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COMMENTARIES

COMMENTARY ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT, VOL 3

Philemon

By Rev. W. B. Godbey, A. M.,

COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

VOL III EPHESIANS-PHILEMON

PAUL, THE CHAMPION THEOLOGIAN

BY

REV. W. B. GODBEY, A. M.,

Author of "Commentary, Volumes I and II;" "Spiritual Gifts and Graces," "Holy Land," "Victory," "Holiness or Hell," "Christian Perfection," "Sanctification," "Baptism," and "Woman Preacher."

PHILEMON

PROLOGUE

Philemon was one of the few rich men, gloriously saved and supporting a Christian Church in his house. His fugitive slave, Onesimus, took refuge in the hiding-places of the world's great metropolis. Fortunately hearing of Paul, the spiritual father of his sainted Master, far away at Colosse, in Asia, he comes to the mission, gets genuinely converted, becomes a worker in the enterprise, and so thoroughly sanctified that he wants to go all the way back to Asia, see his Christian master, and make it all right with him, Paul favoring him and Philemon, his owner, with this beautiful letter, and complimenting him with the companionship of Tychicus, entrusted with the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, these three, all being written in Paul's hired mission in Rome, A.D. 61-63. This brief epistle is brimful of beautiful flashes of deep Christian affection and profound spiritual shrewdness, literally sparkling with heavenly coruscations.

1-3. This beautiful introductory is addressed to Philemon and Apphia and Archippus, the sanctified wife and husband complimented with a class-leadership in the Church organized in the capacious mansion of their sanctified landlord.

4-6. Paul testifies to the high Christian character and beautiful experience of Philemon, replete with Divine love and faith toward the Lord Jesus.

7. *“For I had much joy and consolation over thy Divine love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by thee, O my brother.”* The lordly mansion of this wealthy Asiatic was the rendezvous of God's humble saints, where they worshipped in primitive simplicity radiant with the beauty of holiness, and enjoyed the generous hospitality of their kind host.

8. *“Therefore having much boldness in Christ to enjoin upon you the thing which is right, I the more exhort you for the sake of the Divine love; being such as Paul the aged, and now a prisoner of Christ Jesus.”* This letter is

replete with unearthly beauty and inspired wisdom, modestly and shrewdly utilized in the interest of Onesimus, the bearer, now gloriously saved and returning to his Christian master, from whom he had fled away while a sinner.

10. *“I exhort thee concerning my child, whom I begot in my bonds, Onesimus,*

11. *“Who at one time was unprofitable to thee, but now profitable both to thee and to me, whom I have sent back to thee, him, that is my own heart.”* See the intense fatherly kindness, and the deep parental love and Christian affection in the Pauline references to Onesimus.

13. *“Whom I wish to have with me, in order that he may minister to me in thy behalf in the bonds of the gospel,*

14. *“But without thy consent I did not wish to do anything, in order that thy benefaction may not be according to constraint, but willingly.”* Onesimus, though when a sinner, doubtless a contrary and unprofitable servant in the house of Philemon, is now so gloriously saved that he is all right, either for manual labor, servile drudgery, or the soul-saving work in Paul’s city mission; yet the apostle, fully recognizing the claims of his master, sends him back to meet him face to face, rectify all past wrongs, and mutually participate the joy of the Lord in his conversion.

15. *“For he suddenly departed for an hour on this account, that you may receive him eternally,*

16. *“No longer as a slave, but above a slave, a brother beloved, especially to me, and much more to Thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”* Paul knowing the genuine Christian character of Philemon, and having all confidence in the glorious experience of Onesimus, is perfectly assured of his joyous reception by his Christian master, who will be so delighted with his thrilling testimony to the mighty work wrought in his heart, that, forgetting all about his former slavery, he will gladly receive him as a brother beloved in the Lord.

17. *“Therefore, if you have me a comrade, receive him as myself.”* Observe the triumphant spiritual boldness of Paul, having such implicit confidence

in the testimony and character of Onesimus that he actually puts himself in his place.

18. *“But if he has done you injustice as to anything, or is in debt to you, set it down to me.*

19. *“I, Paul, have written with my own hand, I will pay it.”* See the wonderful faith of Paul in financial matters! Though a prisoner in bonds, and utterly disqualified to prosecute any remunerative employment, and not worth a nickel, he boldly assumes all financial responsibility in behalf of this poor fugitive slave, his son in the gospel. In all the great Pauline series he dictated to an amanuensis, except this brief letter and the epistle to the Galatians. “In order that I may not say to thee, that thou owest thyself unto me.” See what an adroit turn he makes on Philemon! *“Though I go the security of Onesimus, and will pay all of his indebtedness to you, do not forget that you owe yourself to me. Satan had you by the throat, till I broke his grip and delivered you. Therefore you are indebted to me for saving your scalp. Hence, by the time you pay me all you owe me, I can well afford to pay the debts of Onesimus.”*

20. *“Yea, brother, I rejoice over thee in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Having confidence in thy obedience, I have written unto you, knowing that thou wilt do above those things which I say.”* Paul runs on Philemon the *argumentum a fortiori*, having asked so much of him in behalf of his restored fugitive slave—*i.e.*, his manumission and joyful reception in the brotherhood of Christ—he now climaxes all of these demands by the affirmation of his unwavering confidence in Philemon, not only to verify them all, but to go far beyond. With this triumphant conclusion of complete victory for Onesimus in the home of his old master, he now drops the subject, and proceeds to anticipate a happy visit that delightful Christian home, which, in the good providence of God, he doubtless enjoyed after his acquittal in his first trial at Rome, when he went East on his long farewell peregrinations among the Churches of Asia and Europe. Among the Christian workers in Paul’s mission at Rome at the time of this writing we see Demas, who afterward, in the track of Judas, went back to Satan for filthy lucre. I awfully fear Judas and Demas have many clerical successors at the present day, alienated from the God they once loved and ruined by the love of money.

25. “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*” This benediction is exceedingly beautiful for its brevity and comprehensibility. I recommend it to you all. The saints of God have a rich treasure in these beautiful apostolic benedictions found at the conclusion of every epistle. In 1884, the last time I ever saw Bishop McTyeire, of precious memory (for he went to heaven that year), I heard him use this benediction in the dismissal of the Kentucky Conference.

APOLOGUE

This brief epistle has a grand and beautiful symbolic signification. Philemon, a wealthy Christian gentleman, emblemizes God the Father; Paul, the Lord Jesus Christ; and Onesimus, man. Here we see Onesimus did badly, fled away from his master, and was found, reconciled, and restored to the delightful home of his offended lord by Paul. Thus man sinned and fled away from God, and was restored back to Divine favor and reinstated in the Father's family by the Lord Jesus Christ. O we are all restored Onesimi, happy fugitives in our Father's home.

APOLOGUE TO VOLUME 3

The climacteric peculiarity and interest of this book is the fact of its purely Pauline authorship. The providence of God in the existence of Paul is miraculous, and in every way extraordinary. As an intellectualist, he is without a peer in all ages. I have ransacked all the world for books, and been a lifelong student at the feet of the master spirits, not only of Israel, but Greece, Rome, Germany, England, and America. Amid all the intellectual lights that flash along the ages from Moses to the present day, Paul is without a peer, like Pike's Peak amid the Rockies. While his intellect among the sages of all ages and nations is peerless, his learning is transcendent. The conversion of Paul in the splendors of its unearthly glory was adumbratory of our Lord's second coming, when the coruscations of his heavenly splendor and glory he will appear to all the earth, inundating the wicked with paroxysms of trepidation, transfiguring and translating his saints.