

=BOOKS OF THE BIBLE=

Lesson 57

Philemon

Objects to have:

The sign for this book: PHILEMON

Forgive

A sheet of stationery, an envelope and a pen
Your Bible.

Introducing the lesson:

(Remind the children that the Bible is the best book in all the world; that men wrote down the words that are in the Bible, but the Holy Spirit told them the words to write. Tell them that you are going to tell them another Bible story. Then lay down your Bible and go right into the story.)

Telling the story:

(Look to one side, as if you are talking to someone who is beside you.) “Hello there, young man. My name is Paul.”

(Look to the other side as you respond to the imaginary person.) “How do you do, sir. My name is Onesimus.”

Paul and Onesimus were seeing each other for the first time. Paul was in prison in Rome. Onesimus was being led into the prison. Paul had not done anything wrong. Onesimus had done something wrong. Paul was in prison in the city of Rome only because he had been preaching about Jesus, and certain people did not like it. The people who did not like Paul’s preaching made up some bad stories about Paul; the stories were not true. Paul was put in prison for doing nothing wrong. Onesimus was in prison because he had done something wrong.

Paul was an old man. For many years Paul had traveled from city to city, telling about Jesus. When he had been in every city of a country, he went to another country so that he could travel all around it, telling more and more people about Jesus. Paul was a missionary.

Onesimus was a young man. Onesimus had been a slave. A man named Philemon had bought Onesimus, just like you would buy some groceries; Onesimus was a slave. Now Onesimus and Paul were far away from their homes; they were in prison. Onesimus and Paul began to talk with each other. Paul said, “Tell me about yourself, Onesimus.”

“Rome has not been my home, Paul. My home is in Colosse.” We know about the city named Colosse because we know about the book in the New Testament that is called Colossians. Onesimus kept on talking: “I was a slave. My master’s name is Philemon.”

“Oh, I know Philemon,” said Paul. “Philemon is a very dear friend of mine. How is it that you left the home of Philemon?”

“I don’t like to talk about it,” said Onesimus. “I ran away from Colosse. Philemon does not know where I am. I ran away from him. You see, I did something wrong. I took some money that did not belong to me. Because I did not want to be punished for what I did wrong, I decided to run away.”

I am sure that as Onesimus said these words, he hung his head. Onesimus was remembering the good home where he had lived and worked. Philemon, Onesimus’ boss, was a good man. Philemon was a man who loved Jesus. Philemon was kind to all his workers. Even though Philemon owned some slaves, still he was good to them. He was a Christian man who wanted to please Jesus.

I think Paul said something like this: “Onesimus, you have run away from Philemon. There is Someone from Whom you cannot run away. Philemon does not know where you are, but this Someone knows where you are at all times. Onesimus, God knows where you are. You cannot run away from God. Someday you are going to have to face Him. Are you ready to face God, Onesimus?”

I am sure that Onesimus was surprised by what Paul was saying to him. He stopped to think about what Paul was saying. Then, I’m sure Paul said something like this: “Onesimus, you are going to have to die someday. Everybody has to die. When you die, the living part of you will go someplace. You will either go to Heaven or you will go to Hell. Onesimus, what about you; would you go to Heaven when you die?”

“No, Paul, I do not know that I would go to Heaven when I die. Do you know how to go to Heaven? Does anybody know how to go to Heaven?”

“Oh, yes, Onesimus. First of all, Onesimus, you have to admit that you are a sinner. We all are sinners.” I’m sure Onesimus was nodding his head. He knew that he had done something wrong; he was in prison in Rome because he had done something wrong there, and he knew the wrong thing he had done before he left home. In fact, he could remember many other things that he had done wrong. Onesimus knew that he was a sinner. He admitted that he was a sinner. “Onesimus,” Paul said, “Jesus knows that everybody is born a sinner.”

