

克利夫蘭華人教會

Cleveland Chinese Christian Church

474 Trebisky Road, Richmond Heights, OH 44143 (216) 531-2499

3224 Payne Ave., Cleveland, OH 44114 (216) 621-1412

Youth Pastor Letter

July 2017

Dear Church Family,

During youth group for the past several weeks, we have studied the book of Philemon. Philemon is tiny and often overlooked letter written by Paul, but it is powerful with gospel truth. In this letter Paul asks Philemon to allow Onesimus, a runaway slave, to return without fear of punishment, even though he deserved severe punishment for his disobedience. Paul not only asks that Philemon accept Onesimus back, but also that he welcome him as a brother in Christ.

Onesimus's name means "useful." Paul uses a play on words with his name when he writes, "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me" (Philemon 11). Once a useless, rebellious slave, Onesimus became useful through the saving and transforming grace of God.

The truth is, before Christ, we were Onesimus. We were useless. We were rebellious thieves and runaway slaves. Deserving punishment for our sins, we feared returning home to our Master. We felt ashamed, worthless, and unloved.

He stepped a substitute, one willing to take for us all the punishment we deserved. The Son of God paid the penalty we were due at the cross. He wiped the slate clean, clothed us with his righteousness, and allowed us to return home to the Father without fear, and with full acceptance, covered by the perfect works of Christ.

Because of Paul, Onesimus was welcomed back into Philemon's home. Because of Jesus, we are welcomed into God's. Martin Luther put it this way: "As Christ does for us with God the Father, so does Paul with Philemon for Onesimus. We are all God's Onesimi."

The book of Philemon reminds us also that we have other Onesimi in our lives. Paul shows us in Philemon what gospel love looks like. The gospel not only changes our status and makes us new; it also changes how we love others.

When we have been wronged or wounded, we need to extend the same forgiveness that we have received through Christ. As Paul pointed out to Philemon, we've been forgiven for much more than the sins others have committed against us (Philemon 19).

As always, if you have any questions, comments, or prayer requests, please contact me at jmlilley@clevelandccc.org.

In Christ,
Pastor Jonathan Lilley