

Title: **PHILEMON**
 “Put That On Mine Account”

Text: Philemon 1:17-18

Subject: *The Story of Onesimus*

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Tape # Y-26b

Readings: *Bob Poncer & Bob Duff*

Introduction:

The book of Philemon is a personal letter written by Paul while he was a prisoner at Rome to a man at Colosse by the name of Philemon. It is a personal letter, dealing with a very personal matter; but it was written by divine inspiration to teach us things concerning our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote to Philemon about one of his slaves who, having robbed him, fled to Rome. While in Rome, Onesimus came into contact with Paul, heard the gospel and was converted by the grace of God. After his conversion, Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter, urging Philemon to receive Onesimus as his brother in Christ, just as he would receive Paul himself, assuring him that he would gladly pay whatever Onesimus owed him (vv. 10-18).

(Philemon 1:10-18) “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: *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.”

The story we have before us in this short epistle is a beautiful picture of what the Lord Jesus does for every chosen, redeemed sinner. He has paid our debt, all that we owed. He intercedes for us with God against whom we have sinned, from whom we have gone astray. Our blessed Savior said, to the offended justice and inflexible law of God, regarding all his people and our sins, “*put that on mine account,*” and with his one great sacrifice for sin as our substitute he paid our debt. Because Christ is our Mediator, Substitute, and Surety, because all God’s elect are one with him, the Father receives and accepts every believing sinner as he receives and accepts Christ himself (Eph. 1:6).

PHILEMON

Philemon was a truly gracious man. — “*Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints*” (v. 5).

- He maintained a church in his house (v. 2).
- He loved Christ and his people. — “*For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother*” (v. 7).
- He was a benevolent friend to the Apostle Paul.
- He treated his servants kindly and graciously.
- Paul was confident that he would be obedient to the word of God, the word of God sent to Philemon by his servant Paul (v. 21).

ONESIMUS

Onesimus was a slave Philemon had come to trust. He had given Onesimus charge over certain of his household goods. He trusted his treasures to the care of this slave as a steward. But Onesimus betrayed his master’s trust.

It is one thing to have a thief break into your house and rob you; but it is something far more insulting and painful to bear to be betrayed by someone you trust, to have one of your own household rob you. Well, Onesimus took his Master’s goods and ran.

Knowing his guilt and fearing his master’s wrath, **Onesimus ran away to Rome**. There he hoped to lose himself in the crowded streets, among the vagabonds and street people. **At last Onesimus was brought into**

that room where God's servant, Paul, was a prisoner. He heard Paul preach the gospel of God's grace in Christ, and this poor runaway slave was arrested by God's omnipotent grace, converted by the power of his Spirit, born again by the gospel, and made to be believer, a child of God.

You know the rest of the story. **Onesimus still belonged to Philemon.** He was a wanted man. His master had a lawful right to have him executed. The only right thing for this slave to do was to return to his master and hope that he would be gracious.

THE PICTURE

What a picture the Lord here gives us of his amazing grace! We who are now converted by God's omnipotent mercy were once just like Onesimus. We went astray from the womb speaking lies (Ps. 58:3). We robbed God of his glory as God. We despised him and his goodness, but we stilled belonged to God. If we had what we deserved, we would have perished under his wrath. It would be lawful, righteous, and just for the holy Lord God to slay us in his fury. Our only hope was (and is) his mercy. Fleeing to him for mercy, pleading for mercy in Christ, he received us graciously in Christ, for Christ's sake, even as he receives Christ.

SINNER

My friend, you still belong to God. You are a wanted man. Justice cries out for your execution. It would be lawful, righteous, and just for God to slay you. The only thing for you to do is to go to God, confessing your guilt, pleading the merits of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and hope that he will be gracious.

“Come, humble sinner, in whose breast
A thousand thoughts revolve,
Come, with your guilt and fear oppressed,
And make this last resolve—

‘I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin
Hath like a mountain rose:
I know His courts I’ll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.

Prostrate, I’ll lie before His throne,
And there my guilt confess.
I’ll tell Him I’m a wretch undone
Without His sovereign grace.

I’ll to the gracious King approach,
Whose scepter pardon gives.
Perhaps He may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.

Perhaps He will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish I will pray
And perish only there.

I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away I know,
I must forever die.

But if I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
This were to die, (delightful thought!)
As sinner never died!”

