Philemon 1 (Nicolas Simon) 169904

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Holy Scriptures - Titus and Philemon, The (1)

Paul's Epistle to Titus, like those to Timothy, is addressed to an individual. In all three the subject matter is godly order. Likewise, each brings before us a Saviour God. While the Epistles to Timothy are occupied with the maintenance of sound doctrine and the internal condition of the assembly, the Epistle to Titus is concerned with that which is outward our conduct as seen by the world. Paul had left Titus on the island of Crete to set in order the things that remained and to establish elders in every city (Titus 1:5). As a people, the Cretans were known for their unruly behavior, a fact attested to by one of their own poets (vs. 12).

Outline

"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (vss. 1-2). A true Christian is not an adherent of religion; he is one of God's elect. His walk is to be an open acknowledgment of the truth; he lives in hope of eternal life, a life that takes us beyond this world.

In chapter 1, Titus (in contrast to Timothy) is explicitly charged to establish elders (overseers; vs. 7) in every city, appropriate characteristics for whom are given (vss. 6-9). It was important that an overseer could, by sound doctrine, exhort and convince the gainsayers. There were many unruly and vain talkers, deceivers, particularly among the Jews, that subverted the people, teaching things that they ought not, for base gain (vss. 10-11 JND).

In chapter 2, we have our conduct in personal relationships: the aged men, the aged women, the young women and the young men of which Titus was to be a pattern. Servants (bondmen) are exhorted "that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things" (vs. 10).

It is the grace that saves that provides the foundation for the Christian walk, not law. Furthermore, we know that Christ Himself will appear in all His glory our Saviour who gave Himself for us, "that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (vss. 13-14). In these verses we have the foundation, the walk and the hope of every believer (vss. 11-14).

In chapter 3, we have the Christian's conduct in this world, especially before those in authority (vs. 1). They were not to speak evil of any man, nor to be contentious, but gentle, showing meekness. They had been saved out of that which they were formerly, not because of their own works of righteousness, but through the kindness and love of a Saviour God. We should act towards others as God has acted towards us. The Christian has a new life that acts in the power of the Holy Spirit (vss. 2-7).

Foolish questions, genealogies, contentions and strivings about the law were to be shunned as unprofitable and vain (vs. 9). When a man chooses his own opinions over the Word of truth, causing division, he is a heretic and is to be rejected after the first and second admonition (vs. 10).

It was not the Apostle's intent that Titus should remain on Crete. Paul would send Artemas or Tychicus to him, at which time he was to come to Paul at Nicopolis (vs. 12).

Philemon

Two individuals are prominent in this short epistle, Philemon and Onesimus. The first has a name deriving from phileo, meaning tender affection (love), while Onesimus may be translated "profitable." The first was the master, the second his slave.

Onesimus had not always been profitable (vs. 11). Having deserted his master, we find him in Rome, perhaps seeking to escape amid the vast throngs of that city. While he may have succeeded in fleeing Philemon, the eye of the Lord was upon him. In that city there was a prisoner, the Apostle, and it was to Paul that the Spirit of God brings this fugitive. The same Spirit that had worked in the heart of Philemon now works in the heart of Onesimus through the same servant of the Lord (vs. 19).

Converted, Onesimus is profitable to all (vs. 11). Though his soul is set free, he has not received liberty from the obligations that bound him to his master. As a Christian, he must return to Philemon. This beautiful epistle, written by Paul, lovingly beseeches Philemon to again receive Onesimus, "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?" (vs. 16).

Without invoking his apostolic authority, Paul appeals to the heart of Philemon and his wife Apphia and to the love that we possess as partakers of the divine nature. "For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. 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 a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ" (vss. 7-9). This was a delicate subject. The memory of Onesimus could incite the flesh if given opportunity, particularly since it was entirely possibly that Onesimus had stolen from his master (vss. 18-19).

The epistle's address is broader than simply to Philemon and his wife, for it extends even to the assembly in his house (vs. 2). How practical are the lessons it contains. Here we find love exercised in the most difficult of circumstances. In it we see the Apostle's love for Philemon and for Onesimus whom he had begotten in his bonds. We see the stirring of that love in the heart of Philemon for one who had wronged him. Paul also wisely appeals to Philemon's love for him (vss. 9,17,20,22).

Love is obedient, and Paul expresses his confidence in Philemon that the new nature would triumph, exceeding all that was requested of him (vs. 21). This is true Christian conduct, divinely recorded for our admonition.

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