- Being told you're wrong, when you're not
- Criticism when you need empathy
- Denying your experience
- Unsolicited advice
- Not feeling heard
- Being talked over
- Being ignored
- Liars and lies



A light blue background with a grey winding road that forms a large 'S' shape. A small white car with two red figures is driving on the road in the bottom right corner.

And Philemon is
all about...

A Real Power Trip

Who had the most “worldly” POWER?

The Apostle Paul



Tent maker, in prison,
no property

Onesimus



Former slave,
he freed himself
(fugitive/freed)

Philemon



Influential estate
owner in Colossae

Who had the most “spiritual” POWER?

The Apostle Paul



Paul was the leader
of the movement

Onesimus



A young convert

Philemon



House church leader in
the Colossian church

Who had the most “relational” POWER?

The Apostle Paul



Paul mentored
Onesimus and knew
Philemon as well.

Onesimus



Voluntary
assistant to Paul

Philemon



Paul's spiritual
grandson
(Paul → Epaphras → Philemon)

In the book of Philemon, Paul was writing with an objective in mind.

Which type of **POWER** did he use to achieve it?

The Apostle Paul



Philemon
Onesimus



Or is it possible that Paul was opposed to using POWER?

“This isn’t a theoretical treatise about pre-emancipation theories about slaves. This is a counseling letter from an apostle, who refuses to claim his authority.”

– Scot McKnight

The Apostle Paul



Philemon

Onesimus

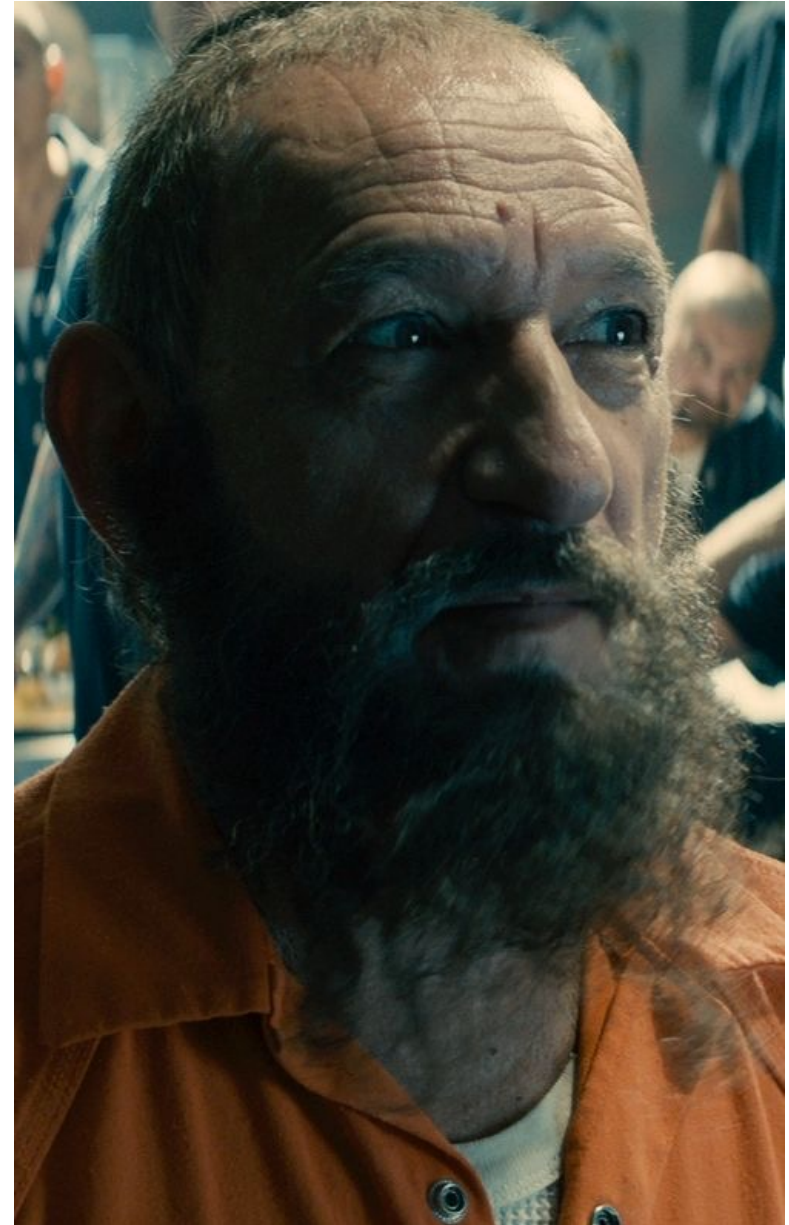


Philemon (1 chapter)

Paul was
imprisoned
in Rome
(directly in
at the city
market).

*You can visit
it in Rome
(I did).*

¹ Paul, a prisoner for Christ
Jesus, and Timothy our
brother,
To Philemon our beloved
fellow worker ² and Apphia
our sister and Archippus
our fellow soldier, and the church
church in your house:
³ Grace and peace from God our
God our Father and the Lord
Lord Jesus Christ.



Philemon (1 chapter)

Timothy
was more
of a
companion
than a
co-author

¹Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus,
and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved fellow
worker ²and Apphia our sister
and Archippus our fellow soldier,
and the church in your house:
³Grace and peace from God our
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



Philemon (1 chapter)

Apphia was likely Philemon's wife.

Archippus was likely Philemon's son.

¹Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ²and Apphia our
sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in
your house: ³Grace and peace from God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ.

