

Philemon

“The Art of Restoration (Part 2)”

1:11-25

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I. **Introduction**

This letter brings up some great truths from both Philemon and Onesimus's view:

Philemon: Reveals to us that the most effective way to handle social evils is not through politics or legislation. In this letter Paul indirectly asks, “*How can my brother be my slave?*” *“Paul brings the institution of slavery into an atmosphere where it could only wilt and die. Where master and slave were united in mutual affection as brothers in Christ, emancipation was expedited immediately, where the formal legal confirmation of this new relationship would take far more time.”*

Onesimus: Found out personally that, “*There was not always freedom in freedom, as you can never escape your own conscience and the master of your fallen nature.*”

Onesimus discovered that there is slavery in freedom and coming back to Philemon he would discover that there is freedom in slavery! The question in this life is not whether or not you are slave or free but to whom and what you are slave or free towards! I am yoked willing to my Master Jesus and because of this relationship I am a free man from sin both its penalty and power!

II. Vs. 11-16 Five reasons to restore

In verse 10 Paul makes his “*appeal*” for Onesimus in this little letter to Philemon but the word “*therefore*” in verse 8 tell us that he had already started his appeal.

1. Vs. 8 The First love reminds Philemon of his own progression and maturity when his heart had been transformed by the Holy Spirit. Though the play on words in verse 11 of Onesimus (*profitable*) who was once “*unprofitable*” but now has become truly “*profitable*” was **aimed at Onesimus it was Philemon’s story as well.** Truth is it is every believer’s story as we are all “*Onesimuses*”; we were all unprofitable Onesimuses. By words concerning Philemon’s reputation of love and faith that he had exhibited towards Jesus and through Him towards all believers to the point in which those who were parched had become refreshed is a testimony of just how profitable the Lord had made Philemon.
2. Vs. 9 In the 2nd appeal Paul reminds **Philemon that the action that he wants him to do in love will refresh him.** Paul is now in his 60’s as he says he is “*aged*” as well “*a prisoner of Jesus Christ*” how could he turn down such a request?
3. Vs. 10 The third appeal is based upon the conversion of Onesimus whom Paul says was begotten while Paul was under house arrest. **Paul no longer views Onesimus as a runaway slave but rather as his “son” in the faith which would make him Philemon’s spiritual brother in Christ.** Onesimus’ spiritual transformation didn’t alter his legal situation as he was still a slave and it hadn’t canceled his debt to Philemon. It meant that Onesimus had a standing before God and his people the church which Philemon needed to take in consideration.
4. Vs. 11-14 The fourth appeal is that **Onesimus has become an asset to Paul in ministry** so much so that Paul was making a sacrifice in sending him back but needed to as he had no right to keep him without Philemon’s consent. The word play for both of these two is amazing as Onesimus was as his name suggests “*profitable*” and Paul is asking that he would be towards Onesimus what his name means “*kindly affectionate*” or Philemon. Now in Christ both of these men needed to live up to the meaning of their names.
5. Vs. 15-16 The final appeal relates to divine providence though Paul uses the word “*perhaps*” as he is not being dogmatic. He suggests that God was in control of this situation and permitted Onesimus to go to Rome that he would meet with Paul and become a believer. Onesimus’ departure wasn’t permanent but temporary so that he would come back forever implying that he would join them in eternity not as just a slave but a brother. Onesimus left Philemon as a slave but returns to Colossae as a brother.

These five appeals of the transformation of Onesimus tenderly nudge Philemon to do the right thing for the right reason.

III. Vs. 17-22 Partners in progress

Vs. 17-22 Paul's appeal is powerful because he stands beside a guilty man and says to Philemon "*I know this Onesimus is a criminal and deserves punishment but this slave is my son, so if you punish him punish me also. I'll take his punishment.*" The word for "partner" is the *koinonia* and Paul makes two suggestions to Philemon:

- a. **Receive Onesimus as you would me**: The word in the Greek means to invite a person into your close family. Paul is asking Philemon to invite Onesimus his slave into his close family.
- b. **If he has wronged you or owe anything, put that on my account**: Paul is not asking Philemon to ignore Onesimus's crimes or forgive his debt instead Paul is offering to cover both, insisting that "*I will repay*". The wording of verse 19 is a legal promissory note of the time.

Saint's this is what Jesus asks us to do as well as we are to treat people as if they were Jesus sense they are accepted in the beloved and clothed in His righteousness.

There is an interesting reality that these verses illustrate: **Love is more than a sentiment or a feeling**. True Love requires an action! God does not save us by the sentiment or a feeling of love towards us. God in His holiness cannot ignore the debt we owe, so His love took action and paid what we owed by sending His only Son to die in our stead. That is what "**GRACE**" is, "**LOVE THAT PAYS THE PRICE**". In theological terms this is called "*imputation*" as it means that the action of another has been placed upon our account. When I receive Jesus two things happened: My sin was placed on Him and His righteousness was put on me. Now that I'm accepted in Christ I desire to be acceptable to Christ.

Vs. 20-21 The word "*Joy*" here in the Greek is the root word for the name "*Onesimus*." As Paul uses another play on words to communicate a not so subtle request: "*Let me have Onesimus back from you in the Lord.*" In verse 7 of this letter, Paul said that Philemon was a man who refreshed the heart of the saints now, he specifically tells Philemon how

he can refresh his heart. It appears that Paul expected to be released in his first imprisonment in Rome and said as much here that he planned a visit to Philemon which would also further motivate him to do the right thing for the right reason.

IV. Vs. 23-25 Closing thoughts

Vs. 23-25

- **Epaphras** may have been a pastor of a church near Philemon as he clearly knew him but at this time he was serving Paul under house arrest.
- **Mark** is a name that speaks directly to this situation as Paul had early in his ministry a sharp disagreement with Barnabas over his fitness for ministry that caused a separation of direction in the early missionary team. Yet here we see that Paul practiced what he preached with regards to reconciliation.
- **Aristarchus** was from Thessalonica and accompanied Paul to Jerusalem then to Rome.
- **Demas** is mentioned three times in Paul's letters, twice where he is called his fellow worker and once where we are told in 2 Timothy 4:10 that he had forsaken him, having loved this present world more. Such is the case with human relationships: Some that fail us will be restored, and some that are great will end in failure.
- **Luke** we know well as he traveled extensively with Paul both as his physician and biographer/historian as he wrote the gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts. He was himself most likely a slave that had been either freed or given to Paul. And again serves as an example that like Paul we are not to live as victims of our circumstances but rather as house guests of the living God.

This benediction is Paul's official signature for his letters as it magnifies the grace of

God. It was Jesus after all who said to us, "**Charge what they owe to my account!**"

Receive them as you would Me!"

- The greatest social changes come when people are changed, one heart at a time.
- Being made a *new creation* in Christ does not end our; it increases our obligation, even when restitution is difficult.
- In 110 A.D., the bishop of Ephesus was named Onesimus, if in his late teens or early twenties when Paul wrote this letter, he would then be around 70 in 110 A.D. Historically the letters of Paul were first gathered as a group in the city of Ephesus and it seems as though Onesimus wanted to make sure this letter of freedom and restoration was included.