Once Onesimus was converted, the Apostle Paul took down his pen and paper, and by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, he wrote this little epistle to Philemon with his own hand, with the hope of both preserving Onesimus’ life and making reconciliation between Onesimus and Philemon.

FOUR THINGS

This brief little epistle is full of instruction for us. I see four things here that arrested my attention as I read this letter from Paul to Philemon.

1. **Here is an example of true Christian love** (v. 5).

(Philemon 1:5) “Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.”

Paul showed great love in his regard for Onesimus. He took this degraded, loathsome creature in. Once he

had been converted by the grace of God, Paul regarded him and treated him as his own son. Though Onesimus and Timothy were very different men before they were converted (Timothy was a moral, upright young man. Onesimus was the offscouring of society.), after they were converted, they were both equal in Paul's eyes. In Christ there is no such thing as rank. In Christ our past is irrelevant.

Illustration: *“With my track record...”*

Philemon showed great brotherly love in his reception of Onesimus. Though Philemon had been greatly wronged by this man, he received him again into his household, freely forgiving him the wrong he had done (Matt. 6:14-15). I pray that God will give me such a tender spirit (Eph. 4:32).

(Matthew 6:14-15) For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

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

If God forgives us, surely we ought to forgive one another. If Christ receives us, surely we ought to receive one another. — This kind of love is the law that rules God's elect. It is the principle by which saved people

live. — “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*” (John 13:34-35).

2. **Here is an example of substitutionary redemption**
(v. 18).

(Philemon 1:17-18) “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.”

Onesimus had wronged Philemon. He had betrayed his master’s trust, despised his master’s goodness, and stolen his master’s goods. Onesimus owed much to Philemon. But listen to this. Paul says, “*Receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.*”

That is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us (Isa. 53:4-10).

(Isaiah 53:4-10) Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 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. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He

was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. 9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

3. Here is an example of divine forgiveness (v. 17).

Paul says, “*If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.*” Onesimus was forgiven through the intercession of another. He was accepted, not as a slave, but as a brother, an equal. And he was accepted because of another. **The God of Glory receives every sinner who trusts his dear Son as he receives Christ himself.** We are “*accepted in the Beloved.*”

- We have been forgiven through the intercession of Christ.
- We have been accepted as the sons of God, in every way equal to Christ in God’s sight (1 John 3:1).

- We have been accepted because of another, accepted because of the Lord Jesus Christ, and accepted as Christ is accepted.

“Near, so very near to God,
Nearer I cannot be,
For in the Person of His Son
I am as near as He!

Dear, so very dear to God,
Dearer I cannot be,
For in the Person of His Son
I am as dear as He!”

4. But the thing that stands out most beautifully in the text is this. — **Here we have an example of God’s wondrous, amazing, irresistible grace.**

Proposition: In the case of Onesimus, we see clear evidence that the grace of God is always effectual and irresistible, and can never be thwarted in its purpose. — Grace is not merely God’s will to save. Grace is God’s act of saving.

Divisions: Taking the case of Onesimus as our example, I want to show you five things about the grace of God.

1. The grace of God always takes the initiative in salvation.
2. The grace of God rules and overrules all things to accomplish its purpose.

3. The grace of God is always successful.
4. Grace always gives God the glory.
5. The grace of God is a door of hope for perishing sinners.

THE INITIATIVE

I. GRACE IS ALWAYS FIRST! — The grace of God always takes the initiative in salvation.

“Grace first contrived the way
To save rebellious man;
And all the steps that grace display
Which drew the wondrous plan.

Grace first inscribed my name
In God’s eternal book:
‘Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb,
Who all my sorrows took.”

A. Onesimus was the object of sovereign election.

This poor slave did not know it, but he was the chosen object of God’s eternal, electing love. He was not worthy of God’s love. He did not desire God’s love. He did not seek God’s love. Nevertheless, he was loved of God from eternity. God had said concerning Onesimus, “*I will be his God and he shall be my son.*” And so it came to pass.

- Grace passed by many slaves who were just like Onesimus, and chose him.

- Grace passed by many men and women at Colosse who were far nobler than Onesimus, and chose him.

Illustration: *David and His Brothers — 1 Samuel 16*

As a general rule, the most unworthy of the unworthy, the most loathsome of the loathsome, the most useless of the useless, the most vile of the vile are the objects of God's grace (1 Cor. 1:26-29; Jer. 31:3). What are you, and what am I that God should be merciful to us?

