

Making a “U-Turn” In Life (v. 11)

A traveler once asked a man in China, “Have you every heard the gospel?” “No,” he replied, “but I have seen it. There is a man in our village who was the terror of his neighborhood. He had a violent temper. He was an opium smoker, a criminal, and a dangerous man. The gospel has made him gentle and good. He no longer smokes opium. No, I have never heard the gospel, but I have seen it and it is very good.”

One of the most thrilling witnesses of the gospel’s validity is its ability to change lives in a dramatic fashion. There is no secret as to how it is able to accomplish such dramatic changes—it possesses a tremendous “power” (Romans 1:16). This “power” is so fantastic that it is able to transform a person’s inner thoughts as well as one’s outer deeds (cf. Romans 12:1, 2; Ephesians 4:17-24; Colossians 1:21-23). This thrilling change is illustrated by many whose lives are chronicled in the Holy Book. A few specifics will illustrate the dramatic changes: Saul of Tarsus was changed from one intent on destroying the gospel to one compelled by the gospel (Acts 9:3-18; 2 Corinthians 5:14). The Philippian jailer was transformed from insensitivity to acute tenderness (Acts 16:27-34). The Samaritan woman’s scorn and dourness was changed to exuberant enthusiasm (John 4:28, 29). And Onesimus was one whose transformation defied all logic and human reasoning (v. 11).

It is the fantastic change of Onesimus that is examined in the current lesson. Onesimus was a man who had taken a very wrong turn in life. He had violated a number of civil laws, had dealt treacherously with those who had shown him

compassion, and had lived in rebellion and ignorance to the Almighty God. There was not much that Onesimus had not tried in life or seen on the immoral streets of Rome.

But in the life of this heathen reprobate, an unbelievable event took place—this man, who had fallen to the lowest depths of humanity, who did not care whom he hurt or how he used another person to satisfy self, this man drastically changed! He heard the gospel and saw its precious treasures. When he realized the blessings that God extended to him through grace, Onesimus was converted (cf. Acts 3:19). It would do no injustice to say that Onesimus made a U-turn in his life—a 180-degree about-face! Such a drastic change deserves close study.

THE WONDERFUL CHANGE THAT TRANSPIRED

This dramatic change is a common occurrence in genuine conversions. The Scriptures often tell us that genuine conversion is easily identified by “fruits worthy of repentance”—dramatic changes and fantastic contrasts in behavior (cf. Ephesians 5:8, 11). Conversion was thus evident in Onesimus’ life because of the following.

First, someone cared enough about him to teach him the truth! Paul demonstrated this compassion to the street-weary fugitive (v. 10). His compassion for the lost is never illustrated better than in the phrase “my child.” Paul saw value in the life of Onesimus; he saw purpose and meaning to Onesimus’ existence; he saw an eternal

soul struggling with the grievous burdens of sin and separation from God. There is no way of knowing how Paul and Onesimus met. We can know that as soon as they met, Paul was anxious to tell the “old, old story of Jesus and His love” (Philippians 1:12-14).

Proverbs 10:30 pronounces as “wise” those who, like Paul, share a zealous compassion for the lost. Saving souls demonstrates wisdom in many different ways: it fulfills God’s will; it spreads the news of God’s great love; and it provides great joy and strengthened faith for the soul winner. How sad is the thought that there are many surrounding us today who like Onesimus are stumbling through this world searching for the truth and never finding it. Such souls will be found in your school, your civic organizations, your family, and even in your worship assemblies! Each day witnesses multitudes departing earthly life unprepared for eternal life. Such lost souls either do not know God or have not obeyed God (2 Thessalonians 1:8). It is not God’s desire for souls to be damned to hell (Luke 14:21-23). God desires that “all” enter into eternal reward (Revelation 22:17).

Paul was doing all he could to see that God’s goal of reconciliation was being accomplished. At every opportunity he sought to teach the gospel’s Good News. When Onesimus and Paul met, it did not take long for the gospel to be discussed.

This simple fact needs emphasis today! How can the gospel achieve its desired goals unless we are willing to do as Paul? (Romans 10:13-15; Colossians 4:3). Had Paul acted like many Christians today, he would have never discussed the gospel with Onesimus, and the fugitive slave would never have changed!

