

*Hello! This is Dorothy -*

**Philemon** is one of the letters which the Apostle Paul wrote as a prisoner. That means he was in prison for Christ during his first captivity in Rome. This would be about sixty-three years after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. At that time, if you can imagine, to be a prisoner in those terrible dungeons was not something like today. He was not there because he had done something wrong; he was there because he was a soldier of Jesus Christ and that was what got him in prison. So he called himself **a prisoner of Jesus Christ**. Actually that is how **Philemon 1** starts: **Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ**. . . He did not say “of the Roman Empire.” We go on and we read the very important contents of this letter, which is all about Onesimus, who is going to have to be returned to Philemon. You see, Onesimus had run away and as he ran, wouldn't you know, he ran right into Paul! In a marvelous way, even though he was thinking he was hiding in this great metropolis of Rome, through Paul he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not know what your story is, but we all have an individual story of how we were enemies of God, whether we like it or not. We could have been very religious or we could have been very moral, but we

were enemies of God! We were really on the run from Him: we took so much and that was it. We said, "I have had enough of that. I do not want to go to that church any more. I am going to avoid those people." All the time, it is God Who is chasing us, because He loves us and He wants us to know Him. That is why He is speaking to your heart today, that you might understand how God, in His Providence, brings these miracles together. Could you imagine, for example, that the Apostle Paul, having brought this slave into the fellowship and forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ, then when Onesimus explains where he is from, Paul suddenly realizes he is a slave of the household of Philemon and that, wouldn't you know, Paul had led Philemon to the Lord? In this amazing miracle of timing, God arranged that Paul had two converts. Here, in another city from where Philemon was, Paul had this joy of bringing Onesimus to Christ. You see, God used Paul to write this letter then on behalf of Philemon's slave. He wrote a letter and, as he wrote on behalf of Onesimus, he pled for forgiveness. He asked that Philemon would accept him now, not as a slave, but as a Christian brother. You know, this changes our relationship with all those people out there that we can't stand and we think are so bad. When they come into Christ, they are our brothers in Christ! This totally, radically changes our behavior toward them. Perhaps you have a problem with a certain group of people of a certain color or national origin. Perhaps there is something in your background and you

just cannot stand those people. Wait a minute! When somebody comes into Christ, you don't identify them any more with their background or their country or their color, but they are your brothers and your sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Paul is emphasizing when he writes this letter. Paul, the Apostle, also instructs you and me as to how this is so. It is our privilege to understand that we have to do this, not by compulsion but by our own free will. (That is in **verse 14** of this little **Book**). It is by our own free will that we suddenly see people with the eyes of the Lord and we love them with the love of the Lord. We do not expect them to be perfect overnight, but we see they are babes that need to be built up in the Lord. We love them and we instruct them, so that their lives are an explanation of the radical amazing change that Christ brings within.

So Paul did have a rather difficult situation. He had to write this letter and he had to be very careful how he did it. As he did, God showed him, as he addressed Philemon, the master, about Onesimus, the slave, that he was to be bringing out the fact that in Christ, they are now new creatures in Christ. Could you imagine, new - totally new?

Can you believe that that person you cannot stand, when he comes into Christ, is totally new? I feel that for some of us, we have to see that Paul, in writing, did not write from his high

position, but he identifies himself with as being a prisoner. Back in **Colossians**, he said, **Remember my bonds**. And now he is saying, "I am in bonds here." This is for the reason of telling other people about Jesus. So why wouldn't you accept this person?

I do not know how God is speaking to your heart today, but I believe, for some of you, you have carried bitterness and resentment and hurt. Perhaps you have inherited it through the family. But it is very important, if you are in Christ, that you might ask not only His forgiveness but a fresh infilling of His anointing and His love and His fullness that as never before you might love those who once you hated. Also, in Christ Jesus, pray that they might come to know Him, Who is the only explanation of the bond we have in Him.

*In His precious Name. Amen.*