

Becoming a Free Man

Philemon 10-19

This is a letter that Paul wrote to a man by the name of Philemon. It is considered one of the Pastoral Epistles, along with Timothy and Titus.

Philemon was a Christian whose home was used for the church to meet in the city of Colosse. He had a slave named Onesimus who had fled from Colosse to Rome. The life of Onesimus is the focus of this letter. In his life we see a picture of all men.

Each of us has traveled the path of Onesimus. Some have been set free, while others are still on the run. Either way, we all can relate to Onesimus.

Paul is also a key character in this letter. In him we see a man who had compassion for a runaway slave. There is a beautiful picture of Christ through the life and actions of Paul. I want us to take a few moments and consider two of the key [characters](#) in this letter and see how our lives relate to this account in Scripture. I would like to preach on the thought: [Becoming a Free Man](#). First let's look at:

I. Onesimus, A Man of Desperation – As we look at the events in the life of Onesimus, keep in mind that he pictures mankind.

A. His Captivity (16a) – [Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?](#) Onesimus was a slave owned by Philemon. Slavery was not uncommon in Paul's day. Estimates suggest that there were 60 million slaves throughout the Roman Empire at this time. Most of them were treated as simply a piece of merchandise that was to be bought and sold. They had no control of their lives or their destiny. They were at the mercy of their owners.

- Each of us was born into bondage, into the captivity of sin. Our lives were controlled by the sinful desires of the flesh. Just as it was in Paul's day, there are millions who are slaves to sin in our day, literally millions who are bound by sin. They are not free in the Lord. They are slaves to the lusts of the flesh. Their lives are consumed and dictated by the desire to satisfy that lust.

- I remember the time when I was a slave to sin and Satan. He was the brutal taskmaster of my life, dictating my very existence, and preventing me from the joys of life. I longed for the day that I could be freed from his merciless grip. Are you a slave to sin today?

B. His Conduct (11, 15, 18) – The name Onesimus means “*profitable*,” but Paul reveals that there was a time when he was anything but profitable to Philemon. He had not lived up to his name. He was a rebellious slave who brought despair to the life of Philemon. Have we not all been in that situation? Have there not been times in all of our lives that we were unprofitable to the Lord and brought despair to Him and those who loved us?

- We also find that Onesimus had fled from Colosse and had even stolen from Philemon, [vv.15, 18](#). He was a man who thought nothing of others, committing crimes worthy of death on the run.

- You maybe have never been guilty of stealing or committing other crimes, but we were all like Onesimus. We were only concerned with our own selfish ways. We only wanted to satisfy ourselves, with no regard to the cost or pain of others. We lived a life on the run from the mercy and call of God! We felt as if the world had created the difficult circumstances in which we lived and we refused to assume any accountability for our own actions.

- Many today possess the character and conduct of Onesimus. They live a life of sin and rebellion; a life lived on the run from the Lord and His desire for their lives. He stands pleading for them to come unto Him, but they only try to run farther away!

C. His Condemnation – Onesimus was a man with a price hanging over his head. Stealing was a crime that brought severe punishment, but the fact that it had been committed by a slave who had fled with the stolen goods only added to his condemnation. Onesimus was a wanted man who had committed crimes punishable by death if the master chose that course of action. He was a man who had no peace within his heart. He was a man who lived in constant fear of being apprehended and forced to face his crimes. He was one who was constantly looking over his shoulder, living in suspicion and without trust in anyone.

- The Bible teaches that that is the way of all sinners. [Rom.6:23a](#) – *For the wages of sin is death*. Those who are on the run from God and never repent will face eternal death because of their sin. Many go out to meet God in a sinful state and are cast out into eternal condemnation in hell. The life of Onesimus clearly reveals the life of a sinner who is apart from God. There is no real peace in their lives. They are always seeking a place to find shelter from the cares of life and the conviction of their sin. They are fearful and afraid. They know that their lives are not right with God and they wonder about the existence of hell and the wrath of God.

- This is a miserable condition to be in. Friend, if you have never been saved you stand condemned before God. There will be no mercy when you meet Him when this life is over. Eternal death and torment awaits those who reject the mercy and saving grace of the Lord.

D. His Capture (10) – [I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:](#)

Onesimus wasn't captured by the Roman authorities; he was arrested by the King of kings. He had fled over 1,000 miles from Colosse to Rome and it was there that the Lord sought him out. He had reached a place that he could not escape. The Lord Jesus cornered him in Rome and brought conviction to his heart. He was born again under the teaching of Paul.

- I rejoice for the day that the Lord captured me. He knew where I was all along. On that faithful day, Jesus came and spoke to my heart, forgave me of my sin, and gave me new life and pardon in Him.
- Jesus knows where you are today. You may have been on the run for a long time, traveling many miles in this life fleeing from His call, but He wants to save you. Why not wave the flag of surrender before it's too late.