Paul talked more with Onesimus. “Onesimus, sin cannot be in Heaven. Heaven is a perfect place. Heaven is the most wonderful place anybody can imagine. Because sin cannot be in Heaven, nobody can go to Heaven without a payment being made for his sin. Sin has to be punished. Jesus decided that He would take the punishment for the sin of everybody. Onesimus, Jesus came to earth to die for our sins. Jesus is the perfect Son of God. He never did anything wrong, but He decided to die to take the punishment for our sins.”

Onesimus listened very carefully as Paul was explaining these things to him. How wonderful it must have seemed to Onesimus to think that somebody would take the punishment for all his sins! “Onesimus, just trust Jesus as the Person Who has taken the punishment for your sins. Ask Jesus to be your Saviour. Do it right now, Onesimus.”

Onesimus bowed his head, and he prayed. He told Jesus that he knew he was a sinner. He asked Jesus to be his Saviour. How wonderful! Onesimus was so glad, now that he was a Christian. Paul, too, was very happy that Onesimus was a Christian.

Then Onesimus said, “Paul, how I wish that I were back home! How I wish that I had not done wrong to my master, Philemon! I love him. I’d love to go back home when I am allowed to leave this prison in Rome. But how could I go back home? I have done wrong. I do not have any money to pay back to Philemon.”

Paul said, “Onesimus, I will write a letter to Philemon. When you get out of jail, you take the letter to Philemon. I am sure that Philemon will let you come back home.”

Paul reached for his writing paper. (Pick up your stationery, envelope and pen while saying the following.) He had an envelope, also, and a pen. “Onesimus, you take this paper and pen, and write what I tell you to write.” Paul had very bad eyesight. Usually when he wrote a letter, he told someone else what he wanted to say in the letter, and someone else wrote down the words that Paul wanted to say in his letter.

(Pretend to write as you say the following.) “Dear Philemon, I love you, and I respect you. I know what a good Christian man you are. I have a favor to ask of you. Please take Onesimus back into your house. Onesimus is not the same man that he was when he left your home. Onesimus has now asked Jesus to be his Saviour. You will find his life to be different from what it was. Onesimus is now a Christian.

“Philemon,” Paul was saying in his letter, “if Onesimus has taken anything from you, just charge that much money to me. I will repay you if you insist that the money be repaid. Whatever Onesimus has taken from you, I will pay. You may choose, however, not to have me pay it. I plan to come to visit you someday, Philemon. It

will be good to see you again and to talk with you. Now, do receive Onesimus as a brother, for he is our brother in Christ.” I think that maybe as Onesimus finished writing the letter for Paul, he looked up at Paul with tears in his eyes. How generous and kind Paul was being to him!

The day came when Onesimus was released from jail. It was time for him to leave, and he was gathering his things into a bundle. He made sure that he had the letter that Paul had written. He was going to be very careful not to lose that letter. Onesimus started on his long journey home; he was probably nervous about what Philemon would say when he got there.

Now, of course, in the Bible we have just the letter that Paul wrote to Philemon, but I am sure (aren't you?) that when Onesimus got home, Philemon read the letter carefully while Onesimus nervously watched and waited. As Philemon finished reading the letter, I am sure that he said, “Onesimus, I will do what Paul asked me to do. I am so happy that you are a Christian now, Onesimus. Please come back and work for me again. I will forgive the wrong that you have done.”

Children, that is just like Jesus. Jesus says to our Heavenly Father, “I love _____.” (Fill in the names of the children in your class, or at least several of the names. Fill in your name, also.) Jesus says, “Dear Father, that person has said that he is sorry for his sins. He has asked Me to be his Saviour. Now do receive him into Your family, dear Father.” Isn't that wonderful!? Just as Paul wrote to Philemon for Onesimus' sake, so Jesus talks to God the Father for our sakes. Whenever we pray, Jesus tells God the Father our prayers. Whenever we have done wrong, and we are sorry for it, Jesus reminds God the Father that our sin is covered by Jesus' blood.

This little tiny book that is called the book of Philemon (show the children the book of Philemon in your Bible) reminds us of what Jesus does for us. Isn't Jesus wonderful!?

Let's say together the titles of the New Testament books we have learned so far.

LEARN OUR BIBLE VERSE: Philemon 18, “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.”