

“NOTHING TO PAY”

PHILEMON 17-21

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INTRODUCTION

Paul has now come to his primary point—his specific appeal to Philemon concerning Onesimus: “**Accept him as you would me.**”

But, what if Onesimus has wronged his master? What if he owes him money? Paul has an answer: “**Charge that to my account.**” And then to make his point even clearer he says: “**I will repay.**” But, Paul adds, really you owe me more than that; you owe me your very life! So, Philemon, let me benefit [play on Onesimus’ name] **from you in the Lord; refresh my heart** in Christ. Think beyond yourself to Onesimus’ needs and my needs.

Verses 17 and 18 display for the reader the two sides of the doctrine of **imputation**:

- 1) “Put that on my account—reckon to me his demerit.”
- 2) “Receive him as myself—reckon to him my merit.”

Thomas also speaks of the two aspects of substitution: *exact and equivalent*.

- 1) Exact is **vicarious**. Scriptural examples would be a) the ram for Isaac (Gen. 22:13); Judah for Benjamin (Gen. 44:33); the Levites for the firstborn (Num. 3:11-13); David for Absalom (II Sam. 18:33). Here it is Paul for Onesimus. Spiritually it is **Christ for the sinner**.
- 2) Equivalent—doing for another what he is *incapable of doing for himself*, e.g. someone rescuing a person drowning without drowning himself. Compare the ransom of Lev. 25:45-47, an amount the condemned could not pay. Here, Paul would pay what Onesimus could not pay. **Spiritually, Christ paid with his life’s blood what we could not possibly pay—an eternal debt.**

JESUS PAID IT ALL; ALL TO HIM YOU OWE.

But, before we press the spiritual applications, let us first examine the practical applications to this situation as it relates to relationships within the local church.

I. SOME PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR CHRISTIANS

A. You have Partners in Fellowship in a Common Faith [kononia] (17).

1. We need to “have our brother’s back”
 - Paul here defends and stands up for a slave!
 - Paul wants what is best for him.
2. Receive a less gifted, less liked, less significant brother as you would a Christian leader: “**Receive him as [you would receive] me.**”
 - The verb means to take into one’s home, society, circle of friends.
 - Here it more broadly applies to the Christian fellowship also.
 - Rom. 15:7 is a great example [**Read**]

So in reality, the way Philemon treats Onesimus is the way he treats Paul; note that Paul had also said about Onesimus that he was Paul’s heart (v. 12). Paul here makes a very practical application of the spiritual truth that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Gentile neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one” (Ga. 3:28; cf. Col. 3:11).

B. You must be willing to forgive your brother his wrongs and restore him (18)

1. People have acted unjustly and done wrong.
2. People owe us a debt, sometimes literally.

C. You owe a Great debt of gratitude to those who have led you to Christ, disciplined you, and trained you (19).

- You owe your very self—your life.
- How much more is this true of the debt of gratitude we owe to our Savior?

- D. You must return the favor to those who have blessed you—let them have benefit/joy in the Lord.
- You do so by obeying God, following truth, cooperating in ministry, and helping the weak.
 - You especially do so by lovingly giving of yourself in Christian service to the less fortunate.
1. You must “refresh their heart”.
 2. Such can only be done in Christ.

II. SOME SPIRITUAL LESSONS FOR CHRISTIANS

A. Jesus Christ has fully paid your debt (18-19) [**We have wronged him—done unjustly; we owe Him a huge debt that we cannot pay.**]

1. He has repaid it (19).
2. He has put it to His account (18).

Grace is love that pays a price. God in His holiness could not ignore the debt that we owe, for God must be faithful to His own Law. *So He paid the debt for us.* Christ died on the cross and put our sins on His account; **He was treated the way I deserved to be treated.**

B. In Christ we have been accepted by the Father as the Son is Accepted (17).

When the believer trusts Christ, Christ’s righteousness is put to his account and God accepts the sinner in Jesus Christ. **JESUS PAID IT ALL!** And now Christ pleads the case of the believer before the Father as his intercessor—as Paul pled the case of the slave here after identifying with him.

C. As the Result we owe Him our very lives—ourselves (19b).

CONCLUSION

Frances Ridley Havergal expressed the spiritual theme behind this practical story well with these words:

Nothing to pay! Ah, nothing to pay!
 Never a word of excuse to say!
 Year after year you have filled the score,
 Owing your Lord still more and more.
 Hear the voice of Jesus say,
 “Truly, you have nothing to pay!
 Ruined, lost are you, and yet
 I forgave you all that debt.”

Nothing to pay! The debt is so great,
 What will you do with the awful weight?
 How shall the way of escape be made?
 Nothing to pay!—yet it must be paid!
 Hear the voice of Jesus say,
 “Truly, you have nothing to pay!
 All has been put to My account,
 I have paid the full amount.”

Nothing to pay! Yes nothing to pay!
 Jesus has cleared all the debt away,
 Blotted it out with His bleeding hand!
 Free, and forgiven, and loved, you stand.
 Hear the voice of Jesus say,
 “Truly, you have nothing to pay!
 Paid is the debt, and the debtor free!
 Now I ask thee, do you love Me?”