

ONESIMUS' VIEWPOINT

STUDIES IN PHILEMON #2

Andy was born into a poor family. His mother and father could hardly provide enough food for him to eat, let alone clothes for him to wear and money for education and other needs. So, with heavy hearts, Andy's mother and father did what they thought was in the best interest of their son - they gave him to a kindly, wealthy man as a bound boy. In other words, Andy became a slave. Now we must remember that this was before the Civil War when slavery was legal in our country. And we must also remember that it was legal not only to have black slaves but also to have white ones as well. So Andy, as a 13 year old white young man, became a slave.

Well, things went along fairly well for Andy the next couple of years. But his lack of freedom kept gnawing at him on the inside. Andy dreamed of being free. And in his dreams, Andy's freedom brought glorious fame and riches to him. One day, Andy threw a rock through a neighbor's window by mistake. He hadn't meant to do it. He was just fooling around. But the neighbor was understandably upset, and threatened that he was going to tell Andy's master. In a panic, Andy ran. And before he knew it, he was in a position where he just didn't think that he could return. He feared reprisals from breaking the neighbor's window and from his own running away.

So Andy decided that he would go to the nearest city, Raleigh, North Carolina, and he would make his dream for freedom a reality. Andy basked in the emotional glow of freedom for a couple of weeks. But he didn't have a job and

was just eating scraps that he could find to survive. And then he heard that his master had put a reward out for him. So Andy decided that he had better get farther away from home. He crossed the border into South Carolina where he felt that he would be safer. The emotional high of being free quickly faded, and the realities of life began to set in. Andy didn't have a trade, he couldn't read or write, he had no learned skills, he had no money, and no job. Worst of all, Andy was eaten up inside by the gnawing guilt that what he had done was wrong - and he felt that God was punishing him for it. Finally, after 2 years, Andy decided that he would return to his master. He would humble himself, admit his wrong, and take his consequences like a man.

That was a life changing decision for Andy. First, he felt a tremendous lifting of the burden that he had inside. That first night, he could finally lay his head down on his pillow and sleep in peace. But then, as he returned home, imagine his surprise to find out that his master had sold his land and moved to the nearest city during those 2 years of his absence. When Andy finally tracked down his master in the city, he was told that he was no longer needed as a slave in the new business which the master had started. So the master voluntarily released Andy from slavery so that he wouldn't have to be responsible for him.

At first, Andy was afraid that his now legal freedom would be the worst thing that could have happened to him. He was still uneducated and unskilled and had no job. But with both physical freedom and the spiritual freedom of having a clear conscience, Andy began to think more clearly. He found himself a job as an apprentice with the help of his former master. He began to take some tutoring and

learned how to read and write. He, in time, became successful not only in business, but also in war as a war hero, and finally in politics as well. For Andrew Johnson would become the 17th President of the United States. But as President, he would admit that he never would have been able to make that long journey from slavery to the White House if he wouldn't have had the courage and integrity as a teenage young man to face the music and do what he knew in his heart was right for him to do.

It is not always easy to do the right thing. In fact, it sometimes appears to be much harder to do what is right. That is the reason for so many opting for the wrong way. For the wrong path often appears to be the easiest one. But the right path, doing the right thing, is always the best path to take. For even if it doesn't lead to success, it allows a person to live at peace with himself.

Last week, we started a 4 part series on the short, one chapter letter from the Apostle Paul to Philemon. We revealed our plan at that time to look at this epistle from 4 viewpoints. Last time, we saw this situation from Philemon's viewpoint. Philemon was the master of the household. His slave, Onesimus, had stolen from him and run away. We saw last time how Paul encouraged Philemon to forgive this errant servant and accept him back home again.

Now this week, we want to view this situation from Onesimus' viewpoint. Onesimus was the one who had done wrong. He had abused the graces of his godly master and had stolen from him. But Onesimus had found that while he could hide from Philemon in the large capital city of Rome, he couldn't run from his own conscience inside. And that guilty conscience had eventually lead

Onesimus to the Apostle Paul. Now, saved by the grace of God, Onesimus wanted to do what was right. So while Philemon pictures for us the godly response to having been wronged - being willing to forgive and restore,

ONESIMUS IS AN EXAMPLE OF GODLY REPENTANCE. - being willing to turn from a sinful path in life to do the right thing. Now I want for you to see 4 observations concerning godly repentance that we find illustrated in this brief letter from Paul to Philemon.