(1 Corinthians 1:26-29) For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

Let us never forget where we were, who we were, and what we were when the grace of God found us and called us by his grace (1 Cor. 1:26-28; 6:9-11; Isa. 51:1).

(Isaiah 51:1) Harken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock *whence* ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit *whence* ye are digged.

(1 Corinthians 6:9-11) Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, *10* Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. *11* And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Illustration: *The Remembrance Room*

- **Be sure you understand this — the grace of God is always sovereign** (Rom. 9:15-16).

(Romans 9:15-16) For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. *16* So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

You have no claim upon the grace of God. God is in no way obliged to show you mercy. He can save you if he will, or he can damn you if he will. It is up to him. God is not in your hands. You are in God's hands. The Lord God is sovereign. He does as it pleases him.

- God chooses some, and passes by others.
- God sent his Son to redeem some, but not others.

- God sends the gospel to some, and refuses to send it to others.
- God sends his Spirit to call some, and leaves the rest to their own chosen darkness and ignorance.
- This is God’s right as God. We gladly submit to his total, absolute sovereignty (Rom. 9:18-21).

(Romans 9:18-21) Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth. *19* Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? *20* Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? *21* Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

“Mortals, be dumb; what creature dares
Dispute His sovereign will?
Ask no account of His affairs,
But tremble and be still.

Just like His nature is His grace,
All sovereign, and all free;
Great God, how searchless are Thy ways,
How deep thy judgments be!”

B. The Grace of God sought Onesimus.

Onesimus did not seek God. God sought Onesimus. —
Onesimus was not looking for the Lord. The Lord was

looking for Onesimus. — Onesimus did not want grace. Grace wanted Onesimus. — Onesimus did not come to grace. Grace came to Onesimus. — Onesimus did not find the Lord. The Lord found Onesimus.

Illustration: *“I didn’t know he was lost.”*

The name of God’s church is *“Sought Out”* (Isa. 61:12). The Lord God declares, *“I am found of them that sought me not”* (Isa. 65:1). Modern day religion says to the sinner, “You take the first step, and God will do the rest.” God says to the sinner, *“Without me, ye can do nothing.”* You have no ability and no will to come to me. I will come and be gracious to whom I will be gracious.”

Grace always takes the initiative in salvation.

- God chose us; we did not choose him.
- God gave us life; we did not give life to ourselves.
- God sought us; we did not seek him.
- God came to us; we did not come to him.

“Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be,
This heart would still refuse Thee,
But Thou hast chosen me.
Thou from the sin that stained me
Washed me and set me free,
And to this end ordained me,
That I should live to Thee.

‘Twas sovereign mercy called me,
And taught my opening mind;
The world had else enthralled me,
To heavenly glories blind:
My heart owns none before Thee,
For Thy rich grace I thirst;
This knowing, if I love Thee,
Thou must have loved me first.”

ON TIME

II. GRACE IS ALWAYS ON TIME. – It is never before time; and it is never behind time, but always on time!

The grace of God rules and overrules all things to accomplish its purpose (Ps. 76:10; John 17:1-2; Rom. 8:28).

(Psalms 76:10) Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

(John 17:1-2) These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: 2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

(Romans 8:28-30) 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. 29 For whom he

did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Onesimus had no right to rob his master and runaway; but God was pleased to make use of Onesimus' sin to accomplish his conversion. In the wise arrangement of divine providence, Onesimus' evil deed brought him to the place where God would be gracious to him (Psa. 76:10). **Look at verse 15.** — “*For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.*”

PREVENIENT GRACE

We must be careful here. Onesimus did exactly what he wanted to do. He freely exercised his “free-will,” and chose the path of wickedness. – Still, God had a hand in the whole affair. This is what the old writers used to call prevenient grace, grace that goes before and prepares the way for grace. (Compare Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 13:29).

(Acts 2:23) “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:”

(Acts 4:27-28) “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and

Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, (28) For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

(Acts 13:29) “And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took *him* down from the tree, and laid *him* in a sepulchre.”

Illustration: *Adam’s Fall*

A. Onesimus madly ran the sinful course of his own “freewill.”

Had not the Lord God sovereignly intervened, this man’s actions would surely have brought him to ruin and to hell.

