

**Scripture Reference:** Philemon 10-14

**Date:** November 9, 2014

**Title:** "Seeing God Work"

**Focus:** A Submitted Life is the Place Where God is Encountered  
(Philemon Series 2 of 4)

As was seen in verses one through nine, Paul had great delight in the life of Philemon. The fact God's person was evident in Philemon's life was Paul's source of joy.

Upon this foundation of Philemon's submission, Paul was confident God would continue to express Himself. This prompted Paul's appeal regarding Onesimus.

*v. 10; "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment."*

Onesimus was the slave of Philemon. He had run away and made his way to Rome, where Paul was imprisoned.

There is no information as to how, yet, Onesimus came into contact with Paul. As a result of this encounter, Onesimus came to saving faith in Christ.

*"My child Onesimus";* As a person births a person, conversion is mediated through a person-to-person medium.

Those who experience the saving grace of Christ by being reconciled to God, are His means others experiencing spiritual rebirth.

People in need of God are encountered everyday. In order to see them the student of Jesus must:

- a. Embrace the role in this redemptive endeavor God has given us.
- b. Think more of those encountered than we do of ourselves. This is the lesson of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).
- c. Not be preoccupied (and therefore distracted) by our own circumstances.

Paul's imprisonment did not hinder him seeing Onesimus, his lostless, or sharing God with him.

vv. 11-12; "[Onesimus] *formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart.*"

Paul employs a play on words to make a point to Philemon.

Onesimus' name means, "useless, unprofitable." Paul telling Philemon, "The one who was formerly useless and of no benefit is now a person who proves to be beneficial."

What do these words of Paul say about the wondrous capacity God has to transform the Human soul?

1 Peter 1:23; "*You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.*"

By conversion, God instills a life that exceeds what is possible by human nature or effort.

The life God births is supernatural (Romans 8:37). Just as a human child reflects his or her human parents, the spiritual child bears the DNA of his or her spiritual Father, God.

*2 Corinthians 13:5; "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?"*

*vv. 13-14; "Whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will."*

The Onesimus Paul knew was no longer the man Philemon was familiar with.

The person Philemon knew was worthless. The individual Paul wrote about was of such benefit Paul wished to keep him around.

As incredible a difference God makes, spiritual transformation DOES NOT negate the temporal effects of past actions.

Onesimus was rightfully Philemon's. Salvation did not change that. As a new creature, Onesimus remained accountable for the effects of his past actions.

This reality presented opportunities Paul would not interfere with. Paul would not hinder the working out of God's grace in the lives of Onesimus and Philemon.

Two opportunities:

a. Onesimus had to learn to trust God. Trust (faith) is the quintessential element in a disciple's relationship with God (Hebrews 11:6).

From Onesimus' perspective, returning to Philemon entailed genuine and considerable risk. At the least he could be exchanging his physical freedom for slavery once more.

He also faced the possibility of retribution for running away. This might have resulted in additional loss of freedom, imprisonment or death.

There was no assurance Philemon would forgive and/or release Onesimus. According to the natural man, Onesimus was taking a chance.

However, discipleship without faith is without meaning and power. It is only by acting on the truths of God that stand in contradiction to human reason that faith is experienced and the disciple learns God can be trusted.

b. Philemon needed to learn to further operate in God's grace. Like it or not, Philemon was the aggrieved party in this situation. He was the one deprived of His property.

Humanly speaking, he had every right to demands his rights be respected.

However, as with faith, a value related to God is the practice of self-denial. This discipline is expressed in the willingness to suffer loss for the profit of another.

God demonstrated self-denial in the incarnation and crucifixion. His disciples imitate His actions by forgoing their own benefits that another would profit.

self-denial, by definition, entails offering something of personal value.

### **The Last Eighteen Inches**

1. God is encountered in the person of His disciples. One who has come to a relationship with God is the means of others experiencing Him.
2. Only to the extent that a disciple is living a vital and expressive relationship with God, can The Father be manifest to others.
3. Are you experiencing God? Is your life a conduit of His person. If not, why? How do you expect Him to be found?