1. GODLY REPENTANCE COMES ONLY FROM A CHANGE OF HEART. READ VS. 10

¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

When the Apostle Paul speaks of Onesimus becoming his son, he is testifying to his change of heart. Onesimus had received the Lord Jesus Christ into his life. Onesimus had become a member of God's family. Paul often spoke of the ones whom he had lead to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his children in the Lord. So it is clear from Paul's letter to Philemon that Onesimus' repentance began with a change of heart.

Now this is important for us to realize today because many are promoting a message of radical change by changing only external circumstances. No one questions the fact that there is a great need for change in the world around us. There is far too much crime; there is far too much immorality; there is far too much ignorance. But the solutions that are offered usually address only the external circumstances. If we only had better programs to keep kids off of the

street, that would solve the crime issue. If we only had better education about socially transmitted diseases, that would solve the problem of immorality. If we only had more money for our schools, ignorance in society would be eradicated. The underlying assumption is that all people are basically good inside - we just need to fan the flame of their basically benevolent nature.

Now we have tried these solutions for several decades now as a nation. We have added countless programs of various kinds from headstart programs to midnight basketball programs. We have all seen an explosion of public service announcements identifying STD's and the dangers of them. We have doubled and tripled and quadrupled the amount of money spent on education in our country since W.W.2. But we are not solving all the problems. Now I am not saying that programs or education or money aren't important - they are. But I am saying that it is about time that we looked at the basic underlying assumption that is leading us down the wrong road. True repentance does not come from the outside in - true repentance comes from the inside out. True change does not begin with the alteration of outside circumstances - true change begins with different commitment of heart. The bible says that we are born in a state of enmity with God. Our natural tendencies are not towards goodness or righteousness - we naturally want to oppose God and his standards. The Bible says that our hearts are deceitful and wicked. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jer. 17:9.* We have to understand our basic nature in order to begin to change our lives. Our society will only be changed for the better in the long run as the hearts of the individuals in our society are changed.

Now allow me to take these principles and make them very personal. It is easy to talk about society in general, but it is more difficult to consider ourselves personally. If you or I want to change our lives, we must begin by admitting our sin and asking God to cleanse our hearts. The change must come from the inside first. As long as we expect change to come from the outside in, we will continue to excuse our actions. We will blame our environment; we will blame our parents; we will blame the personality we were genetically given; we will have a thousand and one excuses. And these excuses will make us feel better about ourselves momentarily. But the bottom line is this - we will never change. We will continue to be imprisoned by our sinful heart. True Biblical change begins with a change of heart.

Several years ago I saw a cartoon in the paper. A ragged beggar was on a street corner holding a cup. Around his neck hung a sign which read, *60% heredity; 40% environment*. Now that sign might have some truth to it. And that sign might have made that man feel better about his conditions. But that sign was like a ball and chain that was going to keep that man on that same street corner for the rest of his life.

Onesimus began his journey of repentance when he confessed his sin and was born again into God's family. When God gave him a new heart, he was then in a position to change his way of life.

2. GODLY REPENTANCE DEMANDS A CHANGE OF LIFE. READ
VS. 12

PHM 1:12 I am sending him--who is my very heart--back to you.

It was impossible for Onesimus to truly repent and then not take steps to make his wrongs right again. It was impossible for Onesimus to truly repent and then to keep running from Philemon's home. True Biblical repentance demands a change of life. That is what the word repentance literally means. The word that is commonly translated *repentance* in the N.T. literally means to change one's mind about something in life leading to a change of actions.

A Sunday School teacher asked her class what they thought was meant by repentance in the Bible. One little boy raised his hand confidently and answered, *Repentance is being sorry for you sins.* There was a moment of silence in the class. And then another little lad timidly raised his hand. *I think repentance is being sorry enough for your sins to quit.* It was that second boy who captured the essence of Biblical repentance.

