

Philemon Part 2

Onesimus: A Transformed Slave

The Book of Philemon is an amazing story of Redemption and Reconciliation.

A) It is the only one of Paul's prison epistles that is written directly to a person: Philemon.

B) Last week we looked at the story as a whole.

C) **If missed it quick recap** - The story is about a run away slave – named Onesimus

1) From the city of Colossae

Onesimus runs away from his master Philemon and ends up in Rome in Prison – **cell mate of Paul**

A) He gets converted to Christ – ends up being a help to Paul –

B) **When it was time for Onesimus** to be released –

1) Paul sends him back home with this letter that He is supposed to deliver to his master.

C) Roman culture a master could have his slave beaten – branded F or even killed for running away

E) Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back – not as a slave but as a brother –

1) If he has wronged you in anyway – Charge it to my account – Beautiful picture of what Jesus did for us!

Read the chapter

So Last week we looked at the whole story – today we want to focus in on Onesimus – **Title.....**

A) See some things that we can learn about true conversion through his story!

B) **Start with his background:** - He was living in the city of Colossae – Asia Minor

C) As far as places go it wasn't a bad place to live

D) Located on the **Lycus river** it was a city of trade – many new faces coming thru –

It was a City with a decent population Base – City of industry –

A) Wool was the prominent industry but not the only industry.

B) **So there was plenty of opportunity in Colossae**

1) Problem He was a slave – He belonged to someone else – **He was not his own.**

Now as far as masters went – Philemon was a good one – **He was known as a loving man**

A) V.7 tells us He actually had a reputation for refreshing the hearts of those who were around him

B) His life – blessed others – He was one who had respect and care for people

1) He no doubt was one of those rare masters who treated his slaves well.

So as a slave we could say Onesimus had it better than most – **But still he wasn't free!**

A) That is what He wanted – He wanted to be free!

B) So when the opportunity came to run – run He did – He Ran fast and he ran far – ROME

1) In order to survive life on the road – **he took what was available – from his masters' house.**

C) Rome was the logical place – It was far / it was big – easy to blend in – easy to get lost in the crowd

1) Rome was the kind of place where there would be lots to do/ lots to explore/ lots to experience good/bad

D) Rome's slogan today would be – **what happens in Rome – Stays in Rome** {**Evil place – decadent place**}

1) The kind of place where a newly freed man would choose to express his new found freedom.

Problem: **He really wasn't free** – Still bound by the emptiness in his heart – Void in his life

A) This void and emptiness – no matter what the experience – always left him longing for more

B) He was a slave to his passions – a slave to pursuing pleasure – a slave to trying to overcome the emptiness

1) This slavery was even greater than the one he knew as a slave to his master

C) His **new master** – was self – and self would never be satisfied!

Well we are not exactly sure what happened but it seems that in his pursuits to be free – **Got in trouble**

A) Ended up in Prison – there he met a man who was also in Prison – **A man named Paul**

B) Now in V. 23 Paul mentions a man by the name of **Epaphras – his fellow prisoner.**

1) Epaphras was from Colossae

C) In fact most scholarship believes that it was Epaphras and Philemon who journeyed from Colossae to Ephesus to hear Paul PREACH

D) Paul started the Church in Ephesus and stayed there 3 yrs as Pastor –

1) The longest place he ever Pastored

Scholars believe that Epaphras and Philemon were converted & went back to Colossae – started Church

A) Epaphras was the first Pastor – before turning the church over to Philemon's son - Archippus

B) Epaphras went off to join Paul in his ministry and that is what landed him in Prison.

C) So it is quite possible that – the way Paul became connected to Onesimus in prison was through Epaphras

D) **Talk about small world right** – Met Jon Courson in the Garden tomb!!!! -

When Onesimus meets Paul – there is something about him that blows Onesimus away.

A) Although a Prisoner- Paul was the **freest man** that Onesimus had ever met –

B) Although that wasn't always the case – At one time Paul was a slave to religion –

C) He was a very religious man – **Student of religion** – became a religious leader

1) His life was all about **ritual and routine** – Following rules and regulations

2) His life was about studying the law of God

D) Things that didn't bring him any closer to God and did nothing to satisfy the longing in his heart

Testimony Romans 7

10 So the good law, which was supposed to show me the way of life, instead gave me the death penalty.

14 The trouble is not with the law but with me, because I am sold into slavery, with sin as my master. ¹⁵I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things. NLT

I am sure that Onesimus could relate – Although his experience took him down a far different path

A) His conscience plagued him as well – He had run from one form of slavery into another that was worse

B) But now He met this man – who although he was in prison – **he was perfectly free** – He was content

1) **He was SATISFIED** - His heart was at rest – His life had purpose – All because of Jesus

C) Like his master – Onesimus- found this man Paul was a Christian – a follower of Christ –

1) In fact in a weird sort of coincidence – it was this very man Paul who had introduced his master to Christ.

