

Ministry of The Holy Spirit
Prison Letters
Philemon

Acts 2:1-4, 14-24, 32-33, 37-47

Either 1994 or 1992 years ago today

So began Acts 1:8 and it continues to this day and will until Jesus returns to the clouds for the remnant of His Bride

We have been studying the Apostle's doctrine chronologically, the Ministry of the Holy Spirit indwelling the Body of Christ, continuing the work Jesus began
Currently in time, we are in the prison epistles of Paul

Last time...finishing well our priestly course, Part 2, as discerned in the list of people mentioned in the closing comments of the Epistle to the Colossians, starting with the letter carriers Tychicus and Onesimus

This time...Onesimus, one of those letter carriers to the churches at Ephesus and Colosse, is the subject of another prison epistle of Paul, a personal letter to Philemon

Onesimus is a run-away slave of Philemon, who is a friend of Paul's.
Onesimus fled to Rome, the "big city" in which he could easily hide and start a new life.
But God...

- v1-2 From: Paul, a prisoner in Rome, again describes himself as "a prisoner of Jesus Christ"
- his "crime" is preaching Good News, the Gospel of grace, the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:3-4)...as he was sent to do
 - his Lord is Jesus Christ, not Ceasar
 - his Master is the Living God, Who is sovereign and has a purpose for having Paul right where he is right now

Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

Ps 37:23 The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.

Prov 16:9 A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

Jer 10:23 O LORD, I ("The Weeping Prophet" given a very hard ministry of over 40 years) know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

We know from hearing “the prisoner of Jesus Christ” that no matter how

- bad or unpleasant our temporary circumstances,
 - little we may understand why “this” is happening to us,
- the same can be said
- of us: Jesus Christ is our Lord, now and forever
 - by us: our Master is the Living God, Who is sovereign over all the earth and has a purpose for “this” right here, right now

Having the same indwelling Holy Spirit that came upon the first followers of Jesus Christ in Acts 2, we can have the same attitude as Paul

Timothy, as mentioned in the letter to the Colossians but not in the letter to the Ephesians

To: Philemon (“friendly” living in Colosse)

- our dearly beloved friend
- our fellowlaborer (with God in the Gospel of grace, 1 Cor 3:9-11)

Apphia (female name)

- beloved sister in Christ

Archippus

- fellowsoldier (in the Lord’s army)
- exhorted to take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it (Col 4:17)

the church that meets in Philemon’s house

v3 Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

The “stamp” of all the Epistles – a right relationship with the Living God

Eph 2:8-9 thru faith, being right with God because of His grace

Rom 5:1 with being right with God comes peace with and of God

v4-5 In greeting his friend, Paul expresses his thanks to God for hearing of the harmonious union of Philemon’s

- **love** (Matt 22:36-40, John 13:34-35, James 2:8)
- **faith** (Gen 15:6, Hab 2:4, Heb 11:6)

toward

- first, the Lord Jesus
- then because of the first, all saints

A vital union in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ – love and faith.

Love without faith is empty, as is faith without love.

v6-7 looking a little closer at Philemon's faith and love

- **faith:** praying continually that the fellowship/*koinonia* (others-centeredness) of his faith may become effective and powerful by the active acknowledging (day-by-day demonstration) of every good thing in him, in Christ
 - the indwelling Spirit of Christ on display before God and man
 - his life being “all Jesus” and not a mixture of Jesus and Self, as an imitator of Paul following Jesus

Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

- **love:** as evidenced by hearts of the saints being refreshed (rested, strengthened, encouraged) by him, which brings great joy and comfort to Paul

Philemon is a genuine follower of Jesus Christ, a man of sincere love and faith, a wonderful brother in the Lord, a great blessing to many

Now, down to business

v8-9 Wherefore...because Philemon is a genuine follower of Jesus Christ, a man of sincere love and faith, a wonderful brother in the Lord, a great blessing to many

though I might be very bold in Christ and order you to do that which is proper... though I could “pull rank” and give you a directive

1 Thes 5:12-13 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

Heb 13:7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.

Heb 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.

I would rather implore/beg/appeal to you

- to do the right thing for the right reason, the highest of motives: the love of Christ and love for the saints
- in one accord with me, to “buy into” what I ask of you to do, what I, a willing prisoner of Jesus Christ, would do if I were you

1 Cor 4:16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

1 Cor 11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.

Phil 3:17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

v10-11 Paul is pleading to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus

- “profitable”
- run-away slave of Philemon
- thru the witness of Paul, a prisoner in Rome, is now Paul’s son (in the faith)
 - born-again of the Spirit of God
 - been given the power to become a child of God
 - a new creature in Christ
 - made right with God
 - “in Christ” before God in heaven

“profitable” who was unprofitable but is now profitable

The unregenerate lost are unprofitable to the Creator God, for they seek their own “profit”/gain and not His (*seek to save his life shall lose it*)

But God...transforms the unprofitable to be profitable to Him by grace thru faith in Jesus Christ by the regeneration of the Spirit

We all were once unprofitable/worthless (self-centered) but are now profitable/valuable (God-centered, others-centered, Self-last, living our confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, the Son of the Living God)

Titus 3:3-7

v12-13 “Profitable”, who is now profitable to both Philemon and Paul, is sent back to Philemon by Paul, carrying this Holy Spirit-inspired letter

Paul asks Philemon, the one wronged by the “unprofitable” slave, to receive Onesimus as he is now – Paul’s son in the faith (therefore Philemon’s brother in Christ), whom Paul would have preferred to keep with him as Philemon’s replacement to be his minister/bondservant/helper in prison

Paul loves the Lord, Philemon, and Onesimus
With the heart of the Father, Paul seeks the reconciliation of Philemon and Onesimus

But...