Second, the gospel was heard, believed, and obeyed (vv. 10, 16). “Begotten” is often used to describe the act of God in bestowing the disposition of “children” upon obedient believers (cf. John 3:3, 5, 7). “Brother . . . in the Lord” is a phrase that refers to the bond of unity shared by those who are God’s children. These two phrases applied to Onesimus only because he had obeyed the gospel. If he had not heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel, he could not share these titles. Baptism is crucial to the obedience that allows one to share these titles. If Onesimus had not been baptized, he would not have worn these titles. The obedience of baptism is the “birth” of John 3, and it is baptism that places one “in

Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Thus, if one truly desires to follow God’s will, he must be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Some contend that baptism is not an essential factor of salvation. But these fail to realize that the dramatic difference in conversion is connected with baptism! Romans 6 contains an in-depth discussion of the essentiality of baptism to salvation. It teaches that baptism is a death to sin and renewal to God (Romans 6:3, 4). It teaches that baptism is a putting away of the old and accepting the new (Romans 6:6-11). It emphatically states that baptism is the point where we resign as servants of sin and are accepted as servants of God (Romans 6:17-22). Certainly the emphasis on baptism in Romans 6 is sufficient to demonstrate the necessity of baptism to salvation.

When Onesimus heard the gospel message, he wanted to respond. His faith in Christ as God’s only begotten Son prodded him to respond and obey God’s command of baptism. Following his baptism, Onesimus shared a “new life.”

Third, fruits of repentance were demonstrated in his life. As the short book is examined, it is discovered that there were at least three very visible fruits. The “useless” had become “useful” (v. 11; Psalms 51:2, 10; Romans 6:13). The “deserter” went back to the “deserted” (v. 17; Jeremiah 24:7; Hosea 6:1). And the grudging slave became a willing servant (v. 13; Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Deuteronomy 30:6; Psalms 110:3). These three “fruits” reveal the seriousness of Onesimus to conform to God’s will. These reflect the earnestness with which Onesimus began to make a U-turn in his life.

THE WONDER OF THE CHANGE THAT TRANSPIRED

This change was dynamic! It was incredible that one was able to change to such an extent. But such only comments upon the “power” of the gospel (Ezekiel 11:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).

The comforting thought to consider is that this same dynamic change is possible today! Consequently, we must be cautious about making two common remarks. Some say, “I just can’t live the life God expects.” They continue to walk the path of self; professing repentance they fail to produce the fruits! Whenever you are thinking that you “cannot” live as God expects, think about Onesimus and his dynamic change! If Onesimus could change, so can you! Others say, “So-and-So is beyond the

gospel. Just leave him alone." We must be careful to never "write-off" anyone as beyond the scope of the gospel's power! Even when one's life is marred with sin and devoted to self, a change can take place (Luke 15:17a). If one will believe and obey the gospel, he is able to make a U-turn in life and find great joy! (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

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As you consider the marvelous change in conversion, you have to question those who refuse to accept God's gracious invitation. Why would anyone refuse such an offer? (Isaiah 32:3, 4, 15, 17; Ezekiel 11:19, 20).

CONCLUSION

God urges all who hear the gospel message to understand the urgency of making a U-turn in life right now! As John's marvelous Patmos vision was ending, there was a statement made about the urgency of all making this U-turn in life (Revelation 22:12-15). We are exhorted to "wash robes" which indicates the urgency of baptism (Acts 22:16). We are encouraged to be among those who have "the right to eat," indicating the heritage of being a member of God's family (John 3:9). We are told the necessity to "enter in," revealing the exclusive fellowship that will exist in heaven. And we are cautioned about being among those "without," informing us of the tragic destiny of all who refuse to make the "U-turn" in life to genuine conversion (Acts 17:32).

What about you and your conversion to Christ? Can it be said of you by another, "I have never heard the gospel, but I have seen it in _____'s life and it is very good"? Does your life encourage others to accept or to reject the gospel?

Second Corinthians 6:2 is plain in urging all to make a U-turn right now. Follow Onesimus—hear the Good News of the gospel, believe in Christ Jesus as God's Son, repent of sin's control, and be baptized for the remission of sins!

—John Kachelman

Philemon — Paul's

Own Heart

(Philemon 12)

In this brief comment in verse 12, we are challenged to live so as to impact others just as Philemon did.

1. Live as a member of Christ's body, the church (v. 16b).
2. Live as one reported to be a "beloved brother" (v. 6).
3. Live as one who is useful (vv. 11, 13).
4. Live as one who is able to bring out the spontaneous Christianity in others (v. 14).
5. Live as one who causes others to focus upon providence's care (v. 15).

Life — Very Real,

Very Full!

(Philemon 12-16)

Society is filled with people who seem to enjoy life but are "empty." They have a void which is yearning to be filled; it is a craving longing for satisfaction. They want life to "be worth something." But all they find is emptiness. The rest reveals five essentials to making life very real and very full!

1. Sincere sacrifice (vv. 12, 13)—"my heart"
2. Wonderful willingness (v. 14)—"free will"
3. Divine directions (v. 15a)—"perhaps"
4. Eternal eyesight (v. 15b)—"forever"
5. Beautiful brotherhood (v. 16)—"brother beloved"

Willingness

(Philemon 14)

Willingness is a trait of God's child (Psalms 110:3).

1. Willingness forbids coercion.
2. Willingness encourages spontaneous service.
3. Willingness is sensitive to others.