

A SINNER MEETS A RIGHTEOUS MAN

The book of Philemon is unique in that it deals with a private matter between two brethren. One of the brothers was a good Christian man named Philemon. He was a slave owner. The other was a man named Onesimus. He was Philemon's runaway slave. Onesimus met Paul and was converted to Christ. The book of Philemon teaches us that the gospel is not a social gospel, but it does have an effect on social issues. Christianity changes the thinking, hearts and minds of people. Through these changes, many evils in society are corrected. The gospel changes men. Onesimus was converted as a runaway slave and he became a faithful brother in Christ. Philemon's obligation was now to accept Onesimus as a beloved brother. Paul wrote, "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; 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?" (Philemon 1:15-16) Can you see yourself in the book of Philemon?

There are many good and faithful people scattered throughout the world – Philemon 1:1-7: We might, at times, get the "Elijah complex" when we think we are the only ones left who are interested in doing the will of God. He said, "I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." But, God told Elijah, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:18) Many changes are taking place in churches of Christ. Some of them are not for the good at all. When churches of Christ have women preachers or women interns to preach; when churches of Christ add instrumental music to worship or when churches of Christ take on the look of a denomination in general we may wonder, are there any others left who want to do right? I can assure you that there are. There are good, faithful Christians scattered about throughout our world, who want nothing but truth. Such was the case with Philemon and his family. These were brethren who were sound and solid in the faith. Paul described Philemon as, "Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlaboure." (Philemon 1:1) He also greeted Apphia, and Archippus and the church in their house. Likely, Apphia was Philemon's wife. Paul described Archippus as a fellow soldier. He was Philemon's son, at least most of us think so. He must have been a preacher of the gospel. These were good people who were trying their best to serve God. I have been blessed to know many people who had that same spirit. Paul was thankful for Philemon, for his love and faith that was manifested in his daily living. Philemon was busy sharing his faith and being busy with every good thing. We must also find ways to share our faith and to strengthen others on their spiritual journey.

There are people like Onesimus, who are useless to the cause of Christ because of sin – Philemon 1:8-11: Paul wrote to Philemon, saying, "Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me." (Philemon 1:8-11) There are many things we do not know about Onesimus. We do not know how he became a slave. We do not know why he ran away. We do not know what made him unprofitable. Those who find themselves in a state of being spiritually unprofitable need to quickly make changes in order to be right with God. Let us do our part to gently lead those who are away from God back to Him, and back to spiritual usefulness. "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to