

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 2 DECEMBER 2012 MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 25:3, 5

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 103:1, 2

Confession of faith: Nicene

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And we believe one holy universal and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 40:4

Law

Psalm: 40:4

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 32:1

Scripture reading: Philemon 1

Scripture text: Philemon 1:20

So brother, let me have joy of you in the Lord: give new life to my heart in Christ.

(Philemon 1:20)

This letter addresses the following two matters:

- Your love must be so great that you can forgive somebody who harmed you
- And that you must fully receive and treat that person as your fellow-believer in the Lord.

Thus you cannot be a true believer unless you share the love the Lord has for you with the people around you.

The following matters clarify the contents of the letter

1. **The previous events.**
2. **God's claim to Philemon.**
3. **God's claim to us in Christ.**

1. **The previous events.**

Somewhere Paul met a heathen called Philemon. Possibly this man was a trader, we are not sure about it, but he was very rich.

- This Philemon resided in Colosse and after his conversion became part of the Christian community in Colosse.
- He went to great lengths for the congregation as the congregation of Colosse always gathered at his house and held their worshipping services there.

Philemon owned a slave called Onesimus.

- The impression we have about Onesimus is that at the beginning he was quite a rascal.

- He ran away from Philemon, possibly after causing Philemon damages.
- From the letter we deduct that he possibly also owed Philemon some money.

To a slave of those days running away only held one consequence: troubles.

- Usually the owner of the run-away slave reported the matter to the authorities of those times.
- When the slave was eventually found he received a very cruel ill treatment and was returned to his owner.
- Often, when found, such slaves were killed. The same rules were applicable to Onesimus.

Meanwhile Paul was also arrested and cast into jail. It is not certain in which prison Paul was held. (The theologians speculate about three possible places namely Rome, a Caesarea and Ephesus. I believe Caesarea to be the most probable place because from there Onesimus could easily walk back to Philemon carrying the letter.)

Somehow this Onesimus came to Paul in prison. We do not know how and what exactly took place. What took place at the prison is known to us and is also very important.

- Paul told Onesimus the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and that the Lord Jesus also died for the sakes of slaves.
- He told him that his owner also became a believer and about the congregation gathering in his house.

These facts had a radical effect upon Onesimus. So radical was the effect that his personality changed. Suddenly he was a servant to the glory of the Lord. In the prison he also looked after Paul.

Paul realized that he couldn't preach the gospel and at the same time live with a lie.

- He may not allow Onesimus to stay with him. Should he want to do what he knew to be proper, he had to send this converted slave back to his owner.
- So it came to pass that Paul convinced Onesimus to return to Philemon bearing his (Paul's) letter of recommendation.

2. God's claim to Philemon.

Should we only consider the history up to here, than this matter is simple, but then you all could rightly ask: "Why is the letter to Philemon mentioned in the Bible?" It is a fact that if a revelation from God should a slave return to his owner.

But this definitely is not the crux of the letter. The letter deals with it that a Christian (Philemon) is confronted with a very difficult matter.

- Suddenly the man faces his slave who has caused him a lot of trouble, and now he must forgive this slave all the things of the past as if nothing ever happened.

Brothers and sisters here the Lord deeply touches mankind.

- None of us just forgive somebody such bad deeds.

- We always have a lot of conditions and we also decide not to ever again trust the other person.
- The worst case is not wanting to forgive the other his sin and never ever wanting to see him/her again!

That is the crux of this letter.

- The Lord reveals to Philemon that his slave has come to conversion and that he is now acceptable.
- And then the Lord demands from him to receive this slave back into his house.
- And also that, the same as he did it together with Paul, to exercise unity in the faith with him.

As believer the slave thus has the claim to the same amount and quality of love the apostle Paul received from Philemon. In the life of faith we may not differentiate between better and worse, richer or poorer or between people of higher or lower standing. This is also recorded in verse 17 (World English Bible)

If then thou countest me a partner, receive him as myself.

Referring to the **World English Bible translation:**

The word we translate with “partner” in verse 17 is the same word translated in verse 6 with “fellowship” Here it is recorded as follows: “...**that the fellowship of thy faith may become effectual...**”

Thus the intention is very clear:

- Philemon has a specific relationship towards God.
- To the apostle Paul he has the same relationship.
- Now God calls onto him to have the same relationship with Onesimus, his slave who stole and ran away.

Because the Lord knows how weak we are and how easily we hate and how difficult it is for us to forgive, He gives Philemon the motivation for His demand:

- Onesimus is returning as your slave.
- But now he is more than just a slave, he now also is a believer – indeed a beloved brother.

(note the wording: he is a beloved brother although he ran away as a bad slave.)

The beloved brother is further qualified: Not only physically, but also in the Lord, in other words not only as a human is he a beloved - also as a believer he is somebody who has to be loved.

Let me put the command of the Lord sharper in our own way of saying: You must thus receive Onesimus as a human in this life and be aware that he will accompany you to the Lord.

The matter of compensation or of revenge is also dealt with.

- Paul wants to remove the physical obstacles there may be.
- Therefore he writes that he will also pay any monies owing by Onesimus.
- And then suddenly the grave importance of the matter: Keep in mind you owe yourself to me.

Thereby Paul wants to tell Philemon not to be too concerned about earthly matters because they are of temporary nature.

- The eternal life is what matters and Philemon would not have arrived there had Paul not taught him the redemption.
- The fact of him now possessing the eternal life is due to Paul – therefore he should best forget about earthly matters and life properly with God.
- This is something you cannot just confess: Philemon must truly prove this to the Lord in the way he accepts and receives back Onesimus.

4. God's claim to Philemon.

This letter to Philemon has the undertone of judgement, namely should you not be able to render your human relations granted to you by the Lord, then your faith is largely lacking.

Therefore Paul writes that he wants to have joy of Philemon in the Lord and that he must give new life to his heart in Christ.

- He wants to see that he did not in vain guided Philemon to repentance.
- He wants to see Philemon still continuing in this conversion. That will please him very much.

This is what he calls onto. Should Philemon not execute the favour of receiving Onesimus then Paul will sorrowfully realize that Philemon's faith only comes from his mouth and does not live in his works. This means non-belief and the final judgement in hell.

You will notice the words "Christ Jesus" and "Jesus Christ" and "the Lord Jesus" occurring many times in this short letter. Thereby the Lord underlines to Philemon that every bodies salvation and work – and also forgiveness and love, is grounded in Jesus Christ.

God had Jesus die on a cross.

- Thereby He paid with His body and soul for God to forgive us our mistakes and sins and to adopt us as His children.
- He thus bore the punishment of God for all physical and spiritual transgressions we caused onto the Lord.

Indeed the Lord Jesus Christ is thus as physical and Spiritual Redeemer really in a position to demand everything from you: your body and soul, because you owe both to Him. Therefore He demands from us to forgive each other and other people.

The Lord's message to Philemon is also directed towards us: You owe yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ. Without Him you have no life and no advantages. Without Him you are nothing!

But now it is so that He granted you the eternal life.

- And now He orders you: Forgive other people their trespasses against you.
- Do not co-exist hypocritically with them and on the surface pretend that everything is in order.

- **Get your heart in order.** Practice fellowship with them in the way the Lord does it with you: Fully and with claim to all your love and loyalty.

It will not be easy. All of us have difficulty in doing this. But in Jesus Christ we can and must forgive trespasses and we must not only remain with forgiving – we must receive the people who harmed us fully.

Brothers and sisters the Lord calls each one of us to attend to this matter of forgiving and to thereafter live in love with those people.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: Psalm 86:3

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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2 December 2012

Scripture: Modern King James Version except where stated differently.