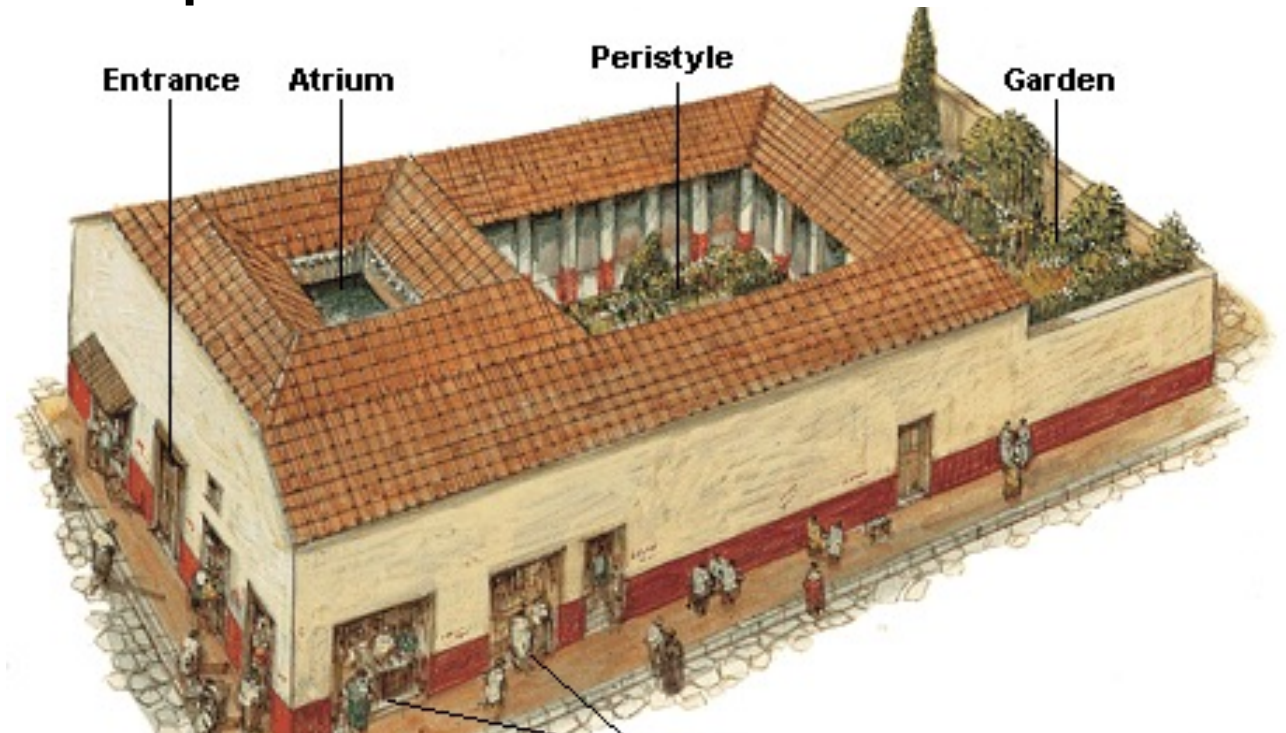


Philemon (1 chapter)

Philemon
was likely
wealthy.

He was also
likely
influential
in the
church.

¹Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ²and Apphia our
sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in
your house: ³Grace and peace from God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ.



Philemon (1 chapter)

There's almost nothing more meaningful than knowing others think of you and pray for you.

⁴ I thank my God always when **I remember you** in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in Christ. ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.



Philemon (1 chapter)

Philemon 1: 6
is NOT a verse
about
evangelism.

In fact, it's the
opposite of
how we used
to teach this
from the NIV.

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the

saints, ⁶ and I pray that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in Christ. ⁷ For I have derived

much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

What is “*sharing your faith*”?

Philemon (1 chapter)

Philemon 1: 6
says that our
fellowship is
what helps us
grasp exactly
WHAT we have
in Christ.

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in Christ. ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

***Why go to church if [a] it's boring
or [b] I don't like the songs?***

Paul thought that the local church WAS the physical embodiment of the kingdom, a way to live out Jesus' plan on earth.

Philemon (1 chapter)

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in Christ. ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Paul couldn't fathom the idea of **VIEWING** church online when you could be **DOING** church in-person.

Philemon (1 chapter)

Without the
DIVERSITY of the
fellowship...

...we can't fully
"GET IT",

...we can't fully
be aware of all
our blessings.

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the

saints, ⁶ and I pray that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in Christ. ⁷ For I have derived

much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Finding gratitude difficult?

Philemon

WOW!

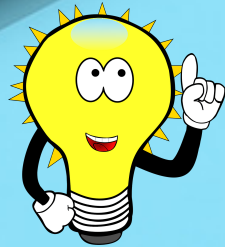
Onesimus was
Philemon's
slave who
apparently
(verse 18-19)
stole from
Philemon and
ran away.

8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, 9 yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— 10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. 11 (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) 12 **I am sending him** back to you, sending my very heart.

And Paul is sending this letter with
Onesimus.



