

## Testimony of Onesimus

Thomas L. Constable (1 of 3)

- Setting: Onesimus, dressed as a first century slave with a scroll in hand, enters the room in view of the audience.
- Teacher: Can I help you?
- Onesimus: Yes. I seem to have lost my way. I was walking along the main highway from Rome to Colosse with my friend Tychicus when we met this traveling magician. We got to talking and he told us he had this new trick he had been wanting to try out. He said he could transport us directly, instantaneously, to our destination and he asked if we would be willing to let him try it out. We said, "Sure." So he stretched out his arms like this, said some strange rhyming words, and the next thing I knew I was standing outside this building. Obviously there are a few bugs he still has to work out.
- Teacher: You wouldn't happen to know a man named Paul, would you?
- Onesimus: Yes, I do.
- Teacher: How about someone named Philemon?
- Onesimus? The one that lives in Colosse?
- Teacher: Yes.
- Onesimus: I used to be his slave! In fact, Tychicus and I were on our way back to see him when that magician fouled us up. This scroll is a letter from Paul to him. I'm delivering it for Paul. Do you have any idea how I could get back where I came from, and what happened to Tychicus?
- Teacher: No, I don't. But as long as you are here, would you tell us about yourself? We have all read about you.
- Onesimus: (With great amazement:) You have?! How did you do that?
- Teacher: Well, maybe I'll tell you about that later. But for now, tell us about your background and what it was like, or is like, to live where you come from.
- Onesimus: It's entirely different than this. (Looking around) I can't believe this. This is wild!
- Well, I come from a poor Phrygian family. Our whole family was split up and we were all sold as slaves when I was very young. My father couldn't pay his taxes. We were put on the block and I was sold to Philemon.
- I can still remember that day. I thought I was going to die! I mean, really die! You see, Philemon was known all over our

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area as a very severe man. When he bought me I thought I was a goner. And for about a dozen years I wished I was dead. Every day was horrible. He shouted at me constantly. He was never satisfied with my work, and I lived in constant fear of the man. I thought about running away many times, everyday. But the thought of being crucified if I were caught was enough to keep me from trying that.

Then something amazing happened. A group of Christians came through our area. They began preaching their gospel in several of the neighboring towns, first at the Jewish synagogues, then in the marketplaces. Well, my master Philemon, who was visiting one of our neighboring towns, heard Paul, who was the leader of the group, preaching, and he got converted.

You wouldn't believe the change that came over him after that! Instead of being hateful and unhappy, he became more gentle and pleasant. Everybody in town noticed the difference.

Well, as time went by, Philemon kept getting nicer and nicer. He even opened his home for the Christians to meet in. They are very unusual people. They were even interested in me!

It didn't take me long to discover that I could get away with quite a bit with Philemon. He gave me a lot of liberties. He often sent me to the market with a bag of money to buy food. I usually kept some of the money and told him the food cost more than it really did.

I got to thinking, "I'll bet if I ran away, Philemon wouldn't crucify me." Then one day when I was down at the wool market I heard two merchants talking about Rome. From what they said it sounded like I could escape to Rome and probably never be discovered. There are millions of slaves in Rome.

So that's what I decided to do. Once when Philemon was out of town on business for several days I ran away. I was pretty scared until I got to Rome. You know, slaves traveling alone are viewed with a lot of suspicion. I got some strange looks.

I remember one night in Philippi I almost got caught. There's a ring of kidnapers working in Philippi. They kidnap slaves, give them drugs, and then use them to do their dirty work. I just missed getting captured by them by the skin of my teeth.

When I finally arrived in Rome I felt safe for the first time. No one would find me there; there were just too many people. But I was wrong.

One day I was stealing an orange in the market, which is how I used to eat. Before I could take two steps this huge gorilla of a soldier grabbed me by the neck. The shop owner wanted my hide, and I was sent to prison. But it was only a minor offense, so I was put in with other relatively harmless prisoners.

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It was there that I met Paul. The other prisoners used to call him Shorty. He's a strange looking character. He's short and thin, and he has a massive head with little beady eyes that flash with fire. He's kind of bowlegged, too. Paul liked to sing a lot especially at night. That really used to aggravate the guards. And he would talk to everybody, I mean everybody, about Jesus Christ.

That wasn't the first time I had heard about Jesus Christ. Philemon had told me all about Him. And frankly I was impressed, especially since Philemon gave Jesus the credit for the change in his life.

Well, Paul and I had a lot of long talks. He was especially interested in me when he learned I had belonged to Philemon. He remembered Philemon, and had kept in touch with him after Philemon became a Christian. After a while I became a Christian, too.

I was released shortly after that. But I went back to see Paul, and brought things to him in prison quite often.

Then one day he said, "Onesimus, I think you should go back to Colosse. You have an obligation to Philemon." I was afraid of that. At first I didn't want to do it. But then I realized that I really had to. Paul promised to write a letter for me to take with me. That's what this is (holding up scroll). Paul read it to me before I left Rome. I sure hope Philemon will receive me back like Paul has asked him to. He gave Tychicus, who was with me, another letter for the whole church that meets in Philemon's house.

We were just leaving Ephesus on the last leg of our journey, when we met that stupid magician. How am I going to get back there?

Teacher: I don't know, Onesimus. But maybe if you go back to the same spot outside this building something will happen if you say, "Beam me up, Scotty."

Onesimus: Well, ok. I'll try that. I sure hope everything works out all right.

Teacher: Somehow I know it will. See you again some day, brother.

Onesimus: Goodbye.

Instructions: Onesimus leaves by the same door through which he entered.

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