D) It was there in that Jail – that Onesimus – gave his life to Christ/

1) Finally He understood what freedom was

You today: What are you pursuing in hopes of finding Freedom {Pleasure / Religion / Possessions

JESUS

Well Onesimus spent some time there with Paul in Prison – He was disciplined in the faith from Paul

A) **V.11 He ended up being a Help to Paul** in his ministry there in Prison –

B) In fact Onesimus became a blessing to Paul

C) But the time came –RELEASE - Paul said – you need to return – you need to go back to Philemon

1) Letter: **Charge that to my account**

D) So Paul was sending Onesimus back to Philemon a Changed man

1) Onesimus stands as a Picture of a man who had a true Conversion:

Redpath Victorious Christian Living

“The Christian life is the replacement of one life by another, it is an exchange of sovereignties: Self is dethroned, Jesus is enthroned. Nobody can pray thy Kingdom come until first he prays – My kingdom go!”

**BIG IDEA: True conversion is noticeable
Onesimus had that type of Change in his Life**

A) I want us today to consider – His conversion – consider the Characteristics that marked his Change

B) Taking note – there are **three things** I want us to consider about the marks of his transformation

1) Three Marks of a true Conversion

#1 There was confession:

A) Wait a minute you say: I don't see that in this story – in fact I can't see where Onesimus said anything

B) True but consider this in v.11 Paul says in the past he was unprofitable to you –

1) NLT *Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us.*

C) I ask you – how did Paul know that? PAUL had never been to Colossae – never met Onesimus

1) How would Paul know what kind of slave he was? He might have been Philemon's most trusted slave!

D) He could have been a great worker

1) A slave who was so good – his master trusted him w/ more responsibility

2) Which might have explained why he was able to get away. – More opportunity to run

So How would Paul know that he wasn't a very good slave at all – He was useless –

A) I believe it was because – Onesimus told him – He told his story

B) He might have said something – like : *My attitude was all wrong – I was a slacker –*

1) Only reason I am even alive today is because my master was a good and kind man

C) I think it is clear: Paul knew Because Onesimus confessed – He told his story

One of the first marks in a person who has had a true conversion to Christ is true Change– they are real.

A) Especially about their sin – When it comes to sin **They quit making excuses –**

B) ADAM in the garden: The **woman** you gave me

1) Or It was the woman – that **YOU GAVE ME!**

C) IT is either her fault or it is your fault but it is not my fault.

D) Blame shifting Comes Naturally

The CEO illustration

When a person is truly converted they are not trying to make excuses for their sin –

A) Not trying to Blame shift – **THEY OWN IT**

B) True Brokenness calls it sin !

1) David..... I have sinned against you God, only you!

C) Person who is truly broken – **takes ownership for their actions**

D) They quit blaming their sins on others / or on how they had been hurt in the past

1) They take ownership of their lives – they own up to their shortcomings – failures – mistakes

They are able to say: I was selfish – I wasn't a good husband – I wasn't caring

A) I wasn't a good wife –

B) **I was a Hypocrite in the Church –**

1) Pretended to be something I wasn't

C) Now the Bible says – 1 John 1:9 ⁹ **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

1) Confess carries the idea – **Say the same as** - See it as sin – like God does – we confess – **MY FAULT**

D) That is where true conversion is first seen in the life of a person who says – **I have sinned**

1) **I was WRONG – It is my fault – GUILTY**

When a person is broken and willing to take responsibility for their sins, God can do a great thing

A) Psalm 51:17 **The sacrifice God wants is a broken spirit. God will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry for sin.** NCV

B) GOD always moves toward the broken hearted sinner in grace – when there is confession.

C) The Law is for the rebellious – Grace and mercy are for the repentant.

So true confession is the 1st mark of a real conversion

2nd Mark is Repentance!

A) Repent – means to have a change of heart – change of attitude – change of direction

B) Idea of doing a 180 – going in the opposite Direction.

