

often equated with slave as the numbers of these people in slavery was so great.

Apparently Onesimus fled his bonds and descended to Rome, likely to be lost in the multitudes of that city. In Rome he became engaged to the Apostle Paul--and it is the author's speculation that it was while Paul was in prison that Onesimus may have been imprisoned also--and was converted. Apparently he was not being held by the law as a runaway slave and when released from Paul's fellowship the Apostle dispatched him to his master. Perhaps Paul had known him before in the company of Philemon but whatever the case the Apostle thought enough of Philemon's friendship and judgment to return to him a runaway slave.

4. Slavery

Slavery was everywhere common in the ancient world and it was a considerable time being expended in Christian circles. The Old Testament in fact had accepted it as a common practice and prescribed rules for its control that it might not be overbearing or tyrannical. All persons of note possessed slaves and this was common in the early church as in the world.

Roman law required the return of a slave to his master. In original condition there were laws binding the hands of the masters to a certain extent in the care of their slaves. These laws were extremely wide and vanished altogether in the practice of disciplining runaways. Many masters had returned slaves cruelly branded and maimed in any one of several ways. They could