Slavery in the New Testament



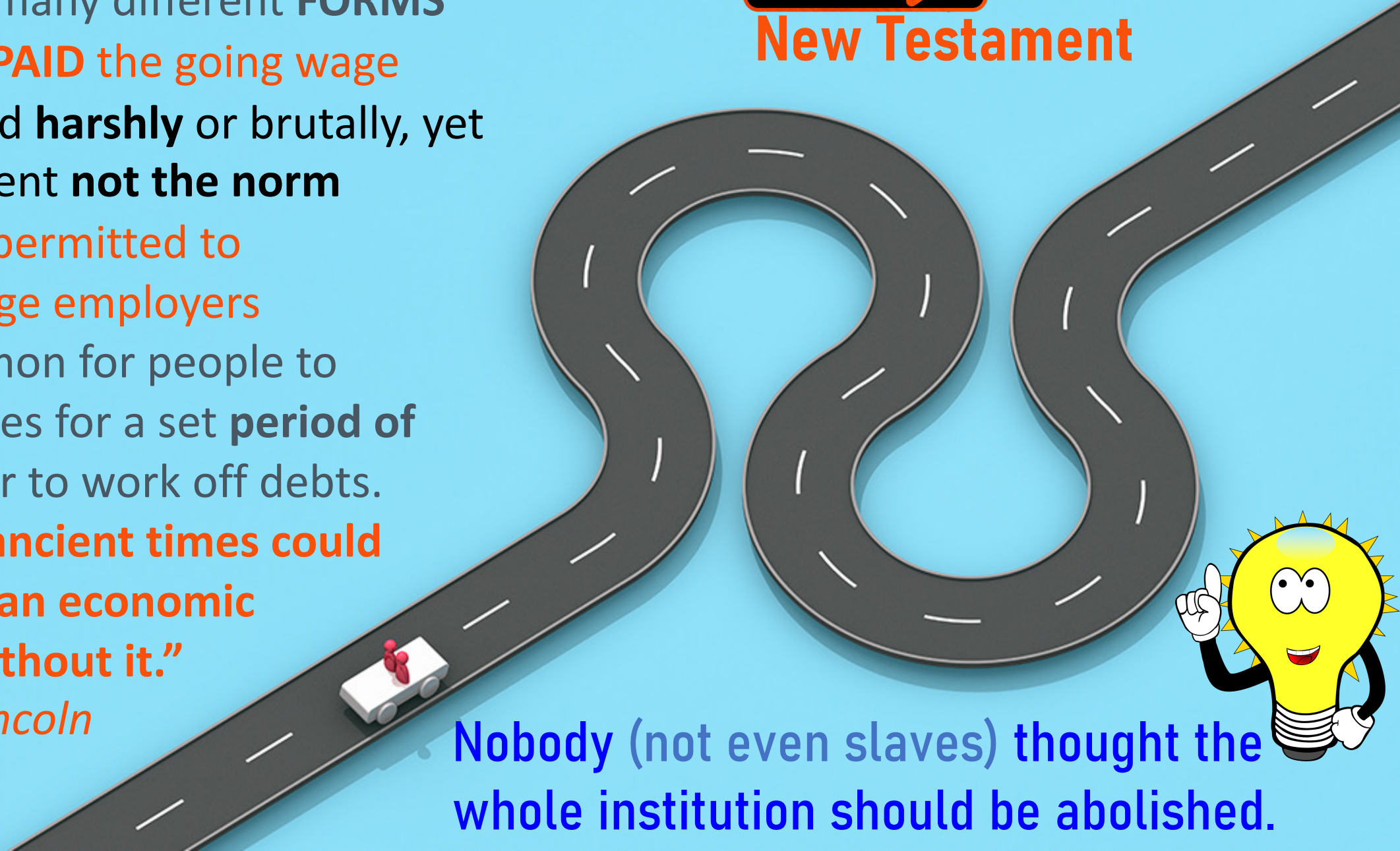
NT slavery \neq African slave trade

- This is **NOT** African slave trade
- There were many different **FORMS**
- Many were **PAID** the going wage
- Some treated **harshly** or brutally, yet such treatment **not the norm**
- Many were permitted to quit or change employers
- Not uncommon for people to become slaves for a set **period of time** in order to work off debts.
- “**No one in ancient times could conceive of an economic structure without it.**”

– *Andrew Lincoln*



Slavery in the New Testament



Nobody (not even slaves) thought the whole institution should be abolished.

Philemon

So, this letter was sent by Paul to Philemon.

And Onesimus himself was the courier!



8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, 9 yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— 10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. 11 (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) 12 I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.

What's Onesimus feeling?

Philemon

There are
some things
that truly are
required of us.

In the words
of Andy
Stanley, they
are required
by love itself.

8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to **do what is required**, 9 yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— 10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. 11 (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) 12 I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.

What does love require of me?

Philemon

I have **chosen**
to NOT pursue
the route of...

- Authority
- Command
- Hierarchy
- Force
- Strength
- Over/Under
- Pecking Order
- Might
- Power

8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to
command you to do what is required, 9 yet for love's sake I
prefer to appeal to you...



Philemon

*I could
command you.*

*But I prefer to
appeal to you.*

*“You can
enforce
behavior,
but not
kindness.”*

8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, 9 yet **for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you**—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— 10 I **appeal** to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. 11 (Formerly he was **useless** to you, but now he is indeed **useful** to you and to me.) 12 I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.



Philemon

Paul appeals
on the basis of
family.

*(Jesus said
his family is
defined by a
common love
for God and
from God)*

10 I appeal to you for **my child**, Onesimus, whose **father** I became in my imprisonment. 11 (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) 12 I am sending him back to you, sending **my very heart**.



Philemon

Paul again
expresses
how he
PREFERS to
deal with
people and
handle
conflict.

13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, 14 but **I preferred** to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. 15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon

Q. What's your preference?

My natural tendency is to just want to jump in and get it done. Then apologize later.

(not always the most sensitive)

13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, 14 but **I preferred** to do nothing with him, so that your goodness might not be in accord with me, but with truth. 15 For I would rather be away from you for a while, longer as a beloved brother—especially in the flesh—than be absent from you, both



Philemon

Paul basically
tells him to
START ALL
OVER AGAIN
with Onesimus.
But this time as
SIBLINGS, *NOT*
HIERARCHY.

13 I would have
that he might
imprisonment
nothing with
might not
this perhaps
that you
bondservant

Business owners, how do
you treat people? ...with
the dignity of a child or
brother or sister?

Do you manage people
on your job? How do you
treat them? ...with the
dignity of a child or
brother or sister?

brother—especially to me, but now much more to you, both
in the flesh and in the Lord.

