

Welcome To

Malvern Bible Chapel



Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Part of the Heart-to-Heart Series

Philemon 1-25

Robert L. Watt
July 1, 2018

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Philemon 1-25 (NKJV)

- ¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy *our* brother,
To Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer, ² to the beloved
Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your
house:
- ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ.
- ⁴ I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,
⁵ hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord
Jesus and toward all the saints, ⁶ that the sharing of your faith may
become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which
is in you in Christ Jesus. ⁷ For we have great joy and consolation in
your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by
you, brother.

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Philemon 1-25 (NKJV)

- ⁸ Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, ⁹ yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains, ¹¹ who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.
- ¹² I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, ¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. ¹⁴ But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.
- ¹⁵ For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Philemon 1-25 (NKJV)

¹⁷ If then you count me as a partner, receive him as *you would* me. ¹⁸ But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. ²⁰ Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

²¹ Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. ²² But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, ²⁴ *as do* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.

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



Onesimus

Once Useless, Now Useful

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Introduction:

- Previously we looked at Mephibosheth—saved by grace.
- Background to this letter: Paul's 3rd missionary journey, return to Jerusalem, beaten, falsely charged, plotted against, imprisoned in Caesarea more than 2 years, appeal to Caesar, miraculous trip to Rome, under house arrest 2 years but free to receive all, teach & preach (Acts 28:30-31).
- Numerous opportunities for Paul to be a witness to soldiers, religious & political leaders and Jews at Rome (Acts 22-28).
- Like Joseph who was falsely imprisoned for 13 years, Paul was not bitter. He saw this as God's sovereign will at work for the salvation of many, including one slave Onesimus!

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Introduction (cont):

- Out of his prison experience came Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and this letter to Philemon.
- The short letter to Philemon is more like a postcard than an epistle, but in it we have one of the most beautiful pictures of grace that is found in the NT. It is the story about three men: Philemon, a man whose name means “one who is loving and kind”; Onesimus, a runaway slave who had need of that loving kindness (grace); and finally the Apostle Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus (v.1) who became the mediator to bring the other two together in a beautiful and gracious way.

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Paul's greeting (v. 1-3)

- Paul: The prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ, not Rome! Timothy was with him in prison.
- Philemon: The recipient of the letter. He was led to the Lord by Paul (v.19). The church at Colosse met in his house (v.2). Paul had not founded the church there, nor had he visited it (Col. 1:1-8; 2:1). It probably started as a result of his ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10,20,26) and perhaps Epaphras was the founder, but now he had gone to Rome to help Paul (v.23).
- Apphia was probably Philemon's wife. Archippus was either their son or a leading brother who took Epaphras' place when he went to be with Paul in Rome (see Col. 4:17).
- Grace and peace—usual church greeting for Gentiles (grace) and Jews (peace—shalom).

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Paul's affirmation (praise) to Philemon (v. 4-7)

- He describes his friend Philemon as a man of love and faith, both towards the Lord Jesus and God's people. His was a practical love—he “refreshed” the saints (helped them to rest from their hard labor). He was living out the meaning of his name! Paul was praying for him and asking God to make his witness even more effective (“go to work”), and that he would have a deeper understanding of all that he had in Christ. The better we know Christ (see Col. 1, written at the same time but for the whole church), the better we can share Him with others and to act in a Christ-like manner in our relationships with one another.

Paul's appeal (plea) concerning Onesimus (v. 8-16)

- Having prepared Philemon for what would follow, Paul now begins his appeal for Onesimus (whose name means “useful” or “profitable”), one of Philemon's slaves who ran away to Rome (after robbing his master?).
- 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire; get lost (like prodigal son) but found by Paul who led him to the Lord and now mediates for his return.

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Paul's appeal (plea) concerning Onesimus (cont.) (v. 8-16)

Paul uses 5 arguments in his appeal to Philemon.

- 1. Philemon's reputation (v.8)**—Paul desired to be refreshed like others
- 2. Christian love (v.9)**—Paul did not use apostolic authority to compel Philemon, but instead tactfully appeals to him for love's sake
- 3. Onesimus' salvation (v.10)**—Onesimus left a slave but now he is Paul's son in the faith and Philemon's brother in Christ. This did not cancel his debt or change his legal status, but it did change his standing before God and His people in the local church.
- 4. Onesimus' value (v.11-14)**—Paul uses a play on words with Onesimus' name, but also with Philemon's. If the slave was supposed to live up to the meaning of his name, how about a Christian that is supposed to be "loving and kind" and do good deeds?
- 5. God's providence (v.15-16)**—Had God sovereignly allowed Onesimus to depart for a short time so that he could become a believer and come back permanently to his master?

