**HEART OF CHRIST**

**Philemon 1-25**

**Key Verses: 10,11**

**"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me."**

**There are 66 books in the Bible. Philemon is just one short page of a letter. But it is included as one book of the Bible. It is indeed amazing that a one-page letter is included as one of the 66 Bible books, beating out such ex­cel­lent books of Apocrypha. It is because the let­ter re­veals the heart of Christ as well as the heart of Paul. Suppose someone has no heart. Then he cannot be a man. As long as one has a heart, he can be a man. This letter re­veals the heart of Jesus so tearfully that this one-page letter was highly recom­mended and includ­ed in the canon. Paul taught basic Chris­tianity to all the believ­ers. And he him­self put what he taught into practice. This one page book reveals the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**First, Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ (1). As we know, Paul was Saul, which meant "the greatest." He was humanly ambitious. Even though he was under the op­pression of the Roman Empire, he wanted to be the num­ber-one man in the future in his Jewish community. This caused him to approve Stephen's execution so as to be more recog­nized by the Jew­ish authorities (Ac 8:1). One day he was on the road to Da­mascus to arrest the early Chris­tians. Suddenly the heaven­ly sun­shine shone upon him. At that moment he heard the voice of the Risen Jesus, "Saul, Saul, why do you perse­cute me?" (Ac 9:4). Immedi­ately Paul fell from the horse and lay pros­trate on the muddy ground. His eyes were blind­ed. But his spiritual eyes were opened and he could see the Risen Christ. Before the Risen Christ, he real­ized that he was not a great man but a terri­ble sinner, and that Jesus is the Savior of the world. The Risen Christ appointed him as the apostle to the Gentiles and he lived gloriously for his mission all his life.**

**Second, house church (2). Look at verses 1b-2. "To Phile­mon our dear friend and fellow work­er, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fel­low sol­dier and to the church that meets in your home." Paul ­­learned that fellow Christians are all equal with him. He also learned the humbleness of Jesus. In verse 2, "Ap­phia" means "pros­per­ous." She was a woman. And "Archippus," mean­s "master of the house." He was a man. Paul also came to realize that fellow Chris­tians ­are the soldiers of Jesus Christ. So he said in verse 2, "fel­low sol­dier." We are cho­sen to fight against the powers of darkness (Eph 6:12). There­fore, Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:3, "En­dure hard­ship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." They were called to fight against the ungodly peo­ple of the times.**

**The last part of verse 2, "...to the church that meets in your home," has a very impor­tant meaning. In the early Christian age there was no church building. Anyone who was identified as a Chris­tian was ar­rested and beaten to death. So they wor­shiped God in their houses. The best example is Aquila and Priscilla. This family once immigrated to Rome and was deported. They went back to Rome and were again deported. Nevertheless, wher­ever they went, they invit­ed people and wor­shiped God. Once, there was Apollos, who was an ex­cel­lent Bible teacher. But he knew only the bap­tism of John the Baptist. So Aquila and Priscilla invited him to their home and taught him the meaning of Jesus' death and resur­rec­tion, and the living hope of the king­dom of God and the sec­ond coming of Jesus Christ. Definitely, each house must be established as a house church. Paul recognized several faithful Christians as the abso­lute majori­ty, for one Christian man is better than 100,000 cor­rupted men. A house church is the essential part of the church of Christ. Look at verse 3. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul teaches us that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the peace of God should be in our souls. In verses 4-7, Paul thanks God for the members of Philemon's church. Paul always remembered them in his prayer because he heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for the saints. Look at verses 4-5. "I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints." Philemon's house was Philemon's church. Those who came to the church grew in faith in God as well as in the love of God.**

**What is love? God is love (1Jn 4:16). God gave his one and only Son to save us from our sins. We did not love God first. God loved us first (1Jn 4:19). When we believe in the love of God we feel we are very much loved. And when we love God we can love our neighbor. When we love God, we have happiness in our souls.**

**Paul knew that they were growing in faith and love. But Paul en­cour­ages them to put what they know into prac­tice. When they practice faith and love, they can understand spiri­tual things in Jesus (6). Paul, who was in prison, compli­ments them that they gave him joy and encourage­ment and refresh­ment because of their growing faith and love.**

**Third, "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus" (8-16). Now, Paul comes to his main point of writing a letter to Philemon. Look at verse 8. "Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do..." Paul was a spiri­tu­al father to them and he had authority over them to tell them to “do this” and “do that.” But he did not use his spiritu­al authority over them. He ap­pealed to them. He is real­ly a humble man. He was in prison. His old body ached. He had many needs. But he did not write a petition for himself. But he wrote a petition for his one to one Bible sheep.**

**What kind of petition did he make? There was a man named Onesi­mus, mean­ing, "useful man." At that time, there were many satel­lite coun­tries which surrounded the Roman Empire. All the young men wanted to go to Rome out of their curi­osity and to satisfy their ambi­tion.**