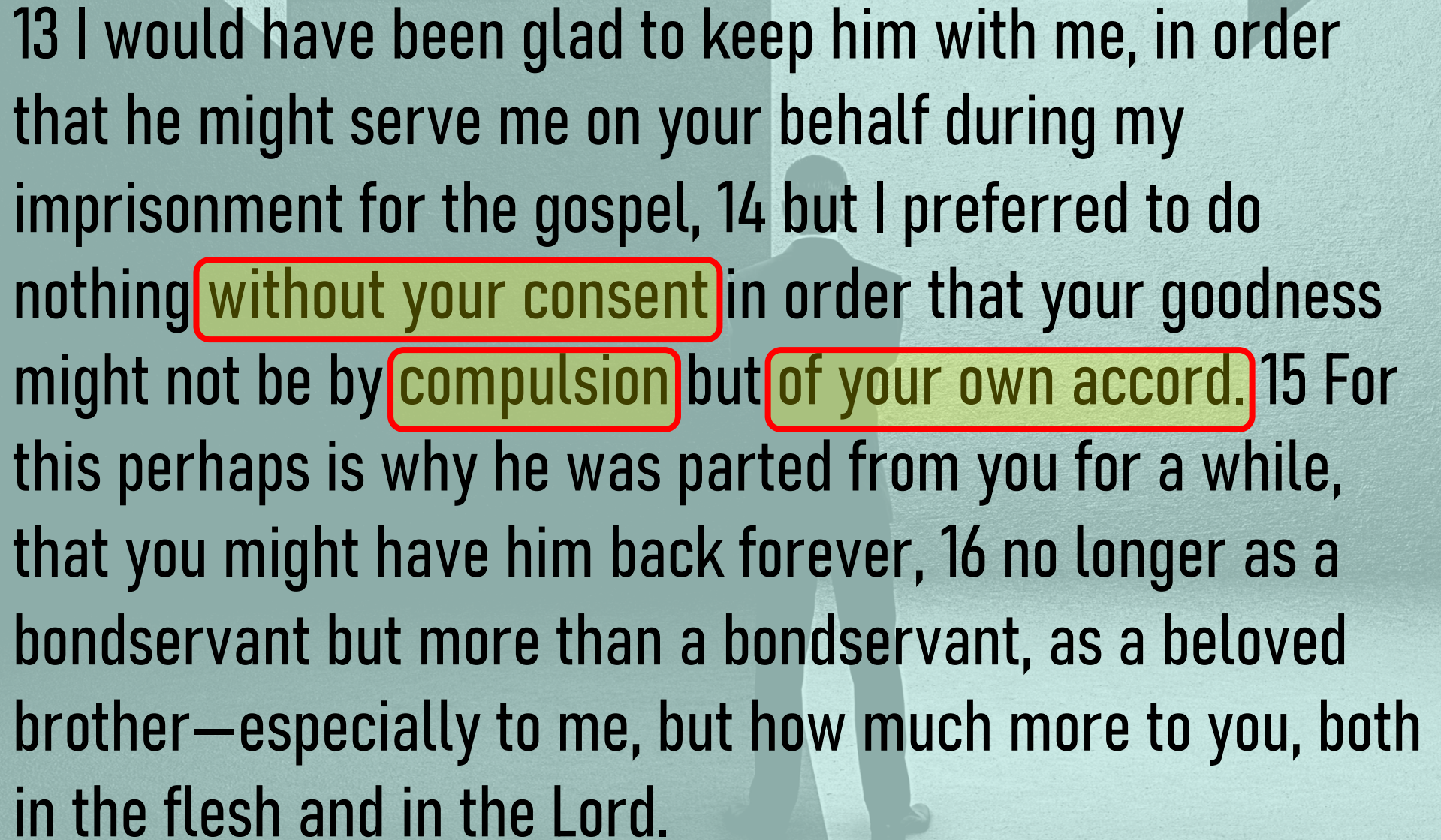
with me, in order
ring my
ferred to do
at your goodness
own accord. 15 For
you for a while,
6 **no longer** as a
ant, as a beloved

Philemon

Paul does the
hard work.

*He takes the
time to ensure
consent.*

*He helps folks to
make decisions
of their own
accord.*

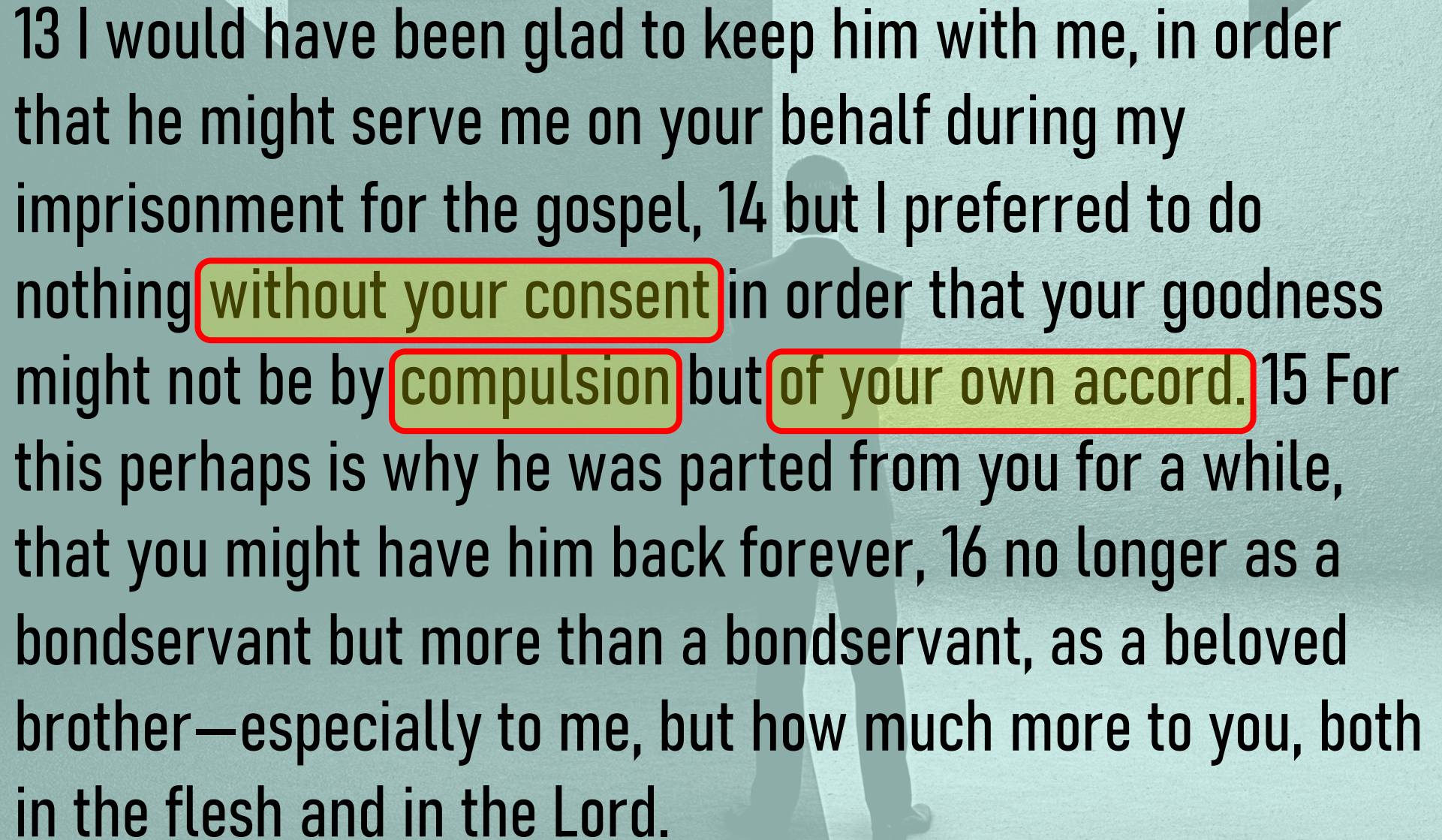


13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, 14 but I preferred to do nothing **without your consent** in order that your goodness might not be by **compulsion** but **of your own accord.** 15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon

Isn't this the
**HEART OF A
PARENT?**

...take all the
time you need
...focus on
heart and
motive more
than behavior.



13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, 14 but I preferred to do nothing **without your consent** in order that your goodness might not be by **compulsion** but **of your own accord.** 15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon

Paul wanted
reconciliation.

He wanted
Philemon
to welcome,
to embrace,
to forgive,
to restore, and
to reconcile.

Do you remember that
hero/celebrity who you
might meet and how you
might welcome them into
your home?

For Philemon, Paul was
THAT hero. Paul was
THAT celebrity.

Paul tells him to treat
Onesimus the way YOU'd
treat Paul McCartney if
he were to come over.

partner, **welcome him as you**
s wronged you at all, or if he



Philemon

Charge it to
my account!

Q. What
parable of
Jesus shows
this heart?

The Good
Samaritan.

17 So if you
would we

owes you

write this

of your own

please do not

Christ. 21 C

more, I write

room for me

will be graciously given to you.



s you
if he
ul,
thing

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I

Philemon

Acts 19:10 and Colossians 1:7 might indicate the Colossian church being planted by Paul's disciple, Epaphras.

Paul begins & ends with grace.

23 **Epaphras**, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

25 The **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.



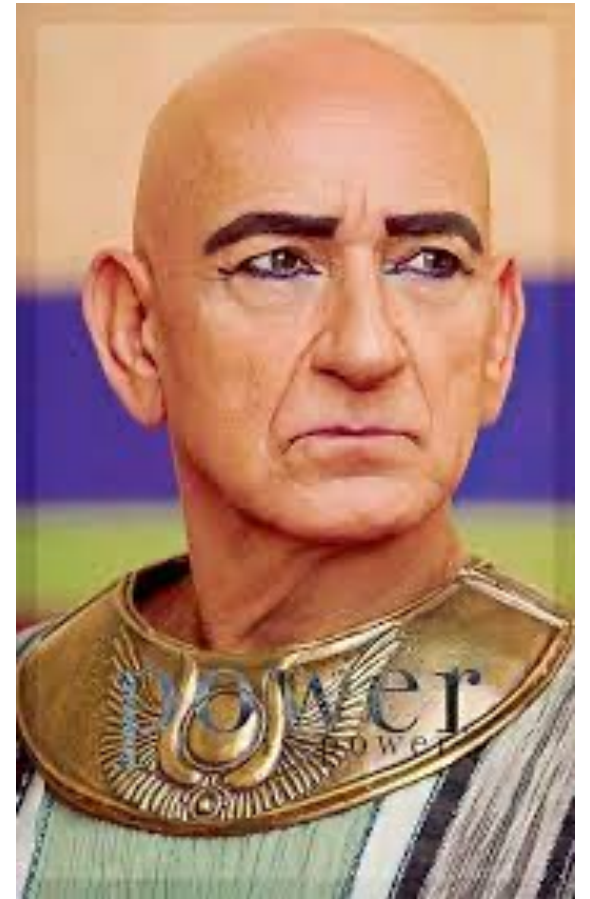
KEEPING IT REAL

Scot McKnight:

Philemon, has probably been shamed (at least in the household);

Philemon probably was also financially damaged.

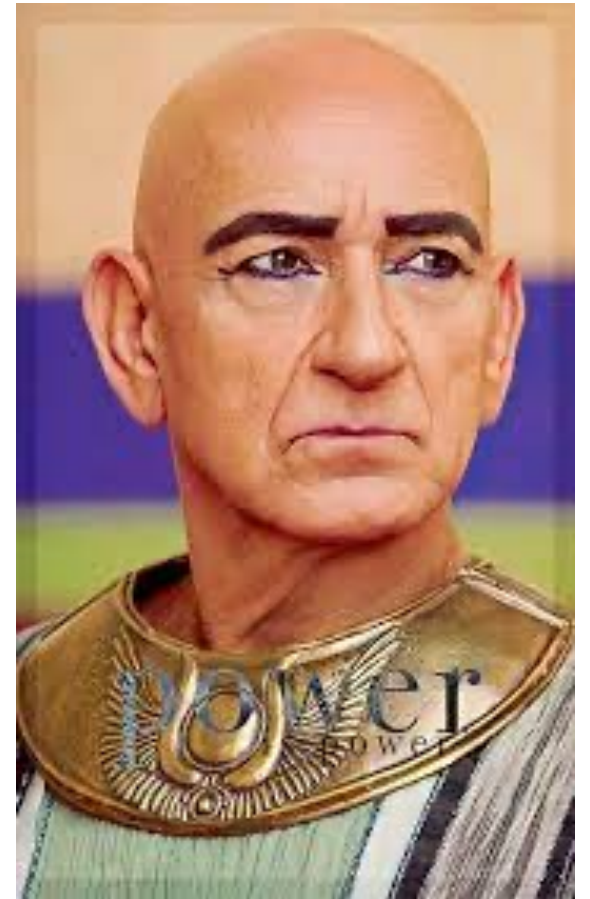
So, we are looking at a slave who has offended the honor of a slavemaster.



