

PHILEMON



Day 302

“Charge It To Me”

October 29 - Philemon

Oh, Happy Day! I've met some characters in my life, but probably no one like Ollie. He was quirky and had a fire for God that burned in his heart. He was also very Pentecostal. When I met him, I had no idea what the word Pentecostal meant. Ollie had intensity in his eyes, a deep love in his manner, and a very boisterous demeanor. I was a bank teller at a local savings and loan, and he'd come to my window from time to time. That is where our common faith in Jesus ignited.

I too was pretty demonstrative about my faith while I worked. I wore a badge, like a name badge, that said, “Jesus is Lord.” I'm not so sure I'd like to admit this, but I'd sneak gospel tracts into customers' passbooks when I was done making the transaction. We had a strong Jewish clientele and I now wonder what they must have thought when they came upon those booklets. I guess you can see why Ollie and I hit it off from the get-go.

I can remember that on several occasions while Ollie bent over at my window that he'd be saying, “Glory,” and “Hallelujah,” and “Praise Jesus,” right there in front of everyone. It didn't bother me a bit. One day when he began to speak in tongues though, I got a bit nervous. Ollie was Ollie. The bank manager was a longtime friend of my family, and while he did try and tone me down, I think part of him was respectful of my convictions. But what could he say about good old Ollie? He was a customer and you know the old saying: “the customer is always right.”

“Glory!” “Hallelujah!” “Praise Jesus!” Something magical happens when you share your faith in Jesus

with someone else. This is true whether the person is a believer or not. There is just a special spiritual experience when you are able to talk about any aspect of what Christ has done for the world in general or in your life in particular. Paul says that it clarifies our understanding of the Lord and it reminds us of all the good we have because of Jesus. This is why small groups in church are so important. When you get together with other believers and share your beliefs, you build each other up and also solidify your faith in the Lord.

The book of Philemon is like a little postcard. In it, Paul is appealing to a friend—a friend with whom he had shared the bond of faith in Christ. I wonder if the original had a picture on the front of some beautiful spot in Israel, maybe the amphitheater in Caesarea. Or maybe it was a funny one with a Far Side joke. Of course, I am speculating horribly here; more than likely it was on a small piece of parchment, rolled up and tied together so that it could be carried in the most practical way.

Onesimus, whose name means “useful,” had escaped his master's homestead and was off to experience the world. How he meets up with Paul is unknown, but it seems to me that since the apostle is in prison they probably met there. Maybe Onesimus was the trouble-making type. Anyway, while in prison Paul leads the young man to the Lord and realizes that he has potential to work with him in the gospel. Paul could tell when he had a live one on his hands, and Onesimus must have fit the bill of someone who could work on the gospel road. When Paul appeals for

Onesimus' release from Philemon, he says that he was at one time "useless," but now he was "useful;" a play on the meaning of his name.

Don't you love how Paul appeals to his Christian friend Philemon, the slave owner who was Onesimus's master? He knows that as an apostle he has the authority to demand the request, but he appeals on the basis of love, so that Philemon will also forgive Onesimus and join him in the redemption of the runaway slave. Onesimus is now a brother in Christ and Paul wants Philemon to see him that way. He wants him to forgive, and free the slave to work now for Paul. This request will test Philemon's ability to forgive. It will also force him to trust a man that he is probably pretty angry at. Have you ever been in that position?

From time to time we will be asked to forgive someone who has wronged us. Have you ever had a friend remind you of the option of forgiveness rather than anger and bitterness? It usually catches us off guard, because we are so taken up with the wrong done to us that we don't even think about forgiving and canceling that debt. In the case at hand, Paul is

so convinced of Onesimus's potential and his sincere faith, he tells Philemon that he will personally take care of any debt or wrongdoing caused by Onesimus's behavior.

It would sure be fun to know what happened to the former slave. Where did he go? What did he end up doing for Christ? Wouldn't it be weird if your salvation could be traced back to the witness of Onesimus? He told someone the gospel, and then that person told someone and so on and so on, then one day you were told.

Maybe today would be a good day to cancel out the debt someone owes you. I hold accounts too long and with way too much attention sometimes. What would it do for Christ's sake if we decided to take that second option—to cancel the debt and be done with it? Do you have anyone like Onesimus in your life? Maybe Paul is telling you it's time to let him go, and if he owes you anything God will take care of the account.

God's blessings make forgiveness possible,
Pastor Steve