I. Onesimus, A Man of Desperation

II. Paul, A Man of Deliverance – Just as we could see ourselves in the life of Onesimus, we can see the Person of Jesus Christ in the life of Paul.

A. He Offered Intercession (11-12, 15) – Onesimus had wronged Philemon. He had stolen from him and fled, causing great distress to Philemon. Most would have had no desire to welcome him back, but rather to see him punished for his crimes. From a heart of compassion Paul appeals to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave and didn't have anything to offer, except what rightly belonged to Philemon. Paul revealed that even though he wasn't profitable to Philemon, he had become profitable to him. He urged Philemon to accept Onesimus and receive him with gladness. Paul interceded for Onesimus; he pled his case before his accusers.

- What a beautiful picture we see of the intercession of our Lord. We were just like Onesimus. We were guilty of sinning against God. We had fled from His tender mercies. We were broken and undone before Him. We had nothing to offer except that which already belonged to God. Jesus made intercession on our behalf. He pled our case before the Father. He desired that we be received and accepted, not on our merits, but on His alone. Praise God for our Intercessor.

- He continues to intercede for me when I fail and miss the mark. He stands as my advocate before the throne. [Rom.8:34 - Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.](#) He presents His merits rather than our own. [1 Jn.2:1- My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the](#)

righteous: As our Advocate He stands by our side, even in our stead before the Father. I have nothing to boast of; my dependence is in Christ my Lord.

B. He Proclaimed Identification (16-17) – Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? [17] If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. There would be those who would remind Philemon of the deeds of Onesimus and his position as a slave. There would be those who would cry out for punishment for his crimes. Paul proclaimed that Onesimus should no longer be considered a slave, but a brother in the faith. He was no longer to be looked down upon and despised, but accepted as a member of the family. His position was to be elevated because of his new birth.

- There were those who had written me off, those who had no use for me and no compassion. Satan accused me before the Lord. He declared that I was worthy of death for the sins I had committed.
- Jesus now proclaims my identification. I am no longer the slave of sin. I no longer belong to this world and Satan. I have been redeemed; I am now part of the family of God. Jesus declares that I am righteous and acceptable because of His sacrifice and cleansing power! When Satan brings accusations, Jesus reminds the Father that I have been covered in the blood! I am His and that will never change.

C. He Assumed all Debt (18) – If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; Paul told Philemon to place all the crimes that Onesimus stood accountable before and whatever debt he owed to his account. Whatever he had done that had brought suffering or shame, however Philemon had been wronged, Paul was to become accountable. He was not guilty, but he loved Onesimus enough to assume his debt.

- Isn't that just like our Lord? He was not guilty. He had committed no crimes or engaged in any sin. He owed no debt to God for His transgressions, and yet He willingly assumed all of my debt. He came to earth to bear my sin. He stood condemned and judged of God for the debt that I owed, [Is.53:4-6](#). He, who had done no wrong nor deserved condemnation, became sin that I might be set free and have eternal life. [2 Cor.5:21](#)- For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

D. He Settled all Debt (19a) – I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: Paul would repay any charges that Onesimus owed. Whatever the damages were, Paul would make it right. He settled the debt that Onesimus owed. Paul wanted Philemon to mark his account "paid in full."

- This is where we must make a clear distinction between Paul and our Lord. Onesimus was pardoned for the crimes of his past. Whatever he stood accountable and condemned of before would be forgiven.
- But, for the child of God, their record has been stamped “paid in full” by the blood of the Lamb. The debt of my past sin has been settled. The debt of the sins that I have committed today has been settled. The debt of all the sins that I will commit until I die have all been marked paid in full. Jesus redeemed me from a life of sin and has pardoned me from the penalty of all sin, past, present, and future! [Rom.8:1- There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.](#)
- I couldn't have bought my way out of a lie that I told as a child, much less a lifetime of sin, but Jesus purchased my redemption as He paid my sin debt on the cross of Calvary. Praise God I am no longer accountable to God for the debt that I owed. I am no longer a slave to sin and shame. I have been set free and forgiven!

Whether you are saved or not, you would have to admit that Jesus is a wonderful Savior. He paid the sin debt for all mankind as He died upon the cross, yours and mine included. If you are running from God, Jesus wants you to know that the debt has already been paid. His blood is sufficient to provide redemption for all! If you have never trusted Him in salvation, He wants to mark your account paid in full, but you must believe on Him and trust Him as the Savior of your soul.

Where do you stand today? Do you stand accountable for your sin? Wouldn't you like to be forgiven and have the benefit of the Intercessor standing for you? He would love to tell your accusers that you have been set free in Him.