KEEPING IT REAL

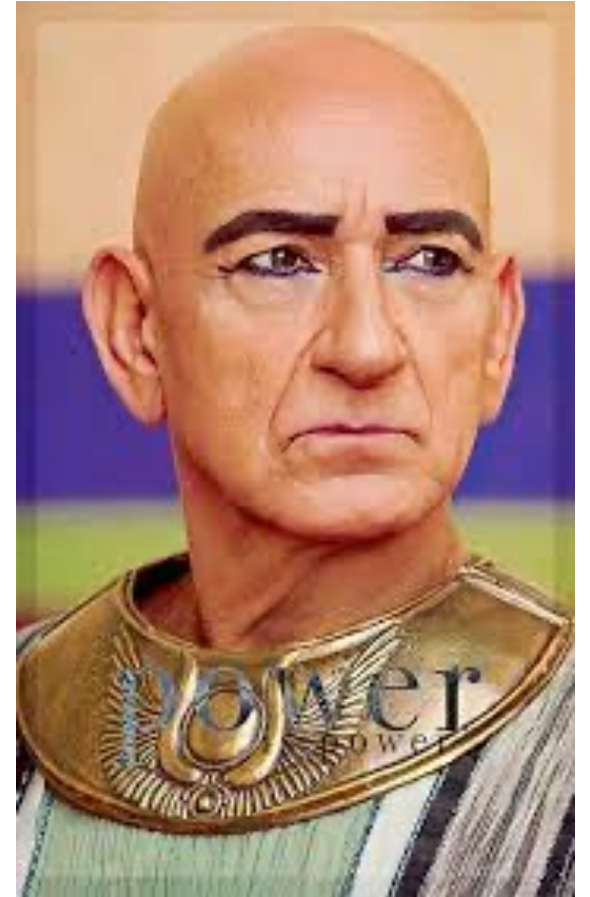
So, how did the disciple of Christ, **Philemon**, feel when, out of the blue, Onesimus just up and disappears without a note or any info?

How does a good-hearted follower of Christ feel when the man who owes him a debt just up and leaves, ignoring the agreement they had made?



KEEPING IT REAL

So, how's **Philemon** feeling when, out of the blue, **Onesimus shows up at his doorstep**, and he sees him for the first time in several years --- after Onesimus just ran off (and possibly stole something), violating the contract between them, and leaving his debt unpaid.

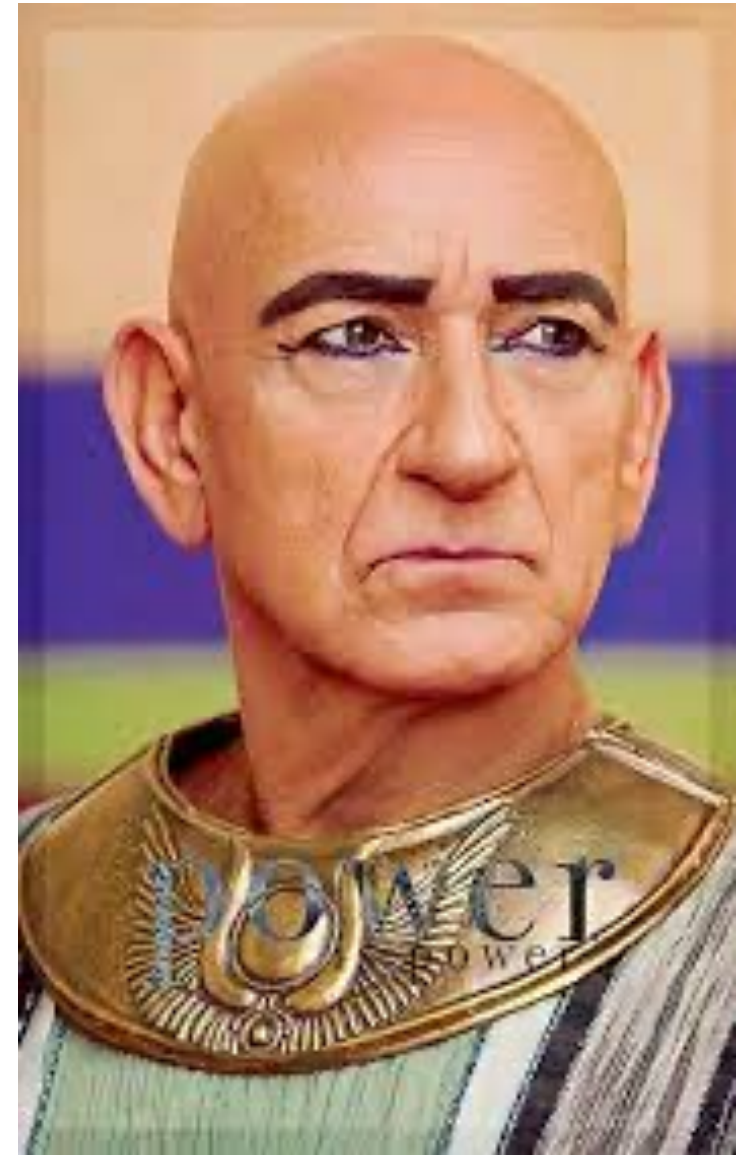


KEEPING IT REAL

So, what's **Philemon** thinking after finding out that Onesimus is now his brother in Christ?

And he finds out that Onesimus knew the apostle Paul, and even assisted him, and was disciplined by him?

And when he reads the letter?



