

The Runaway Philemon

INTRO: Onesimus was a slave. A slave who had runaway from his master Philemon. Not only was he a runaway, he was a thief for he had robbed the master to finance the journey which took him to Rome (18).

Many people today are slaves and have a sin that has become their master!

Are you a slave to sin? Have you been running away from God.

I will not, in this message, endeavor to give an exposition, but rather an observation of lessons to be learned from this wonderful little book.

I. TO WHOM PAUL WROTE

- A. Vs 1, He wrote to Philemon: a slaveholder and a brother in Christ.
 - 1. History tells us that there were about six million slaves in the Roman Empire. To have slaves, you have to have a master.
 - 2. The common slave cost 500 denari in Paul's day. A denari represented a days wages making a common slave worth 500 days wages. A skilled slave could bring as much as fifty thousand.
 - 3. To have a slave runaway was a great loss to the slave owner. As to treatment of the slave, Wiersbe says: "While it is true that some masters were cruel.... many of them were reasonable and humane. After all, a slave was an expensive and useful piece of personal property" (Vol 2, 270).
- B. Vs 2, Paul also wrote to Apphia, Philemon's wife. He also wrote to Archippus, probably the pastor at Colosse and to the church, local assembly, that met in the home of Philemon and Apphia.
- C. Paul continues his salutation in verses 3-7 and closes the letter of Philemon with further salutations verses 23-25.

II. THE UNPROFITABLE BECOMES PROFITABLE

- A. In verses 8-10, Paul's plea for Onesimus is aimed at the heart of Philemon.
 - 1. "Paul the aged" probably bout sixty which was old for that day. "Help the old apostle's friend" is the cry here (vs 9a).
 - 2. Paul also mentions what Philemon already knew, the apostle is under arrest and is chained to a Roman soldier

(vs 9b).

3. In verse 10, Paul reveals that he has a new son in the faith, Onesimus who was saved under Paul's prison ministry at Rome.

III. VS 11, FROM UNPROFITABLE TO PROFITABLE

- A. In verse 10, we have seen that Onesimus, while running as hard as he could from his master, meets Paul the Gospel preacher who shares Christ with him, and Onesimus, the unprofitable, becomes Onesimus, the profitable.
- B. Since the Garden of Eden, man has been running away from the Master of the universe, Jehovah God.
 1. Genesis 3:8 tells us that Adam and Eve, "heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." Man is still running and hiding today.
 2. In Isaiah 53:6a, the prophet proclaims: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way....."
 3. Romans 3:11 says: "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God."
- C. Man is unprofitable spiritually: "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rm 3:10. Then we read in Romans 3:12: "They are all gone out of the way [runaways], they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one."
- D. Man is unprofitable spiritually because he is a slave to sin. We do not know whether Onesimus was born a slave or not, but we do know that we are born into spiritual slavery (Jn 8:34).
 1. Those who are unsaved, those who are unbelievers are still slaves to sin. They are running from God having stole the praise due His name.
 2. The scriptures tell us in Galatians 3:22-23 that man is under sin, a slave to it. This is in order that the "promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (vs 22). You see, "before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed" (vs 23).

IV. VS 15, ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD

- A. Yes, Romans 8:28 is still in the blessed old Book.
 - 1. Be assured that God is working in the believer's life just as he was in the life of Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon.
 - 2. Paul points out to Philemon that God has been at work (vss 13-15).
 - B. In vs 16, Paul reminds Philemon that Onesimus is more than a servant now, he is a brother in Christ.
 - C. Things do work together for good to those who are the called according to God's purpose.
 - 1. Philemon, I am sure, was fit to be tied when the thieving slave Onesimus ran away. Have you ever been fit to be tied over a situation in your life? Do you believe that God has a lesson for you in all of life's situations. Not all things are good, but all things work together for good, Child of God.
 - 2. There are many times when things have to get better: it is darkest and coldest before the dawn.
 - D. Paul's words to Philemon are especially striking as we look closely at them: "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever."
 - 1. God allowed Onesimus to runaway so that he could receive Christ, and Philemon could have him for ever as a brother (Jn 8:35-36).
 - 2. The slave does not have a permanent place in the family; but a son, he belongs forever.
- V. VSS 17-18, RECEIVED AND REDEEMED
- A. Vs 17, Paul was a good friend of Philemon. Philemon loved Paul and eagerly welcomed him when he was in the area. Philemon was a rich man and could lavish on Paul the things he needed.
 - 1. We are here reminded that we as runaways headed home are accepted.
 - 2. Ephesians 1:6 says we are "accepted in the beloved." God the Father accepts us as He would His own Son, the Lord Jesus. We have done wrong; we have runaway; yet, when we come home, we are accepted.
 - B. Vs 18, "Put it on my account."
 - 1. Onesimus had a debt; he owed it to Philemon and justice demanded that the debt of Onesimus be paid in full. The words of Paul found in this verse must have delighted the

- poor slave for he knew he had no way of paying the debt.
2. You and I had a debt that we owed to our Master, the Creator of the universe. We had no way of paying the debt, no way to clear our account. Justice had to be served and the account must be paid. The Bible declares that the believer has been justified by the blood of Jesus; our debt has been paid (Rm 8:1, 3:23-26).

CONCLUSION: “Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it, Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.....”

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