

Discussion Questions:

Breakout Session 1

1. How has our society been shaped by slavery?
2. How has religion and/or your religious tradition played a role in that?

Breakout Session 2

Paul uses different vocabularies in this letter:

- Religious/Moral (service, love, duty, obedience)
 - Economic (account, owe, profit)
 - Familial (beloved brother, father)
1. How do these vocabularies work together or contradict each other?
 2. What would justice look like in this relationship between Onesimus and Philemon?
 3. What might this text have to teach us in light of the legacy of slavery in the U.S. and the economic inequalities in our communities today?

Philemon

¹Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, ²to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God ⁵because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. ⁶I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. ⁷I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

⁸For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, ⁹yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. ¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. ¹²I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. ¹³I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. ¹⁵Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, ¹⁶no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If 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. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. ²⁰Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

²²One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

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

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

Philemon (with Greek terms included)

¹Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker ([synergō](#) - fellow worker, companion in labor), ²to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house ([oikon](#) - material building, household, family):

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God ⁵because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. ⁶I pray that the sharing ([koinōnia](#) - participation, partnership, contributory help) of your faith may become effective ([energēs](#) - productive of due result, at work) when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. ⁷I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

⁸For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty ([anēkon](#) - is due, suitable, proper), ⁹yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love ([agapé](#) – good will, benevolence, affection) —and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰I am appealing ([parakaleó](#) - beseeching, encouraging, admonishing) to you for my child, Onesimus ([Onēsimon](#) - useful, profitable), whose father I have become ([egennēsa](#) - I beget, give birth to) during my imprisonment. ¹¹Formerly he was useless ([achrēston](#) - unprofitable, detrimental) to you, but now he is indeed useful ([euchrēston](#) - serviceable, very profitable) both to you and to me. ¹²I am sending him, that is, my own heart ([splágxnon](#) – internal organs, affections, capacity for deep emotions), back to you. ¹³I wanted to keep ([katechein](#) - take possession of, hold firmly, lay hold of) him with me, so that he might be of service ([diakonē](#) - wait at table, minister to) to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary ([hekousion](#) - willing, spontaneous) and not something forced ([anankēn](#) - under duress, threatened with violence/torture). ¹⁵Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have ([apechēs](#) - receive in full, possess) him back for ever, ¹⁶no longer as a slave but as more than a slave a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me your partner ([koinōnon](#) - a sharer, joint participant), welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has wronged you ([ēdikēsen](#) - act unjustly, injure, harm) in any way, or owes ([opheilei](#) - be indebted, owes legal or economic duties) you anything, charge that to my account ([elloga](#) - I charge to my account, impute it to me). ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay ([apotisō](#) - pay off, pay what is due) it. I say nothing about your owing ([prosopheileis](#) - intensified owing, be indebted on a personal level) me even your own self. ²⁰Yes, brother, let me have this benefit ([onaimēn](#) - I profit, benefit, derive benefit) from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

²²One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored ([charisthēsomai](#) - shown favor, freely given, bestowed) to you.

²³Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow-workers ([synergoi](#) - companions in labor).

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

²³Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow-workers ([synergoi](#) - companions in labor).

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