

# CLASS NOTES -- PHILEMON

**Relationships among the Pastoral Epistles.** (From Explore the Book by J. Sidlow Baxter)

**First Timothy** -- A **charge**, "Guard the deposit" (1:18; 6:13, 20)

**PROTECT** the message.

**Second Timothy** -- a **challenge**, to courage and faithfulness.

**PROCLAIM** the message.

**Titus** -- a **caution**.

**PRACTICE** the message.

**Philemon** -- an **example**, the apostle Paul at work as a good pastor.

**LIVE** the message.

**Outline of Philemon** (J. Sidlow Baxter)

Salutation (1 - 3)

Paul's praise of Philemon (4 - 7)

Paul's plea for Onesimus (8 - 17)

Paul's pledge and assurance (18 - 22)

Salutations and benediction (23 - 25)

## INTRODUCTORY

See Deut. 23:15, 16. The Law required that a man "give asylum" to an escaped slave. Paul could have legally kept Onesimus, even though there seems to be no valid reason for Onesimus to have fled. However he sent him back and (because he was a new creature) he went back voluntarily! Here again grace triumphs over Law.

Notice the meaning of some of the words used. The name "Paul" means "little." The name "Onesimus" means "profitable" (notice the play on words in verse 11, "Which in time past was to thee unprofitable [UNonesimus], but now profitable [Onesimus] to thee and to me." he is now living up to his name). The Greek word translated "consolation" in verse 7 is "*paraklasis*" which is often translated "comfort" and refers to relief which comes when one has been called along side you to help. "Beseech" in verses 9 & 10 is "*parakaleo*," the verb form of the same word. Paul is here calling Philemon along side Onesimus to help him. The name "Philemon" means "affectionate."

## THE STORY

Onesimus, the slave of Philemon, has evidently stolen money from his master (v. 18) and run away from him. Leaving Colosse (Col. 4:9) he finds his way to Rome where Paul is in prison. In some way Paul comes into contact with him and leads him to Christ (v. 10). Paul knows that it is customary for a runaway slave to be terribly beaten or even killed when he is found. However, since Philemon is (probably) a convert of Paul (v. 19) and a brother with high Christian principles (vs. 5 - 7) he sends Onesimus back to his master with a letter to explain the situation and make sure he is well received. With great tact and evidence of love for both Philemon and Onesimus he writes a letter to send back with Onesimus. This book is that letter.

## The BASIS for salvation -- IMPUTATION

What Paul suggests to Philemon illustrates how God dealt with us. The guilt of Onesimus is imputed to Paul (put to Paul's account) and Paul is to bear the blame and pay the debt (vs. 18, 19). Paul's acceptance with Philemon, on the other hand, is imputed to the guilty Onesimus who is to be received as though he were the beloved apostle (v. 17). So our sin was imputed to Christ and He bore the penalty, while His matchless righteousness is imputed to us and we are "accepted in the Beloved" -- with His perfect righteousness on our account (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:6). See pages 4, 5 on reconciliation as illustrated in Philemon.

## The RESULTS of salvation demonstrated in TRANSFORMED LIVES.

**PAUL.** He is living up to his name. His name means "little." Compare another man, (king Saul) for whom Paul was named, who started out "little" and ended up rejected because he became proud (1 Sam. 15:17).

He **WAS** formerly an avid persecutor of the church, "breathing out slaughter (Acts 9:1; 26:10, 11). He was bigoted, self-seeking, self-righteous and cruel. Behold what he has now **BECOME**:

He speaks of himself as a prisoner of Christ (not a prisoner of Rome, nor of his persecutors and enemies -- v. 1).

Believers are now his brethren, dear to him (vs. 1, 2).

He brings grace and peace (not law and slaughter -- v. 3).

He is praying to God (not preying upon God's people -- v. 4).

He is beseeching as "the old man in prison" rather than commanding as the great Apostle (vs. 8, 9 -- NASB).

He now puts other men's interests above his own need (vs. 13, 14). He has the "mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:1 - 8).

He now has a tender and loving care for a lowly and guilty runaway slave (vs. 16, 17).

He now pays the debt of the thief (instead of demanding that the Law exact its penalty -- vs. 18, 19).

He does not hold the debt of gratitude over the head of one he has led to Christ. Instead he looks to him expectantly for that which will come, not as a duty performed, but as the loving out-flow of a transformed life (vs. 19-b - 21).

**PHILEMON.** He is expected to live up to his name -- which means "affectionate."

He **WAS** -- no details given as to his life before he was converted, but see what he has **BECOME**:

He is dearly loved by Paul as a laborer (although he is a rich man with slaves -- v. 1).

His house is given to the Lord as a meeting place for the church. He may have been its "pastor" (v. 2).

He is known as one who loves all saints and refreshes their hearts (vs. 5, 7).

He can be an effective witness to others. "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ" (v. 6).

--NIV).

He has a great love for Paul (vs. 13, 17, 22).

He is one who can be counted on to "go the second mile" in his obedience (v. 21).

**ONESIMUS.** He is now living up to his name, which means "profitable" or "useful."

What he **WAS** -- **unprofitable** (V. 11), a runaway slave (v. 15) and, evidently, a thief (v. 18). But consider what he has now **BECOME**:

He is now a believer -- he has been born again (v. 10).

He is profitable (or useful -- v. 11).

He is useful "in the bonds of the gospel," even to Paul, who is not his master (v. 13).