B. But God’s purpose of grace could not and would not be overturned.

- Onesimus must come to Rome.
- Onesimus must hear the gospel from Paul’s lips.
- Paul and Onesimus must be brought to Rome at the same time – At just the right time.

How will it all happen? **The Lord God called the old serpent, Satan, into his service.**

- Satan tempted Onesimus, just at the right time, and persuaded him to steal his master’s goods.

- Satan led an angry mob to have Paul arrested at Jerusalem.
- Having robbed his master, Onesimus was filled with fear and fled to Rome.
- At last, on the appointed day, Onesimus comes before Paul, and Paul preached the gospel to him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Illustrations: *Brad and Iris*

The Boy From CA in Lima, Peru

The Boys who Came in to Check the Time

God almighty, when he intends to be gracious to a sinner, always brings the sinner whom he has chosen to the preacher whom he has chosen to hear the gospel (Rom. 10:14-17).

- Perhaps he had been arrested.
- Perhaps he came to Paul for help.

At any rate, Onesimus and Paul meet face to face, at the appointed time, in the appointed place, for the appointed purpose. And I am here to tell you that it is still true...

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His vast designs
And works His sovereign will.”

Note: Here is a word of comfort and encouragement for you whose sons and daughters break your hearts through their rebellion and waywardness. Sometimes this is God’s appointed way of grace. — It is far better to lose them for a season and gain them for eternity than to keep them at home in self-righteousness and to lose them for eternity. The wise thing for us to do is simply to submit to the will of God. — *“It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.”*

Illustration: *The Sailor in Havana.*

Aren’t you glad to know that the grace of God rules and overrules all things to accomplish its purpose? Grace is always on time.

SUCCESSFUL

III. GRACE IS SUCCESSFUL. — The grace of God is always successful.

Grace cannot be defeated. Grace cannot be thwarted. Grace cannot be overturned. Grace cannot be resisted. God had chosen Onesimus, and Onesimus must be saved.

A. Grace preserved Onesimus, provided for Onesimus, protected Onesimus, and led Onesimus all the days of his life, even in his rebellion (Heb. 1:14; Hos. 2:8).

(Hebrews 1:14) Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

(Hosea 2:8) For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, *which* they prepared for Baal.

B. At the appointed time, grace conquered Onesimus' heart (Ezek. 16:3-8).

(Ezekiel 16:3-8) And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity *is* of the land of Canaan; thy father *was* an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite. 4 And *as for* thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple *thee*; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. 5 None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. 6 And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live. 7 I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou

art come to excellent ornaments: *thy* breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou *wast* naked and bare. 8 Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time *was* the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.

By the power of God's grace, Onesimus was made a new man in Christ. – Behold the wondrous, transforming power of the grace of our God! — Grace changes a man's character, and grace changes his behavior: – At Home! – At Work! – In All Things!

Rowland Hill used to say, “I would not give half a penny for a man's piety if his dog and cat were not better off after he is converted.”

C. **Mark this down, my friends, the grace of God is successful.** – **It is always be successful** (Rom. 8:29-30).

(Romans 8:29-30) For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

The good Shepherd goes seeking his sheep. He never gives up the search until he finds his sheep. And he always fetches his sheep home.

HONORS GOD

IV. GRACE HONORS GOD. — Grace always gives God the glory.

This is the reason why God does things the way he does them, so that we might be “*to the praise of the glory of his grace*” (Ezek. 16:62-63; Eph. 1:3-14).

(Ezekiel 16:62-63) And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD: 63 That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.

I am sure that Onesimus gave God the glory due unto his name, and so do I. — “*Salvation is of the Lord.*”

- He chose me.
- He redeemed me.
- He sought me.
- He called me.
- He came to me.
- He gave me life.
- He gave me faith.

- He keeps me.

GIVES HOPE

V. GRACE GIVES US HOPE. — The grace of God is a door of hope for perishing sinners.

My friends, the God that I preach to you is the God of all grace. “*He delighteth in mercy.*” Come now to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). Come in Submission. Come in Repentance. Come in faith. Come to Christ. Come home.

Illustration: *Tie a white handkerchief!*

- What a difference grace makes!
- Grace alone makes the difference (1 Cor. 4:7).

(1 Corinthians 4:7) For who maketh thee to differ *from another?* and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it*?

Amen.