

PAUL, A TYPE OF CHRIST
The Epistle to Philemon

Intro: The epistle to Philemon gives what is perhaps the most remarkable story of salvation that we have in the Bible. It would at least equal that of the Apostle Paul himself, although the two men were completely different before they were saved.

Such an encouraging illustration of what the Lord can do in a life is undoubtedly one of the main reasons why this epistle is in the Bible.

But there is another reason . . . and we want to take that up tonight.

No one can read this epistle and see how Paul pleads with Philemon for Onesimus without being reminded of the intercessory work of our Lord, i.e., the way the Lord must intercede with us before the Father.

Looking at the epistle from this standpoint, we recognize the following types:

- 1) Paul becomes of type of Christ as our intercessor.
- 2) Philemon is a type of God the Father--the one upon whom the decision regarding Onesimus rests.
- 3) Onesimus is a type of anyone who knows the Lord. Martin Luther used to say, We are all the Lord's Onesimi!

Whenever we study types (when one thing pictures or represents something else), we must always remember that there are limitations. Not everything applies. Joseph is an outstanding type of Christ, but not everything about Joseph is a type of Christ. The same is true here. Types must always be limited by the teaching of the Word of God. Types do not originate truth; types illustrate the truth.

Note the following similarities between Paul's intercession, and Christ's.

I. THE BASIS OF THE APPEAL: "for love's sake" (v. 9).

The doctrine of salvation in the NT is closely woven around the relationship of love which exists between the Father and the Son.

This is not Philemon's love for Onesimus, but Philemon's love for Paul!

Cf. John 15:9,

"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love."

Also John 10:17,

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again."

Or, John 3:35,

"The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hands."

The love of the Father for the Son is linked with the Son's obedience through His death on the cross. This is our strongest claim upon the heart of God.

II. THE PLACE WHERE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAUL AND ONESIMUS WAS ESTABLISHED: "whom I have begotten in my bonds" (v. 10).

The imprisonment of Paul looked so unnecessary--and so does the cross of Christ until you learn the reason. Then you realize that that was the place where a birth became a reality.

Speaking of being begotten, read 1 Pet. 1:3,

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

It was through the imprisonment of Paul that Onesimus was born again; it is through the death and resurrection of Christ that we have been born again.

This forms another strong hold which we have upon the Father.

III. THE REASON BEHIND THE APPEAL: "Who in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me" (v. 11).

Philemon could never have considered accepting Onesimus back except for one reason: He had been changed! How did Philemon know? Because Paul told him.

A holy God cannot accept unholy sinners. They must be changed first. This is the basis of our Lord's appeal for us. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17.

Do you suppose that this means that the first one to know about our salvation was God?

It was our Lord who said,

"Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10).

It is the change that makes us useful, easy to use.

- IV. THE ONENESS BETWEEN PAUL AND PHILEMON: "Whom I would have retained . . . but without thy mind would I do nothing, that thy benefit should not be, as it were, of necessity but willingly" (vv. 13a, 14).

Paul was not going to force Philemon to do anything; he wanted Philemon to do what he would with Onesimus from his own heart.

Therefore, we can be sure that the Father's acceptance of us is not because He has been forced to do something, but because He wants to.

Cf. 1 John 3:1,

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us . . .

- V. THE LENGTH OF THE RELATIONSHIP: "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever" (v. 15).

Once Philemon received Onesimus back, Paul knew that he would never want to let him go again.

Cf. John 10:27-29,

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give; unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

- VI. THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP: "Not now as a servant but above a servant, a brother beloved" (v. 16a).

Onesimus was not really a servant of Philemon's before because he was a slave to sin. He would be Philemon's servant now--but even more: a brother in Christ.

In John 8 our Lord said two things which apply here:

- 1) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." This is v. 34.
- 2) In v. 36, "If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Once a person comes to Christ, he is never the servant of sin that he was before.

- VII. THE EXTENT OF ONESIMUS' ACCEPTANCE: "Receive him as myself" (v. 17).

Cf. v. 22a. If Philemon would prepare for Paul, he must do

the same for Onesimus.

We are "in Christ." Cf. 2 Cor. 5:21. "And ye are complete in Him" (Col. 2:10a). We have a standing before God that is equal to that which Christ has. And this is the only ground of our acceptance.

- VIII. THE RESPONSIBILITY WHICH PAUL TOOK: "If he hath wronged thee or oweth thee anything, put that on mine account. I, Paul, have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it" (vv. 18, 19a).

Perhaps there are two here:

- 1) Paul accepts full responsibility for any and everything that Onesimus owes to Philemon.
- IX. 2) He guarantees what he promises by writing it down.

Onesimus had to look ahead to the future, but his past sins were already taken care of. Cf. Heb. 10:14, 17,

"For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified . . . And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

How can we be sure that these things are true? It is written. The Word of God is the only foundation for our assurance!

- X. THE CAPSTONE OF IT ALL: "Thou wilt also do more than I say" (v. 21).

We love Eph. 3:20. But what about Eph. 2:7? Or 1 John 3:2?

Concl: Such parallels are unmistakably linked together. We get a clearer picture from Philemon (the epistle) as to what was involved, not only in our salvation to begin with, but what is involved every time we sin and must depend again upon the intercessory work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the main reason that 1) anyone can be saved, and 2) every one who is saved is promised salvation for all eternity.

"Wherefore, he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

What joy must have been in the heart of Onesimus as he made his way from Rome to Colosse! He knew that Philemon would accept him, not for his own sake, but for Paul's! So it is with those of us who know the Lord!