**Onesimus was a slave of Philemon. He stole some money from his mas­ter and ran away to Rome. In Rome, unfor­tunate­ly, he was arrested and put in prison. But by God's provi­dence, he be­came a prison-­mate of St. Paul. At that time, St. Paul was all by him­self. But he met Onesi­mus. He took care of him as his own dear son. Through St. Paul's babysit­ting and teaching the Bible, this runaway slave was gradually changed. He was once a use­less man. But he be­came a use­ful man by means of Paul's one-to-one Bible teaching.­ As his name “Onesimus” meant, he became a­ useful man. There was a very intellectual missionary. At first she wanted to be a mis­sionary to Har­vard University. But she stayed in Chica­go. She met a North­western Universi­ty student who had a bright mind. But since his parents divorced, he became a man of sorrow. The young man did not take care of him­self. So his sister took care of him. He ate only bloody raw meat. He walk­ed around in his bare feet in the winter snow. At that time the wo­man mis­sionary took care of him with all her heart. Then the young man could finish at North­west­ern and marry a woman of prayer.**

**Paul wanted Onesimus to be a wholesome man. Paul wanted to re­store his social position. So Paul wanted to send him back to Phile­mon. Paul appealed to Philemon, saying that once Onesimus was use­less, but now he is a useful man. Paul emphasizes that he is a changed man. Look at vers­es 10-12. "I appeal to you for my son Onesi­mus, who became my son while I was in chains. For­merly he was useless to you, but now he has become use­ful both to you and to me. I am sending him--who is my very heart--back to you." In the first part of verse 12, Paul said, "I am send­ing him--who is my very heart..." Paul gave all his heart to Onesimus. Paul loved Onesimus as he loved God. So he said, "...who is my very heart...." It may have been that Paul's heart was broken many times in the course of helping Onesi­mus. It is more than sure that Paul was tired and weary in the course of help­ing him. Paul is like a four-star general in one-to-one Bible study. But in car­ing for one wretched person he is like a mother.**

**Fourth, welcome him as your own brother (17-21). Paul firmly be­liev­ed that Philemon and the fellow Christians there would wel­come Paul as a partner of the gospel of Je­sus. Paul also believed that they would accept Onesi­mus as a Chris­tian brother. But the system and mentality of the time did not allow a slave to act like a brother. On top of this, those who stole the master’s money and ran away were supposed to die or be severely punished. Onesimus had stolen money from Philemon and run away.**

**Paul urges Phi­le­­mon to cancel the debt by remembering the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Look at verses 17-18. "So if you consider me a part­ner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you any­thing, charge it to me." In actual­ity, Paul was in prison. Paul could not pay the debt back for Onesimus, for he had no mon­ey. But he appealed to Phile­mon to cancel his debt. A grace­ful shep­herd, St. Paul, in short, wanted Philemon to accept Onesimus with respect and honor and not punish him. From Phi­lemon's point of view, it was totally im­possible. But Paul said,­ "He is my heart" (12).**

**Onesimus was nothing but an ex-slave and thief and pri­soner and a man of no hope of marriage. At best, he could be reinstated as a slave, if not imprisoned. But Paul asked them to accept him, not as a slave, but as a brother, with respect and love. If they did so, Paul would be happy and his heart would be re­freshed in Christ. Paul had the heart of Christ. Paul cared for Onesi­mus, not be­cause he was a possi­ble future lead­er, but because he loved him in Je­sus.**

**Paul was in prison. Humanly speaking, Paul was old. He had come to Rome to evangelize the Roman Em­pire, but his dream seemed to have been shat­tered. So Paul could not have any space in his heart for Onesi­mus. But Paul loved him with all his heart. Paul was too old to write with his own hand. But he wrote with his own hand to show how much he loved Onesi­mus. Look at verse 21. "Confident of your obedi­ence, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask."**

**Fifth, prepare a guest room for me (22). Look at verse 22. "And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be re­stored to you in answer to your prayers." As we have thought about, Paul was in a Roman prison. He was in chains. He was old. Rome was a foreign country. His destiny seems to be like a flickering candlelight before the wind. In this situa­tion, Paul could not hope for anything. He could not do any­thing. If he were an ordinary person, he would only worry about bloody hands injured by the chain and be very sorry for his skin. But in this verse we don't find any hint of fatal­ism or sorrow in the heart of St. Paul. Rather he was full of vision. He was hop­ing that he would be freed from prison and go all around the world and pro­claim the gospel of Jesus and evangelize the whole world. Paul’s real intention to go to Philemon’s church was to see that Onesimus was accepted with respect and love.**

**Finally Paul introduces fellow prisoners in Christ Jesus: First, Mark, meaning "unstable man;" Aristarchus, mean­ing "good steward;" Luke, mean­ing "shining." Luke was a Gentile. He had no reason to be in prison. But for the sake of Jesus, he had been a personal doctor for St. Paul. Mark was a slippery person. But he was changed and impris­oned together with St. Paul. St. Paul was in prison and was con­sidered as a traitor. Paul was treated like a pris­oner. But his love for God pre­vailed over every­thing. Be­cause he loved God he loved one lost soul with all his heart. We can­not deny that he had the heart of Christ. May God help us love many Onesimuses. May God give us the heart of Jesus Christ. We must have something to live in this world. But to us to have the heart of Christ is the most important because it helps us overcome all the hardships and sufferings and keeps us in the peace of God.**