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Paul's assurance (promise) (v. 17-21)

- Not an easy decision for Philemon. Can't be too easy or too hard on Onesimus, but still the debt had to be paid.
- The solution is Paul, a “partner” with Philemon (v.17), who has all in common; he tells Philemon to put Onesimus' debt on his account! (v.18)
- This is a beautiful picture of what Christ has done with our debt! This debt is not forgiven, but it is paid by another to redeem us. Love pays the price (see Titus 3:4).
- God saves sinners by his grace (Eph. 2:8-9)—also written at this time! God does not give us what we deserve (this is mercy), but pays the price and gives us what we don't deserve (grace). Paying the price is “imputation” (reckon to me His merit; reckon to Him my demerit). This is God's double-entry bookkeeping system! “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity.” (Psa. 32:2; Rom. 4:1-8).
- Paul had a special place in his heart for slaves, perhaps from his conversations with Onesimus. He also hoped soon to be free (v.21).

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Paul's benediction (v. 22-25)

- Paul concludes this beautiful note with his usual personal requests and greetings. He expected to be released and wanted to visit Philemon and Apphia (v.22). This fact should also encourage them to forgive Onesimus and not be ashamed at his coming. Are there any that we have not forgiven, that we would be ashamed of at Christ's coming?
- Epaphras (v.23) is commended for being a fellow prisoner. We don't know if he volunteered to help Paul or whether he had actually been arrested as well by the Romans. Mark is John Mark (v.24a), Barnabas' cousin, finally restored to useful service to Paul once again as the result of Barnabas' exhortation (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11).
- Aristarchus (v.24b) was from Thessalonica and he accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and then on to Rome (Acts 19:29; 27:2). Demas (v.24c) is mentioned three times in Paul's letters (v.24; Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:10). Whereas John Mark started out a failure and was later restored, Demas started out well and later forsook Paul "having loved this present world".

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Paul's benediction (cont.) (v. 22-25)

- Luke (v.24d) was the “beloved physician” (Col. 4:10) who accompanied Paul and eventually wrote the Gospel according to Luke and the Book of Acts. All these men were considered Paul’s fellow laborers.
- Paul’s benediction (v.25) was his “official signature” for his letters (2 Thess. 3:17-18). In it he emphasizes once again the grace of God. It was the grace of God that made our salvation possible (Eph. 2:1-10). It was by grace that Paul could declare “Charge that to my account!” and “Receive him as you would receive me!”.

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

What ever happened to Onesimus?

- He no doubt was received by Philemon and became an integral part of the local church at Colosse. Ignatius, a church father writing to the Ephesian assembly 50 years later, speaks of their bishop/elder called Onesimus as the one “who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me”. This is language right out of v.11!
- It seems that Paul’s letters were probably collected, copied, and compiled at Ephesus while Onesimus was there. This explains why such a “minor” letter as this one to Philemon would be included in the NT cannon along with Paul’s other “prison epistles”. We are indeed grateful to God for preserving this beautiful picture of His grace at work restoring Onesimus to be useful again.

Onesimus—Restored by Grace

Application:

1. Philemon

He had been shown grace when he was a condemned sinner that was set free; now he must also show grace and forgiveness and not be held captive by bitterness. What about us?

2. Onesimus

He was once a fugitive from grace; now after receiving God's grace he is free and must return and be restored to useful service to Philemon and to his ultimate master God. What about us?

3. Paul

He was a prisoner of Rome yet free to be an instrument of God's grace; now he needs to trust the sovereign will of God to be done to restore Onesimus to Philemon for God's ultimate glory. What about us?

Missionary Update

CMMML Trip #8 to the DRC

- Situation in the DRC still chaotic; refugee camps; political insecurity, but life still going on in Bunia
- Invited to come; DRC visa application submitted
- Travel dates: Aug 2nd – Sept 4th (Pascal going about 10 days earlier to prepare local logistics)
- Clinical trial restarting (after 9 month delay); not sure if Rwanguba safe; monitor from Uganda
- Ministry 3 weekends at Kabale, 2 at Bunia
- TNT AIDS products for Bunia made in Kampala; Hope Pharmacy Ituri (HPI) started as God wills