- v14 But loving and following Jesus is not a forced march...it is a rational choice
Following Jesus is voluntary, willing to live a lifestyle (a narrow path with a few others)
that
- demands denying Self and picking up our cross
 - comes not only with believing in Jesus but suffering for His sake in a hostile environment
 - means going not knowing where you are going but knowing Who is leading you (walking by faith)
 - come with trials and tribulations that are used by the hand of God to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ His Son
 - has great benefits – forgiveness of sins, the indwelling Spirit of God, and eternal life

Paul will not take unilateral action, will not impose his will on his friend (v8, v13)
Paul's desire for Philemon, his beloved friend, is that he would willingly do what he and Jesus Christ have willingly done –

- to receive the born-again Onesimus as a brother in Christ
- to be of one accord with the heart of the Father and the mind of Christ

- v15-16 For perhaps...is it possible
that Onesimus ran away from you for a short time...he is back with you now,
having delivered my letter you are reading
so that you would receive him forever, not merely as a returned slave but as a brother in
the family of God...in a new and right relationship in Christ

Is it possible Eph 2:10 (letter being carried at the same time by Tychicus and Onesimus)
is at play here?

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Did the God of set times and appointments direct the steps of Onesimus to Paul in Rome
to hear the Gospel and to set him free from the bondage of sin and death?

Could this entire series of events been used by the Sovereign God in heaven working
in the lives of people: Onesimus, Paul, and Philemon...and now us who are also
reading this letter?

When do we clearly understand what God is doing in our lives?

Later, in hindsight

Which means in the present we...walk by faith that God is sovereign in all circumstances and that He has an amazing plan that will cause us to erupt in praise!

Think back on your conversion/transformation/re-birth/regeneration:

Can the fingerprints of the Sovereign God be seen in the series of events that resulted in your new and right relationship with Him?

And since then, think back on the trials and tribulations you have so far endured:

Can you see the fingerprints of God Who did a work in your life and in the lives of others in those circumstances?

Can you trust the Lord in your current and future trials and tribulations?

v17-19 Paul adds weight to his loving request on behalf of Onesimus for Philemon to consider

v17 If you consider me to be a partner, receive Onesimus as you would me

We are partners in the work that the Sovereign God is doing in our lives, you with me and me with you
Our loving Master accomplishes His work in and thru us as we by faith yield to His perfect will

v18-19a If Onesimus has wronged you, I will make you whole,
I will pay his debt in full; this letter is my signature/word

v19b Keep in mind that you "owe me", you are indebted to me for your newness of life...God using me to preach the Gospel to you

Implied are words of Jesus Christ

Matt 6:14-15

Matt 5:7

Matt 10:8b

Matt 18:34-35 The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Implied are the Holy Spirit-inspired words of the Apostle's doctrine

Eph 4:30 And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Eph 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

v20-21 Having made his request on behalf of Onesimus, Paul expresses his hope and confidence in his beloved friend and brother Philemon

hope: he would refresh/strengthen/encourage his heart in this joyful matter

Luke 15:4-7 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

as he has refreshed the hearts of so many others...v5-7

confidence: knowing his heart and that he will even do more than he asked

v22 Oh, and one more thing...please prepare a place for me to stay with you because I trust, by your prayers and the prayers of others, that I am going to be released from this prison and will be able to come to you.

v23-24 Of which we heard in the closing remarks in the Epistle to the Colossians

v25 The first word was...grace
The last word is...grace

Grace is a precious, blood-purchased spiritual gift, to be given as freely as it is received
Grace comes from the heart of the God who John 3:16

Grace is the essence, the fragrance, of love and faith
Grace is the essence, the fruit, of our walk with Jesus Christ

This letter is a message of forgiveness, reconciliation, a ransom paid in full, and hope
This is a letter of the goodness of God that leads us to repentance
This is a letter of grace, that radically changes everything

This letter shows us “But”

But God...the invisible Sovereign God Who uses all things as He directs the steps of people.

But...”profitable” who is unprofitable only becomes profitable by willingly

- humbling ourselves before the Almighty, “crushed” by His goodness and grace
- surrendering our lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ
- thereby being made right with God

This letter portrays a picture of a slave running from his kind and loving master in a desire “to be free”, only to find himself running right into the arms of that kind and loving master, having been “set free”

On the surface, this letter is about Philemon and Onesimus

But to the spiritually discerned, it is so much more

This letter is about Jesus Christ and Onesimus

This letter is about Jesus Christ and you and me

This is an intensely personal letter for every follower of Jesus Christ

- Jesus pled for each us to the Father, who we wronged
- Jesus pled that we would be received without prejudice into the family of God
- Jesus vowed v17-19a for each of us to the Father
- we owe Jesus for our newness of life (v19b)

Rom 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Now, as it was on that 1st Pentecost, the unprofitable servant has been made profitable by grace thru faith, a genuine faith in harmonious union with love for Jesus Christ and for the saints

And as it was on that day so it is on this day

We are sent as witnesses of Jesus Christ, ambassadors of God’s love with a simple message:

Come out of darkness into the Light

Turn your back on death and embrace Life

Jesus Christ...Light and Life and Love...is the only way to be right with the Almighty Creator God, the Father in heaven

Today is the day of salvation, the day of a genuine conversion, the day grace is received and love and faith blossom!

So what happened with Philemon and Onesimus?

We learn from the writings of the disciples of the Apostles:

- Onesimus became the pastor of the church at Ephesus
(obviously set free by Philemon)
- Philemon became the pastor of the church at Gaza

btw...the Epistle to Philemon was later used in the abolitionist movements in UK and USA
which speaks to the import and impact of the Word of God and the Gospel in those two
nations at the times (and no longer is in either)

Is 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return
unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall
prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.