

SUBSTITUTION

BIBLE TEXT : Philemon 1-25

LESSON 354 **Senior Course**

MEMORY VERSE: "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Philemon 1:1-25

¹ Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
² And to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
³ Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
⁴ I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,
⁵ Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;
⁶ That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.
⁷ For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.
⁸ Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,
⁹ Yet for love's sake I rather beseech *thee*, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.
¹⁰ I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:
¹¹ Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:
¹² Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:
¹³ Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Return of Onesimus

1. The Epistle of Paul to Philemon was prompted by the conversion of Onesimus, Philemon's wayward servant, Philemon 1-12.
2. Paul desired to retain Onesimus with him but recognised Philemon's rightful claim for his services, Philemon 13, 14.
3. Paul advised Philemon that whereas Onesimus had departed for a season as a servant, he was returning to him as a brother in the Lord, and that forever, Philemon 15, 16;

Titus 2:9-10

⁹ *Exhort* servants to be obedient unto their own masters, *and* to please *them* well in all *things*; not answering again;

¹⁰ Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Ephesians 6:5-9

⁵ Servants, be obedient to them that are *your* masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

⁶ Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

⁷ With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:

⁸ Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether *he be* bond or free.

⁹ And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

4. Philemon was asked to receive Onesimus as he would have received Paul, Philemon 17;

Matthew 10:40-42

⁴⁰ He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

⁴¹ He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

⁴² And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Matthew 12:48-50

⁴⁸ But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?

⁴⁹ And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

⁵⁰ For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Matthew 25:40

⁴⁰ And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.

5. Paul requested Philemon to place the debts of Onesimus on his account, thereby exemplifying the great principle of the Gospel wherein Christ took upon Himself our wrongdoings,

¹⁴ But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

¹⁵ For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁸ If he hath wronged thee, or oweth *thee* ought, put that on mine account;

¹⁹ I Paul have written *it* with mine own hand, I will repay *it*: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

²⁰ Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

²¹ Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

²² But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

²³ There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

²⁴ Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

²⁵ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.

and pleads with God to forgive us for His sake, Philemon 18, 19;

Isaiah 53:5

5 But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:12

12 Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Romans 3:24

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Romans 4:25

25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Romans 5:1-21

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

13 (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

15 But not as the offence, so also *is* the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is* by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

16 And not as *it was* by one that sinned, *so is* the gift: for the judgment *was* by one to condemnation, but the free gift *is* of many offences unto justification.

17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

18 Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made

righteous.

20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

18 And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Ephesians 2:13

13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Colossians 1:14

14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins:

1 John 4:10

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

6. Paul felt confident Philemon would receive Onesimus favourably, Philemon 19-25.

NOTES:

Conversion of Onesimus

The Epistle of Paul to Philemon can be compared to the story of the prodigal son in that within its message is epitomised the complete Gospel story. Repentance, salvation, restitution, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ for men's sins, the forgiveness of God — all these things are to be found in this story of the converted slave.

The gist of the Epistle to Philemon revolves around the slave named Onesimus. His name means "profitable," but he had proved himself to be most unprofitable to his master, Philemon. He had committed a number of criminal acts and then had finally fled from his master's service and presence. In Rome, Onesimus had come into contact with Paul the Apostle. It is believed, on good authority, that Onesimus was caught while in Rome as an escaped slave, was placed in the Roman army for service, and that in the Roman army he was assigned duty to help guard Paul. Thus through the workings of Divine Providence, Onesimus, while fleeing from the house and service of a Christian master, found himself chained to the person of Paul.

While Onesimus may have seemed to have been an incorrigible to his master Philemon, Paul was not dismayed by Onesimus' past record. Paul could look back to his own past, his attitude, his state of mind toward Christ. Although Paul was not a criminal in the sense that Onesimus was, still Paul had committed crimes of such magnitude against the Gospel that he said of himself he had been the chiefest of sinners. Paul further said: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Timothy 1:16).

Onesimus, being thrown into such intimate association as he was with Paul, soon became converted to true Christianity and was born into the Kingdom of God.

A New Creature in Christ Jesus

The Prophet Jeremiah once asked the question: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23).

This was certainly the predicament of Onesimus, and is equally true of every unconverted and unregenerated soul. Onesimus could not change his propensities toward crime, and we do not know that he even possessed a desire to change them. However, God in His mercy led him to one who could stir up his dead conscience, and at the same time give him a desire to be something different. When desire is aroused in the human heart, then God will give the power to be alive and righteous, instead of dead and eternally condemned. The Scriptures say: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12, 13).

The very qualities that were so sadly lacking in Onesimus' character before his conversion were found in him immediately after his conversion. He had been untrust-worthy, unfaithful in his duties, a thief, and a fugitive from his crimes. After his conversion he was the exact opposite: he was faithful, honest, a loyal worker in the cause of Christ, and an exemplary Christian. Paul was then a prisoner of the Roman government, and of course had no liberty. Onesimus made himself so invaluable to Paul that he could hardly part with Onesimus when he desired to return to his old master.

Restitution

"God requireth that which is past" (Ecclesiastes 3:15). Onesimus soon felt the desire to return to his master Philemon and make amends for his wrongdoings. God freely forgives men their sins but He does not permit them to go on in life without confessing their past crimes and making right, if at all possible, what they have wrongfully done. The willingness of one to make amends for his misspent past is a sign of real salvation. The Law required that past misdeeds be corrected, the principal restored, and a fifth of the amount of the principal be added thereto. (**Leviticus 6:2-5** 2 If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour; 3 Or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein: 4 Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, 5 Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering.)

When Zacchæus, a dishonest tax-gatherer, was converted, he at once promised Jesus to make amends. He said: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

God's mercy, through the medium of the Gospel, warns all men to avail themselves of the opportunity of repenting and having their sins forgiven through the death and resurrection of Christ. The Word of God cautions: "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after" (I Timothy 5:24). It is God's will that through the efficacy of the Blood of Jesus Christ, all men's sins be open beforehand. That is, that they be confessed and acknowledged to God, so that they can be forgiven by God. If they come after us through life, then we shall have to acknowledge them before God at the Judgment Bar; but there will be no forgiveness then, nor mercy preventing the righteous judgment of God from falling on those

sinner who refused the Blood of Christ.

God requires us to make restitution in this present world for our wrongdoings if we hope to meet Him in peace in the hereafter. To fail or refuse to make restitution when possible will insure our exclusion from the Kingdom of God and make our judgment sure and certain. When the salvation of God is received in the human heart, there soon arises a desire and prompting from God to go to make restitution. Onesimus was proving the quality of his salvation when he desired to return to his old master and face his evil past. No longer would he flee from his sins, because they were gone and to be remembered no more against him.

Paul, despite his longing for the fellowship of Onesimus and his much-needed assistance in the labour of the Lord, sent Onesimus back to Philemon with many prayers. His letter to Philemon is a most beautiful and touching plea for Philemon to receive again his slave, Onesimus, who had once been unprofitable but now was profitable indeed. He had left as a slave, but was returning as a servant and a brother in the Lord. Paul suggested that perhaps Onesimus had left only for a season that Philemon might receive him forever. Under the Old Testament Law the servant, after serving for a time, was released to go his way. If he desired to stay in the service of his master his ear was bored by his master. This ear boring, or having his ear digged, was notice to all that the servant had freely chosen to serve his master for life. (**Exodus 21:1-6** ¹ Now these *are* the judgments which thou shalt set before them. ² If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. ³ If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴ If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. ⁵ And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: ⁶ Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever. **Psalm 40:6** ⁶ Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required) Onesimus was indeed choosing to return to his old master that he might serve him with a willing heart and mind, and as to the Lord. It was not a servitude of bondage, but a service and labour of love.

On Mine Account

The letter Paul sent to Philemon asking him to receive Onesimus charitably was more than just an ordinary plea for clemency and forgiveness. In a few short sentences Paul beautifully expressed the very heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Philemon had been converted to Christianity by Paul's preaching, but Paul did not ask Philemon to forgive Onesimus on the basis of friendship. Paul's wording of his message was a forcible and pointed reminder to Philemon of Him who had paid His all that Philemon might be set free from his sins, and that he should freely forgive Onesimus as Christ had forgiven him. (**Matthew 18:23-35** ²³ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ²⁷ Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat,

saying, Pay me that thou owest. 29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. 32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: 33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? 34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.)

Paul's words, "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account," were inspired by the Holy Ghost and portray in a few words all the meaning of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which was sufficient for the sins of all mankind. The sinner, cleansed of his sins, can return to his Master's house, bearing with him the message of reconciliation, received of Christ. Does not Jesus Christ say to His Father, in behalf of any and all sinners who have claimed the Blood of Christ for their justification, **"Receive him as myself"**? "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account." Through the efficacy of the Blood of Jesus Christ, God receives a repentant sinner as He does His own Son, Jesus Christ! The merits of Jesus Christ are reckoned to the sinner, and the demerits of the sinner are paid and atoned for by Christ.

If he "oweth thee ought —" What sinner is there who does not owe God an infinite amount that he cannot pay? Who has not sinned and come short of the glory of God? Yet Jesus has said, in effect, regardless of the wrong done against God's government and God's name, that He will present Himself in their stead before His Father to plead their cause. Jesus Christ can plead the cause of the repentant sinner successfully because He has borne the penalty of all men's sins upon Himself. "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). He was the Lamb of God — a Lamb without flaw or blemish — slain from the foundation of the world; and because of the offering of this perfect Sacrifice, God does impart righteousness to those who believe that the virtue of the shed Blood of Christ avails for the forgiveness of sins.

QUESTIONS

1. What does Onesimus' name mean?
2. Why did Onesimus leave his master's service?
3. Explain how Onesimus became converted.
4. Why did Onesimus desire to return to his old master?
5. In what status did Onesimus return to Philemon?
6. Why did Paul tell Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would Paul?
7. For whom would Jesus say to His Father, "Receive him as myself"?
8. How are men's sins placed to the account of Jesus Christ?
9. What is meant by the efficacy of the Blood of Jesus Christ?
10. Why will God not receive sinners unless they come by the way of the Blood of Jesus Christ?
11. Why is restitution necessary?