Do you remember Paul's statement about repentance that he made to the church at Corinth recorded in 2 Cor. 7:10. *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regrets, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

It is natural to be sorry when we do wrong. We have a guilty conscience within. Often we get caught in our actions and feel embarrassed. Usually, the consequences of our actions are not desirable when we do wrong - we get ourselves into some hot water. Even unbelievers feel bad at times when they do wrong. This is natural. But without Biblical repentance, this sorrow leads to death. There is no forgiveness, there is no cleansing, there is no relief. Biblical repentance demands that we do something about the wrong. Biblical repentance leads to salvation. It demands that we not only confess our wrong to God, but that

we also change our pattern of living to do what is right. And this brings relief and life to us.

Henry Morrison, an old preacher, used to tell a personal story which illustrates Biblical repentance. He was a child way back during the days of the Civil War. And as many young boys at that time, he used to look up in admiration to the uniformed soldiers who gallantly road off to war. Young Morrison used to pretend that he was one of those soldiers out on the farm where he lived. He found a stick and tied a rope around the top of it - that became his horse. And then he whittled another stick to make a sword. And young Henry would spend hours riding that imaginary horse into battle, wielding his sword against the enemy.

His favorite enemy was the family's ducks and geese. He used to love to ride into the unsuspecting animals who were roaming the barnyard and watch them scatter and flee from his ferocious charge. When all of his chores were done, Henry just delighted in playing war, mounting his stick horse, and riding off into battle against the unsuspecting ducks and geese.

One day, as Henry was charging into the fray, thrashing his sword all about, he happened to hit one of the geese in the head by mistake. Henry never really meant to hurt any of the animals, but he just happened to catch this goose just right with his sword. And the goose immediately dropped to the ground. Henry was petrified. What had he done? He ran over to the goose and saw that it wasn't breathing. Crestfallen, Henry took up the goose which really had been his playmate and tenderly took it out into the woods to bury it. Then he came back home in dejection having killed this goose by mistake.

No sooner had he gotten back into the barnyard than his sister Emily met him. *Henry, I saw you kill that goose - and I'm going to tell mom. No, please don't, Henry pleaded. I'll do anything you want me to. Just please don't tell mom. I feel badly enough already - I don't want to hurt her too.*

That night after supper, Henry's mother reminded Emily that it was her turn to do the dishes. *Well, mom, Henry told me earlier that he would like to do the dishes for me tonight.* Well, mother was certainly surprised by Henry's new cooperative spirit as she watched him scrub those dishes. But Henry's cooperation didn't end there. For the next week, Henry not only did all of his own chores, but he did Emily's as well. He didn't have any more time to play, because he was too busy doing all of the chores around the house.

Finally, Henry couldn't take it anymore. He was so sick and tired of living as Emily's slave that he decided he was going to tell his mother what had happened. No matter how painful it would be, no matter how severe his punishment, he just had to get it over with. So with tears running down his cheeks, Henry went to his mother and told her the story about how he had killed the goose with his sword while playing he was in battle in the front yard.

Henry's mother listened patiently as he told the whole story. Then she surprised Henry with her answer. She wasn't angry with him, she didn't scold him. In fact, she told him that she knew what Henry had done all the time. She told him how she had been looking out the kitchen window. She told him how she saw him strike the goose by mistake. She knew that it had been a childish accident. And she told him that she had already forgiven him for the action. She was just

waiting for him to come and confess it to her.

You can imagine the relief that Henry Morrison felt as he walked away from his mother. He was free from the inner guilt and pain. And he knew that he was free from the slavery of his sister.

That night, after supper, when Emily volunteered Henry for her chores, Henry refused. *Well, if you don't, I'll tell mom, Emily challenged. Go right ahead, Henry replied. Mom already knows anyway.* Henry was freed at last. He had felt sorry before. But he hadn't repented. Now he had fully repented - and he was a free man.

Isn't it interesting how we are often tempted to harbor our sins in our hearts living as a slave to both ourselves and the Devil? Do we really think that an omniscient God doesn't know what we have done? Do we really think that we can hide our sins from God? The amazing truth is that God has already forgiven our sins. The Lord Jesus Christ paid for them in full upon the cross of Calvary. God now waits for us to confess them and turn from them in repentance. As we repent of our sins, we find inner freedom and restored fellowship with God.

3. GODLY REPENTANCE DEMANDS RESTITUTION. READ VS. 17-18

PHM 1:17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.

