

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 9/5/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, September 6 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, again pray for those who are suffering from extreme climate conditions. Ask for GOD to ease the suffering, both of individuals and of our planet. Seek the HOLY SPIRIT'S guidance for how to assist others and for how better to honor GOD'S call to caretake creation.*

There are many times where people use the Bible to support their position on certain issues. Sometimes this is done accurately and sometimes verses are taken out of context. There are also times when opposing sides will use passages from the same text to support their arguments.

This past Sunday, our first reading was from Paul's letter to Philemon. Paul had led Philemon to faith previously. Now, Philemon's slave, Onesimus, had run away and come to Paul. Through Paul's mentoring, Onesimus had also become a believer. Paul had written the letter to accompany Onesimus when Paul sent him back to Philemon.

Prior to and during the Civil War in America, both sides of the slavery issue used this letter to support their position.

It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of CHRIST JESUS—that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—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 fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in CHRIST. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

Those who supported slavery, quoted portions of the letter as evidence that slaves belonged to their masters and that runaway slaves should be returned to the ones who owned them. On the other hand, those who opposed slavery cited parts of this letter as a call to free slaves and to treat them as equals.

When we hear someone quoting scripture to support their argument, and particularly when that argument seems counter to what we believe, it is a good idea to take time to study that passage. Often, because it may be just one or two verses that are being spoken, read the entire passage—the paragraph that contains the verses or even the entire chapter. Ask what seems to be the overall message of that reading and how does that fit with the way the verses are being used? Ultimately, and especially when

there seems not to be a clear answer from the words of the Bible, consider the overall message of scripture to ask which position, ours or the opposing one, seems best to fulfill what GOD intends for us as believers in JESUS CHRIST.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey