

“FROM WORTHLESS TO WORTHWHILE”

PHILEMON 8-11

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INTRODUCTION

We are all God’s reclamation projects—some of us more than others! Paul says in I Cor. 6:9-11 that believers came out of all kinds of grossly immoral backgrounds. Certainly, Onesimus did not have much going for him.

- 1) He was a slave. 2) He was not a good slave (v. 11—unprofitable). 3) He likely stole from his master (18).
- 4) He was a runaway.

Griffith Thomas has said:

Christianity has always wrought such moral and spiritual miracles. It admits no knowledge of hopeless cases where it is given a fair opportunity. ...In each instance, it is the yielding of the will that is the all-important prerequisite to a successful outcome.

What were you like when the Lord saved you? Were you a “good catch” for the Lord? Was God “lucky” to get you on His side?

Even the apostle Paul considered himself “the **chief of sinners**” (I Tim. 1:15) and **the least of the apostles** and unfit to be called an apostle (I Cor. 15:9) and “The **very least of all saints**” (Eph. 3:8).

If all that is true of Paul, where does that leave you and me?

We all realize that if we received what we deserve we would all be in hell for eternal suffering and punishment.

But God delights to save undeserving sinners! Just as in Jesus’ day, the “harlots and the tax collectors” are still coming to Him for salvation! Onesimus came to Paul—however, and for whatever reason—and he became Paul’s spiritual child in the faith. Now, he was changed—no longer useless but useful.

YOU WERE USELESS TO GOD WHEN HE SAVED YOU, BUT HE MADE YOU SOMEONE USEFUL.

As the song states: *“I am saved, I am newborn, and my life has been rearranged. I am different you see, since the Lord saved me, praise the Lord, for I am Saved.”*

- I. BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT SERVE GOD OUT OF COMPULSION (8-9)
 - A. Paul could have ordered Philemon to do the right thing (8).
 1. He had boldness, confidence, freedom of speech—authority as an apostle.
 2. In Christ he had both the ability and the right to command Philemon.
 3. Philemon as a Christian was obligated to do the right/proper thing.
 - He has been doing so with others—vv. 5-7.
 - Now, therefore, he need to do what is right with Onesimus [not mentioned yet].
 - B. He chooses rather to appeal/exhort/plead with Philemon (9).
 1. He appeals on the basis of love
 - The “love” of which he speaks is the general love in Christ—including Paul’s love for Philemon and Onesimus, that of Onesimus for Paul and now Philemon, and Philemon for Paul and now for Onesimus; it is Christ’s love now extended to others.
 - The matter of his appeal is not stated until v. 17.
 - The person concerning whom he appeals is stated in v. 10.
 2. Considerations behind the appeal are Paul’s age and status.
 - a. Paul is aged—about 60 years old

- His age has been enhanced due to the strenuousness/struggle/sufferings during his life and ministry.
 - His age should elicit compassion from Philemon.
 - His age should lead to respect from Philemon for Paul's wisdom and authority.
- b. Paul is a prisoner.
- He suffered for the gospel; not for wrongdoing.
 - He is Christ's prisoner, and Christ has made him that.
 - As such, he needs not be ashamed, but is honored.
- C. His Appeal is for his "child" (10)
1. He is Paul's "child" because of the new birth—having become a child of God through faith in Christ.
 2. Paul has "begotten" him—become his father—same verb as "bear a child" when a woman.
 3. His child is special in that he was born "in my imprisonment"—chains.
 - Thus the child of his sorrows.
 - Thus the child of his old age.
 4. Using extreme tact he only mentions his name as the last word of the sentence—Onesimus.
 - The name "Onesimus" means "profitable, useful."
 - Paul wished to prepare the way for his direct request first.

II. BELIEVERS SHOULD BE DIFFERENT ONCE SAVED (11).

- A. Onesimus formerly was useless to Philemon—not living up to his name.
- B. Now he has become useful.
1. To Philemon
 2. To Paul

CONCLUSION

You must be different once you are saved; you must now be useful/profitable/a blessing to God's people and must glorify God!

As a Christian, you must not require God's servants to order you to do what is right; an earnest plea should be all that is required. In fact, you should be proactive to do right and not wait to be told!

We must respond out of LOVE—God given love that is manifested to fellow believers.

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