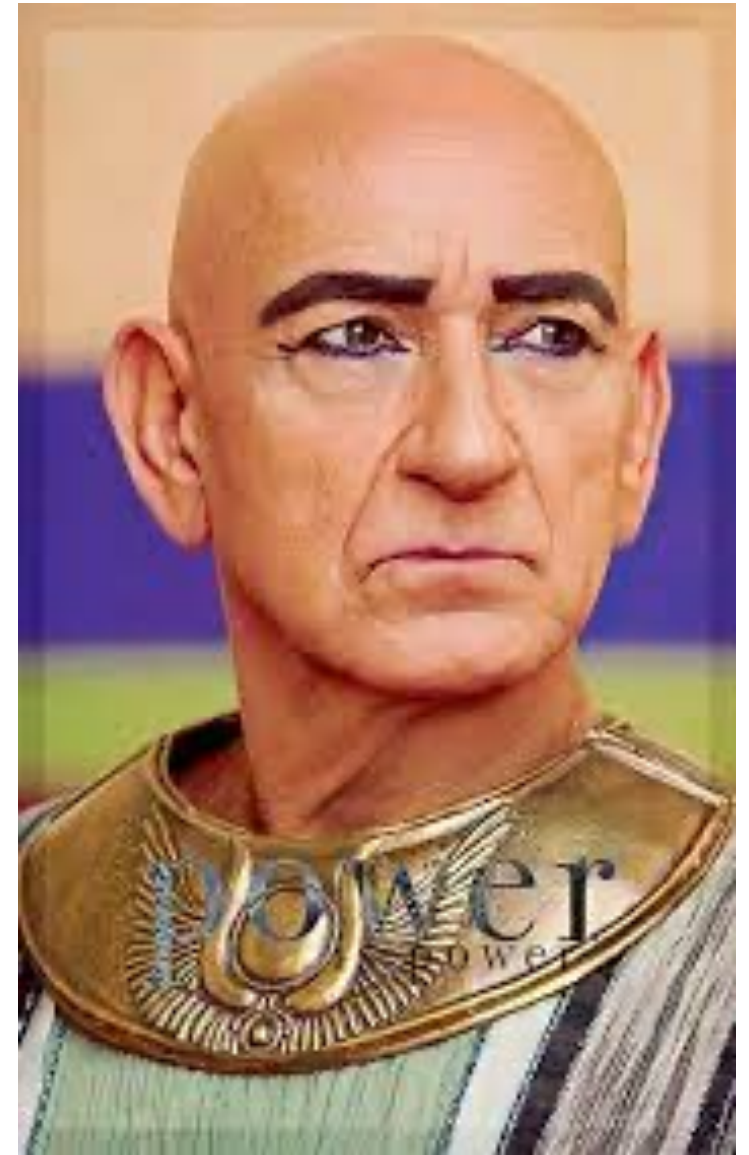
KEEPING IT REAL

Should he punish Onesimus?

If so, how?

If not, then what about the other servants? How do they feel when they see him treating Onesimus so kindly?

Does he hug Onesimus?



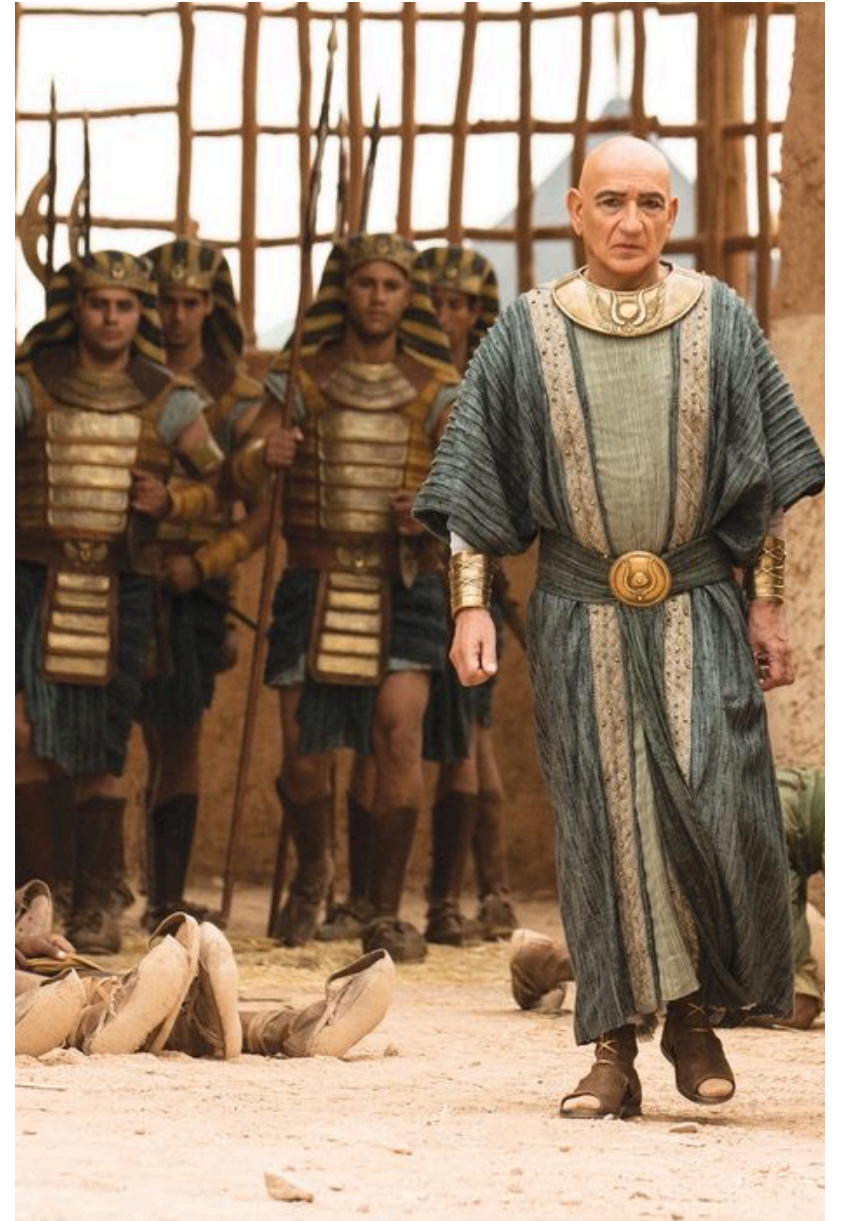
KEEPING IT REAL

Does he hug the other servants now?

Is it clear that he's treating Onesimus better?

Or is he now forced to treat everyone the same?

Will the others now take advantage of his kindness?



KEEPING IT REAL

What about **Onesimus**? How's he feel when Paul tells him that THIS is the way of the cross?

How does he feel about going back home and reconciling?