The Greek word used here is found only in two other passages, both of which have to do with usefulness in spiritual ministry ("meet for the Master's use" -- 2 Tim. 4:1 and "profitable to me for the ministry -- 2 Tim. 2:21).

He is a beloved brother both to Paul and Philemon (v. 16). See Col. 4:9 where he is called "our faithful and beloved brother."

He is courageous. He is willing, voluntarily, to return to his master whom he has wronged. While his fellow traveler, Tychicus, is carrying a letter to the whole church at Colosse, Onesimus is evidently bearing this personal letter to Philemon (Col. 4:7 - 9).

### **CHRISTIAN ETHICS in the book of Philemon.**

Notice and appreciate what others do (vs. 1, 2, 5, 11, 23, 24).

Be concerned about young believers. Whether Onesimus was young or old physically, he was young spiritually, just a "babe in Christ."

Do not "throw you weight around" (vs. 8, 9).

Be willing to take the lowly place (v. 9).

Do not take people's love and friendship for granted (vs. 13, 14).

Do not expect others to do all the sacrificing (vs. 18, 19).

Do not take advantage of "moral obligations" to you (v. 19-b).

Expect the best from other believers (v. 21).

Minister gladly, but do not expect to be ministered to (vs. 13, 14).

Take time to be friendly and courteous. This letter could have been much shorter if these ingredients were left out.

Do not try to change the culture (slavery in this case!) but work within the culture to change men. Changed men will eventually change the culture, where it needs to be changed. If John Wesley had spent his life campaigning and demonstrating against slavery he would probably have failed, and the other social wrongs in England would have remained untouched. Instead, he spent his life preaching Christ -- and his converts eventually were able to put an end to slavery (without a civil war!). Many of the other wretched conditions in England were likewise righted, and England became a fountainhead of worldwide missions for several generations.

**PASTORAL LESSONS from Philemon.** Taken as a "Pastoral epistle" this little gem shows us the following things about pastoral work.

The pastor should be concerned with individuals, not just with the church as a whole. Letters can be an effective part of a pastor's ministry -- not just a chore to be endured. The pastor doesn't have to sacrifice principle in order to be tactful.

While the pastor has authority, he doesn't have to use it, and must not abuse it!

Follow-up of converts is as important as winning them to Christ.

While, in First and Second Timothy and Titus, Paul is instructing pastors, in Philemon he **IS** a pastor, and gives us a lovely illustration of a pastor at his best: a glimpse into his own shepherd's heart.

### **RECONCILIATION -- as illustrated in Philemon.**

The dictionary gives the following definitions of the English word "reconcile." **1.** To restore harmony or friendship between, as conflicting parties. **2.** To adjust; settle; as, to *reconcile* differences. **3.** To make content or submissive: with *to*; as, to *reconcile* a person to his losses. **4.** To make to harmonize; make consistent: with *to* or *with*; as, to *reconcile* words with actions.

The Greek words used. **1.** *Apokatallatto* (Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20, 22). **2.** *Katallasso* (Rom. 5:10; 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19, 20). **3.** *Diallattomai* (Matt. 5:24). **4.** *Katallagee* (Rom. 5:11; 1:15; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19). **5.** *Hilaskomai* (Luke 18:13 ["be merciful"]; Heb. 2:17 ["make reconciliation for"]).

In Scripture "reconciliation" means to bring together those who have been alienated, to replace enmity and war with friendship and peace (Matt. 5:23 - 25; Col. 1:21).

Man is at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7; Col. 1:21); God is not the enemy of man (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). Therefore it is man who must be reconciled to God, not God to man. What man is, and what he has done, stands in the way of peace (Isa. 48:22; 57:21). God is all He needs to be, and has done all that He needs to do, to make the peace (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-a, 19; Eph. 2:16, 17; Col. 1:20, 22). HE is our peace. What He is is imputed to us; what we were was imputed to Him -- and He paid the price for our sin, making reconciliation possible without violating the holiness of God.

How can man be reconciled? By believing the gospel (Rom. 5:1).

Although the words "reconcile" or "reconciliation" are not found in Philemon, they are well illustrated here.

The need for reconciliation to God is totally on our part. So the need for reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus was because of the character and actions of Onesimus.

Reconciliation is made possible between God and us by a two-fold imputation. Our sins were imputed to Christ, and He paid for them in full; His righteousness is imputed to us when we believe, and we are accepted in Him (because of what and who He is -- Eph. 1:6). So the debt of Onesimus was imputed to Paul ("put that on my account" -- v. 18) and Paul paid it in full (v. 19). Then the character of Paul was imputed to Onesimus and he was accepted as if he were Paul (v. 17). Compare 2 Cor. 5:21; 8:9).

Our differences with God have been dealt with. Our debt of sin has been paid and no longer stands between us. Our rebellious attitude has been put under His control and we are willing to submit to Him. We have peace with God. So Philemon has been paid what

Onesimus owed to him and the loss to him no longer stands between them. Paul's gracious handling of Onesimus (including leading him to the Lord) has made him willing to return to his master and submit to him gladly. There is peace between them.

Notice some differences however. It was Paul, not Philemon, who laid the foundation for reconciliation by offering to pay what Onesimus owed. With us it was God Himself who paid the price for peace. Onesimus wanted (or at least was willing) to return to Philemon. We have to be sought out and convinced that we need to be reconciled. Also Paul had to plead with Philemon to receive Onesimus back. With us it is God Himself who wants us back -- and pleads with us to return and be reconciled (2 Cor. 5:20).

--- William P Heath < My Documents\Class Notes\New Testament\Philmn-1 > on Microsoft Word

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