1) **To turn from going the wrong way and to start going the right way!**

John the Baptist preached repentance:

- ❖ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"- **Matthew 3:11**

Jesus Preached repentance:

- ❖ From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."- **Matthew 4:17 NLT**

Peter at Pentecost

- ❖ ³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you

shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. – Acts 2:38

Paul in Acts 26 before King Agrippa –reflecting on his calling as a minister of the gospel.

- ❖ Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, **and do works befitting repentance.**- Acts 26:20

Coming to Christ is marked by a Change:

A) Attitude about sin – Savior – Jesus

B) Turning from Sin and turning to God

C) **The repentive attitude of Onesimus** is seen in the fact that he was **willing to return**

1) Willing to go back to Philemon and face the music

D) There is no hint in the story – that he balked at the idea – begged Paul not to send him back

1) No hint of him having an attitude of – Isn't it forgiven and forgotten – I don't need to do that

In fact some Bible commentators believe that it was Onesimus who had the idea to return not Paul

A) The Fact was he was still a runaway slave and he needed to return – needed to put things right

B) Paul would send him with a letter asking Philemon to forgive &

1) **Paul offered to pay Onesimus's debt-** But there was no guarantee

C) **But it was the right thing to do/ that is what he did**

D) We see a similar thing in the conversion of Zacchaeus – Tax collector – THIEVE –

1) **OVER TAXED FOR THEIR OWN GAIN – one lunch with Jesus – this is his response.**

C) **Zacchaeus – Luke 19:8-9** Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

⁹ And Jesus said to him, "**Today salvation has come to this house.**

C) So too Onesimus showed that his conversion was real because – he was willing to go back

1) His conversion was marked by a real repentance

D) He left Colossae going in the wrong direction – now 180 – heading in the right direction

So the conversion of Onesimus was marked by 1st confession / 2nd repentance

A) **3rd a Concern for others** – Onesimus became a Profitable Servant

B) Consider what Paul says here – **¹⁰I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, ¹¹who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. ¹²I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, ¹³whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.**

C) Paul says I know that at one time – he was not profitable or useful to you –

1) But he has been extremely useful to me –

D) So much so that I wish I could keep him here so he could continue to minister to me in my chains.

E) **A Minister** means to wait on someone and attend to their needs.

Now in his past life as a slave Onesimus served because he had to. Because he was required to

A) He waited on others because it was his duty.

B) But now he was doing it willingly – he did it gladly

C) Take on the mind of Christ!

1) John 15 – Abide in Jesus – Bear fruit – Fruit of Love

This is a true mark of a person who is really growing in Christ who's had a True encounter with Christ

A) They are becoming much more others centered than self centered.

B) Mind and heart of Jesus!

1) **“Came not to be served but to serve – Give his life for others.”**

C) That is what happened to Onesimus: he was no longer interested in running away

1) He wasn't looking for happiness and meaning in some pleasure –

Onesimus discovered what Jesus said is true : it is more blessed to give than to receive.

A) The inference in the original language of the text was he stayed and ministered to Paul even when he could have left – long before.

B) So Onesimus's Conversion: Marked by his:

❖ **Confession**

❖ **Repentance**

❖ **Concern for others**

C) Onesimus went from being a slave – required

1) To being a servant – Willingly

Was this the end of the story? Surely not.

A) Onesimus and Philemon went on to lead even more productive lives for Christ.

B) Many believe that Philemon, in RESPONSE to Paul's expressed desire to have Onesimus back –

1) Returned him to Paul in Rome, where he further developed into a great man of God.

C) The historical evidence supports this.

Fifty years later when Ignatius, one of the great Christian martyrs, was being transported from Antioch to Rome to be executed, he wrote letters to certain churches.

In writing to Ephesus he praised their Pastor Onesimus!

A) It appears likely that Onesimus, the runaway slave, had become, with the passing of years, the great Pastor of THE CHURCH IN Ephesus !

B) Talking total Transformation

I ask you today in closing: What are you running from? What are you running after?

**A) What are you hoping to find? Freedom in Pleasure
Can't experience enough**

**B) Freedom in Possessions – Fill void – emptiness
Never attain enough – Slave to wanting more**

**C) Looking for freedom in Religion –
Not there – Only in Christ**

D) Freedom is only found in Relationship

John 8:32

32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

John 8:36

36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.