

STUDY THE BIBLE 16 (STB 16) "THE BOOK OF PHILEMON" "JUSTIFIED: To be declared innocent"

"If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, **put that on mine account;**" (Philemon 1:18)

"As you ponder on your own salvation, this is one of the most important and heart moving books of the Bible!" It contains a very practical example of the doctrine of justification.

But you might say "**Philemon?** It is only **one chapter of 25 verses**. How can it be that important? What about **Genesis** where we have God showing his glory in his creation of six days? What about David's **150 Psalms** where we discover the magnificence and character of God himself? What about the book of **Matthew** where we have the detailed account of Christ as "...a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs ..." (Acts 2:22)? What about the book of **Romans** where God reveals his righteousness in Jesus Christ?"

And dear Reader, all this is true.

Question

Have you ever done something wrong to another person, and instead of going to him or her, and trying to fix it up, you just wanted to run away?

Well, this is what happened to Onesimus. He was a servant of Philemon. Now we aren't told what he did, but it involved stealing money or goods. So Onesimus, not a Christian, just took off for Rome about one thousand miles away, which was about as far as he could get away. Here he meets Paul, who leads him to the Lord and he gets saved. Paul then sends him back to his master, Philemon, with a letter. So here we have it, **on what basis was Onesimus hoping to clear his name** before Philemon? The fact was that Onesimus was guilty of stealing, and Philemon and Paul also knew it! He couldn't say "Dear Master Philemon, I didn't steal from you." No. He must say "Dear Master, I have stolen from you, but my debt will be paid for by the goodness of Paul!"

And here's what the word "justify" means – it's to be able to stand before someone and say "I am innocent." To "**justify**" yourself is to **declare** you are without **blame**.

Background information

Under old English law, if a man was found guilty of a crime, a penalty had to be paid. For example, if he killed someone, an 'eye for an eye' was enforced. He had to pay with his own life. When he was executed, he was said to have been **justified**. **Upon his death** he was then **declared innocent**. If another person paid the penalty, and died in his place, he was also said to be justified. **The law had been satisfied with a life for a life.**

Now if he was guilty of stealing, as long as he paid back the money, or someone else did on his behalf, he was **cleared of the crime**, and was **justified**, and **declared innocent, before the law**. He could say "I am innocent as the penalty of the law has been paid. I am now not guilty. I am justified!" Justification then, involves **satisfying the demand of the law**.

With Paul's backing, Onesimus could now say "I am innocent. I can now justify myself. I am justified. Dear Philemon, my debt has been paid. I am not guilty. **The law has been satisfied.**"

God has laws as well. Have you ever broken any of them?

God's laws are

Honour thy father and thy mother: ... Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's. Exodus 20:12-17

How about

I am the LORD thy God ...Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God ... Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Exodus 20:2-7

In summary

Thou shalt **love the Lord thy God** with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt **love thy neighbour** as thyself. **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.** Matthew 22:37-40
Are you guilty? Of course you are, as all have sinned (Rom 3:23).

For more information contact:

AUSTRALIAN BIBLE MINISTRIES, PO Box 5058, Mount Gravatt East 4122, QLD, Australia
www.AustralianBibleMinistries.com

How then can you now stand before God and declare you are innocent? How can you say "Dear God, I know you have laws that demand to be kept. I have **never** broken any of them, so therefore I **declare** myself innocent. I am **not guilty** of breaking any of them. I am **JUSTIFIED**."

No, of course you can't. You cannot declare yourself innocent before the Lord.

Can you say?

"Dear God I now stand before you **JUSTIFIED (JUST – AS – IF – I'D)** never sinned. Jesus Christ has paid for all my sins – past, present and future. My slate has been wiped clean with you and it is by Christ's blood, that I can do this. His blood is the only payment that you will accept as payment. Dear God, I am now right with you. I now have right standing with you. I do not have any right standing with you because of what I have done, but I totally rely on Christ's perfect record. I have utterly failed to keep any of your laws but Christ himself has kept them on my behalf. He has paid my sin debt to you that I could never pay. Now his 100% perfect life has been put into my heavenly bank account "**JUST AS IF I'D**" paid the debt myself."

I have been **justified** (JUST – AS – IF – I'D) with God. JUST – AS – IF – I'D never sinned. I now have right standing with God (righteousness), my sin debt has been paid.

Paul's letter is one of **tact, courtesy, generosity** and **delicate wording** appealing to Philemon, to accept Onesimus back as he would receive Paul (v17). Paul's object was to intercede on Onesimus' behalf, pay Philemon any money he was owed, and have Philemon forgive the runaway slave and receive him back as a Christian brother. Indeed, **Paul writes to Philemon** *If thou (Philemon) count me (Paul) therefore a partner, receive him (Onesimus) as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;* (Phil 17-18)

DO YOU RECOGNIZE THE APPLICATION? (Simply change the names)

Philemon = God the Father; Paul = Jesus Christ; Onesimus = you & me

Paul paid Onesimus' money debt he owed to Philemon.

Similarly, Christ pays the sin debt we owe to God the Father

Christ has given you his sinless record and put this into your account. A transfer has occurred – your sin debt has been given the Christ and his sinlessness, and right standing with God, has been given to you. Your slate has been wiped clean now and forever more. Nothing more to pay.

Yes dear Reader, this is why we can be called the sons of God. It is because that God became a man and shed his own blood for our salvation.

"... the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. Acts 20:28"

What did Christ do for us?

Jesus Christ says to God the Father - "If You (God), regard Me (Jesus Christ) as a partner (which he does), accept him (_____ your name) as You would Me. If he (_____ your name) has wronged You in any way (and you have), and owes You anything (and you do), put that on my account."

Coincidence?

Paul has two books that reveal the righteousness of God, and they like two book ends on a shelf, as they have all the other books between them. It is very fitting that God would have Paul's last book to Christians in the New testament, as a practical explanation of God's own righteousness.

Paul's order of books is as follows: **ROMANS**, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, **PHILEMON**.

Romans is about God's getting right with God and **Philemon is also about getting God right with God**. Romans could be described as a 'theological' account on how to get right with God, and God wants to make sure that we know what this means. So Paul gives a very **practical** and **every day example** on what this means in **Philemon**.

Christ says to God

Just as Paul prevailed with Philemon to forgive and receive Onesimus because they were close friends, Christ, God in the flesh, intercedes to God the Father on our behalf.

If thou (God) count me (Christ) therefore a partner, receive him (the reader) as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; (Phil 17-18).

**** *

For more information contact:

AUSTRALIAN BIBLE MINISTRIES, PO Box 5058, Mount Gravatt East 4122, QLD, Australia

www.AustralianBibleMinistries.com