Now I wish that we had more time to develop this point, for it is a very important one. Biblical repentance always demands restitution. Onesimus wasn't

in a position to repay Philemon immediately. He was going to repay him over the long haul by his faithful and committed service. So Paul, recognizing the necessity of restitution, offers to repay Philemon on Onesimus' behalf so that Philemon would have immediate restitution if he demanded it. This was necessary - for Biblical repentance not only demands a change of heart and actions, but it demands restitution – doing everything possible to make the wrong right again.

Restitution is a principle that is taught thruout the Scriptures. In the O.T. law, restitution was an obvious and accepted part of life. Listen to these words from Exodus 22:1-3: *If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters or sells it, he must pay back 5 head of cattle for the ox and 4 sheep for the sheep. . . A thief must certainly make restitution.*

Now there is a very disturbing trend today with regards to wrongs that are committed. People have the idea that as long as they just say they are sorry, everything is alright. A vandal is caught and brought before the judge. *I'm sorry judge, I won't do it again.* He is let go with a stern rebuke. What about the person whose property was ruined? What about restitution? You see, one of the reasons why crimes of this nature have been escalating is the simple fact that we have not demanded restitution to the offended person as a part of the punishment.

Now there is no question that Biblical repentance demands restitution. Simply expressing sorrow is not enough. The issue is not settled until the wrong has been made right.

*When something is taken, it has to be repaid.

*When something is broken, it has to be fixed.

*If a person tells a false rumor about someone, he has to not only apologize to the one who was slandered, but he also should go to everyone who heard it and correct it before it is finally settled.

*That's restitution. That's taking responsibility for the action and making the wrong right. And that is absolutely necessary for Biblical repentance.

*Paul didn't write Philemon and tell him the glorious news of Onesimus' salvation ending with the admonition for Philemon to just forgive and bear the loss with Christian grace. Philemon probably would have done that being the man of Christian character that he was. But it wouldn't have been good for Onesimus. Onesimus had done wrong - he needed to take responsibility for his actions and make them right. So Paul sent Onesimus with this letter in his hand to give it to Philemon. Onesimus was not only going to tell Philemon he was sorry for what he had done, but he was also going to go to Philemon to make it right again.

4. GODLY REPENTANCE RETURNS ONE INTO A POSITION OF BEING USEFUL AGAIN. READ VS. 10, 11

¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

Poor Onesimus. He had so much potential in life. He had even been named Onesimus which means *useful* in the Greek language. Just think of all the good he could have done for the kingdom of God by being a faithful servant in Philemon's household. Remember, Philemon was the key leader of this influential church in

Colossae. This was one of the principle churches in all of Asia Minor. Onesimus was the man who took care of many of the details of life so that Philemon could give so much time to God's ministry in the church. Onesimus had been so trusted and had been given such freedom by Philemon that he could have hatched this plot to run away with much of Philemon's wealth. But he had allowed bad decisions to just make him to be useless. So here he was before he met the Apostle Paul, having squandered the wealth, living as a fugitive and renegade in the ghettos of Rome. But now, having a change of heart, having made a commitment to change his direction in life, being willing to make restitution for his wrongs, he was putting himself back into a position of usefulness once again. Without repenting, Onesimus would have squandered away his life in the anonymity of the Roman ghetto. But because he chose the path of repentance, Onesimus would become a key player in the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout all of Asia Minor.

As we conclude this morning, let me ask you a question. Is there something in your life that has been destroying your usefulness for the Lord?

*Perhaps you don't have the confidence that you are a member of God's family. Perhaps you feel imprisoned by sin in your life. I would encourage you to repent of your sin. Admit it to God. He knows about it anyway. You are not telling him anything that he doesn't already know. As you admit your sin and ask for his forgiveness with a commitment to change your pattern of life, God will forgive you. He will accept you into his family and you will find great purpose and fulfillment in your life.

*But perhaps you are a Christian but your life has been spinning in circles.

You feel that you have become useless. Perhaps you know in your heart that it is because of some sin that you have committed. God knows what that sin is. You are not hiding it from him. Confess it to him. Take responsibility for it. Commit yourself to turn from it. Make restitution for it if necessary. Don't live any longer as a prisoner of the enemy. Find the freedom that Christ desires for you to have.

*Repentance often is the key to unlocking the jail cell of guilt and uselessness allowing us to walk into the freedom that God desires for us to have.