

Date: November 9, 2009

Reading: Jude; Philemon

Paul the apostle was also Paul the prisoner when he wrote to Philemon, a brother in Christ who apparently lived in Colosse (vs. 1, 9, 10, 13). The occasion of his epistle was the conversion of a man whom Paul figuratively described as “my son Onesimus” (vs. 10), since it was Paul who had taught him the gospel and had thus “begotten” him.

Philemon would have been interested in the conversion of this man because Onesimus was actually a runaway slave (vs. 15-16). Now that Onesimus had become a Christian, the aged Paul was sending him back to Philemon although the apostle would have liked to have kept the new convert with him to “minister” to him in his chains (vs. 12-13). He called upon Philemon to receive Onesimus as a beloved brother in Christ (Colossians 4:9) and pledged to reimburse Philemon for any loss he might have suffered at the hands of Onesimus (vs. 16, 18-19).

Paul remarked that Onesimus was once “unprofitable,” but now, as a brother in Christ, would be “profitable” to both Paul and his master Philemon (vs. 11). It appears that the apostle was making a play on the meaning of the name “Onesimus” which means “useful.” Like the three-legged dog with the blind eye and torn ear whose name was “Lucky,” Onesimus had not lived up to the meaning of his name in the past.

Those who have obeyed the gospel have become Christians. In the Greek language, the word translated “Christian” is an adjective used substantively (as a noun) to refer to those who “pertain to or belong to Christ.” Christians are the “belonging to Christ” [ones]. They belong to Christ because He redeemed them with His blood in the act of forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7; Acts 20:28).

Because he had become a Christian, Onesimus would live up to the meaning of the name he had worn before his conversion. Will we live up to the meaning of the name (Christian) that we took on because of our conversion?

Be “useful” today, as one who belongs to Christ!

Happy reading,
Allen