What if Philemon is no longer a believer? Or if Philemon is a believer who no longer wants to be Christ-like?

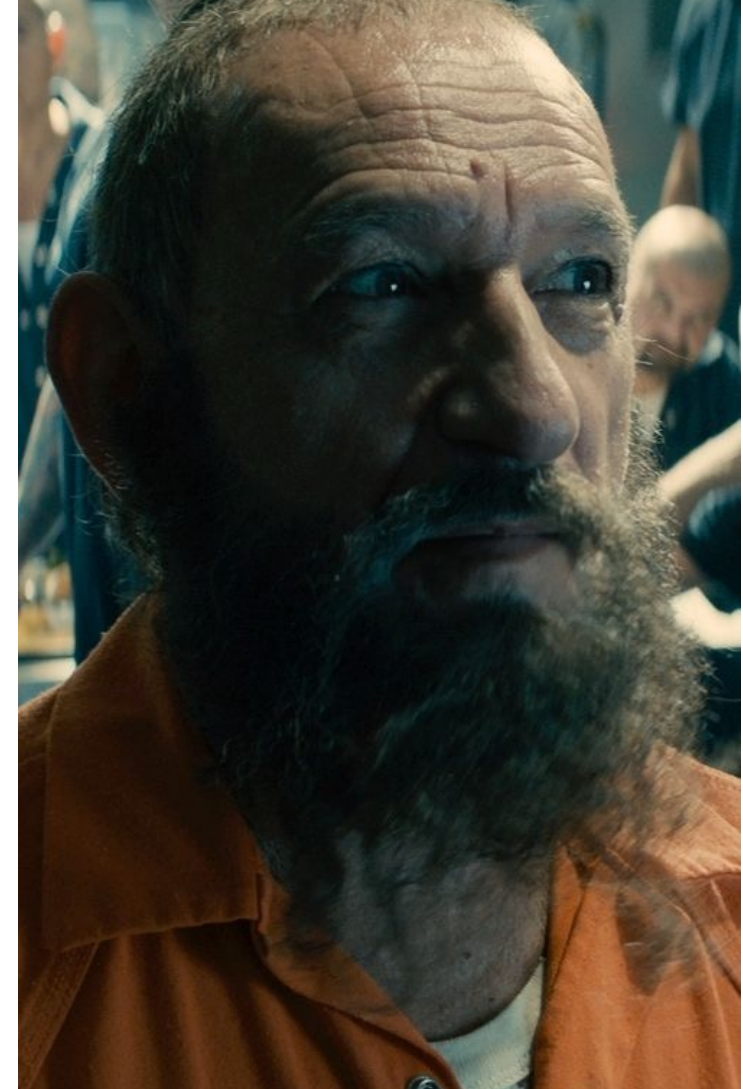


KEEPING IT REAL

What is maybe most amazing about this letter... is this:

Philemon is put into the corner of decision by **Paul**.

Paul asks Philemon in front of all:
[a] "What's your answer, Philemon?"
[b] "How Christian are you, man?"
[c] "How gospel-shaped will your household be?"



This trip for everyone involved is **A Real Power Trip**



Saint Paul *has to choose to sacrifice his power for relationship.*



Onesimus *has to choose to give up any and all power he has.*



Philemon *has to choose to not make decisions based on his power.*

Choosing to **NOT USE** your power...

THAT *demonstrates* that you **agree with Jesus'** new world order of the last being first, his world of the upside-down.



The Apostle Paul



Onesimus



Philemon

Choosing to **NOT USE** your power...

THAT is what proves that you believe in Jesus' principles, regardless of how it might *negatively* affect your life.



The Apostle Paul



Onesimus



Philemon

Choosing to **NOT USE** your power...

THAT is what shows you have **REAL FAITH**
in what Jesus was bringing about.



The Apostle Paul



Onesimus



Philemon

PAUL: He was required to have **FAITH** that **[1]** Jesus' love was still *inspiring* Philemon, and that **[2]** the Holy Spirit was still *molding* Philemon's heart.



The Apostle Paul



Onesimus



Philemon

ONESIMUS: He was required to have **FAITH** that God would bless his decision to “do the right thing”, whatever that might mean.



The Apostle Paul



Onesimus



Philemon

PHILEMON: He was required to have **FAITH** that treating people with kindness wasn't soft/wimpy, but instead it was Christ-like. He was required to **BELIEVE** that God would honor his self-denial.



The Apostle Paul



Onesimus



Philemon



Philemon is a
NORTH STAR example
for how TO live life.



If you're not facing
similar, tough **INTERNAL**
questions that you have
to ponder, then **now** is
the time to grab reality!



So, let's talk about the cookies!

UC Berkeley psychologist Dacher Keltner performed “the cookie monster” study.

- [1] Keltner brought in groups of **three people**.
- [2] He RANDOMLY assigned one of them to be the leader.
- [3] He gave the groups a writing assignment.
- [4] One hour into the activity, **four fresh-baked cookies** were brought out. That's **4 cookies** for **3 people**.

Keltner says the same thing happened every time; at first, everyone ate a cookie and left the last one out of politeness. But **who ate the last cookie?** **Almost always**, it was whoever had been assigned the leadership role.



So, what do we learn?

- Power can be **easily abused**. You hardly see it in coming.
- Abuse of power has nothing to do with **personality**.
- Abuse of power has nothing to do with **age**.
- Abuse of power can be **quickly learned**. *By anyone*.
- **Guard** your own heart! Be aware that you can **quickly and easily** become corrupted and selfish.
- You can be living your normal Christian life; you show up at church, and they offer you some cookies. And all of a sudden, **you can be corrupted**, all by a tiny bit of power...
...power that you didn't even work for to achieve.



So, which of these 3 represents your own Power Trip?



Saint Paul, who *had* power in the church, **yet chose** to sacrifice that power for the idea of appealing to others on the basis of relationship.



Onesimus, who *had* power over his life and decisions, **yet chose** to trust God and give up any and all power he has.



Philemon, who *had* power over an estate and its people **yet** was faced every day with a choice to just be a brother in Christ who does not leverage his power for his own purposes.