

Adult Sunday School Class

Objective: Continued review of the fundamentals of our faith.

Opening Prayer: Thank you Father, we pause now to acknowledge your presence..... I thank you that you always hear me. That you never leave me or forsake me and that you are an ever present help. I ask for a special anointing on this lesson plan and the time we will spend together today. Bless both speaker and listener. Open our hearts to receive a fresh revelation from your Spirit. I bind forces that would hinder and welcome the Holy Spirit as our teacher today. In Jesus name!

Read: Philemon 1

Q – When was the letter to Philemon written? - Around AD 60.

Q – Where was it written? - It is generally accepted that it was written from Rome.

Q – What was Paul doing in Rome at the time?

- He was in prison but not being housed in a prison cell.
- He was living in a rented house, under house arrest, with a Roman guard and some companions.

Q – How long was Paul under house arrest in Rome? - Approximately 2 years.

Q – When was Paul released from this period of incarceration? - AD 61/62

Q – Did Paul write any other letters during this period of imprisonment? - Yes, the letter to the saints at Colosse and Ephesians.

Q – Who was with Paul at the time he wrote this letter? - Timothy, Onesimus, Luke, Mark, Demas, Epaphras, and Aristarcus. It is also possible that Tychicus was with them as well, (Colossians 4:7)

Q – Of the seven companions mentioned in this letter, why is it that only Timothy is mentioned in the opening sentence? - We can't be completely sure but I believe the reason Timothy was mentioned in the “from” sentence is because he was a fellow minister of the gospel while the others were all members of the supporting staff.

Q – Who is Philemon? What do we know about him?

- He was a friend of Paul's.
- Paul refers to him as a fellow Christian worker.
- He and his wife (Apphia) lived in Colosse.
- They had a church that met in their home.
- Paul viewed him as a man of faith who loved the saints of God.
- The degree of Philemon's love was a source of joy and encouragement to Paul as he observed that it was having a refreshing effect on the other Christians.
- He was a slave owner and Onesimus was his slave. (Perhaps one of several.)

Q – What do we know about Onesimus?

- He was a slave who had run away from his master (Philemon).
- In Rome he encountered Paul.
- They may have recognized each other from previous encounters at Philemon's house.
- He became a Christian under Paul's ministry in Rome.
- He joined the team that was supporting Paul while he was in prison.

- Under Paul's council he acknowledged the error of his ways and was now willing to return to his master and face the consequences for his previous actions.
- The charges against him were serious and could rightly include the death penalty.

Q – What was the purpose of Paul's letter? - To request that Philemon forgive Onesimus and take him back.

Q – What did Paul suggest as the restored relationship between Philemon and Onesimus? - Brothers in Christ.

Q – What did Paul suggest as a resolution of the debt Onesimus owed to Philemon? - Charge it to Paul's account?

Q – How would you define the debt that Paul is referring to?

- A slave was considered to be an asset.
- A means of getting work done.
 - Some slaves were assigned to work inside the house.
 - Others worked outside in support of agrarian activities.
- The alternative to a slave would be a hired hand or employee.

Q – Why do we believe Philemon was indebted to Paul? - Because of the statements he makes his letter.

- Verse 13) I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.
- Verse 19) I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.

Q – How would you summarize the main points Paul makes to Philemon?

- The love you express toward others refreshes them and is a source of joy and encouragement to me.
- As your Christian superior (implied), I could order you to forgive and take Onesimus back but I don't want to approach this matter in that way.
- Onesimus has become a son to me while I've been incarcerated here in Rome.
- I would have liked to keep him but don't want to be presumptuous so I'm sending him back to you.
- Perhaps the reason this whole matter occurred was so you could take him back as a brother in Christ, instead of as a slave.
- If you consider me as your partner, welcome him back as you would welcome me.
- If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything charge it to my account.
- I will pay it back, not to mention you are indebted to me for your very self.
- I'm confident you will do the right thing and take him back, which in turn will refresh my heart.
- I know you will do even more than I ask with regard to this matter.
- Prepare a room for me, as I plan to visit after the issues here in Rome are resolved.

Q – What other incident in scripture does Paul's approach to this matter remind you of?

- Our own redemption through Christ.
- Our debt of sin was charged to His account.
- God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Q – How would you feel if one of your employees?

- Stole some of your valuable resources.
- Ran off with them.
- Then subsequently establishes a family like relationship with a dear old friend.
- Your friend then writes to you and asks that you forgive the employee and not penalize them.
- Your dear friend also asks that you accept this former employee back as a brother in Christ.
- Some of us might have a difficult time resolving all the issues in this case.

Q – Which issue(s) do you believe would be the most troubling for some Christians to handle if they were Philemon's place? - I believe;

- Some would get hung up on the fact that he had broken the law when he stole from them and would want him to personally resolve the issue either by incarceration, monetarily or by some period of working off the debt.
- Some might take exception to Paul's statement that as a spiritual superior he could order that he be forgiven and taken back.
- Perhaps some would be offended by being told what to do with their own resource (slave).

Q – What was Paul's prayer for Philemon?

- I bring this up because it demonstrates the difference in some translations and the value of consulting more than one whenever there is possible confusion.
- Depending on the translation you read you could come up with a different answer to this question.
- I believe Paul is saying that the process of sharing ones faith will result in a deeper and more complete understanding of everything we have in Christ.
- Let's read the same verse from several translations and tell me what you believe he is praying for.
 - NIV 1984 - Verse 6) I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.
 - NIV 2013 – Verse 6) I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.
 - Amplified – Verse 6) [And I pray] that the participation in *and* sharing of your faith may produce *and* promote full recognition *and* appreciation *and* understanding *and* precise knowledge of every good [thing] that is ours in [our identification with] Christ *Jesus* [and unto His glory].
 - KJV – Verse 6) That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.
 - NKJV – Verse 6) that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.
 - JB Phillips – Verse 6) And I pray that those who share your faith may also share your knowledge of all the good things that believing in Jesus Christ can mean to us.

Q – What are the two different but similar words that were used in the translations we just read for what we commonality refer to as witnessing? - Sharing and communicating.

Q – How do we most frequently share our faith? - By the way we live, our attitudes, actions and words.

Q – Does anyone know who Bill O' Reilly is?

- He is a television personality who used to have a 1 hour prime time TV show.
- He was caught up in the “me too movement” for apparent sexual misconduct of some kind and apparently there was enough truth to some of the allegations because he was fired by FOX news.
- The reason I bring him up is because in 2013 he had a program where he and some guest shared their faith for almost the entire hour.
- His guests included;
 - The husband and wife that produced the mini-series The Bible.
 - A Baptist pastor from Texas.
 - A Rabbi
 - A College professor with a doctoral degree who I believe teaches theological studies at a major university.

Q – What do we know of Bill O' Reilly's faith and beliefs?

- He is a Catholic
- He believes he is a Christian.
- He believes the ultimate source of scripture is divine.

- However he also believes parts of the Old Testament are allegorical and gave as examples, stories like Jonah, Adam & Eve, Noah and the ark.
- He said he came to these conclusions relatively early in life, while in Catholic school.
- His beliefs have since been reinforced by his own study as an adult.
- He expresses his beliefs very strongly in terms of (his words now) the “Judeo-Christian Tradition”.
- I concluded from both statements and body language that neither the husband and wife nor the Baptist pastor accepted his view that some of the scriptures are allegorical.
- One of the key statements made by the pastor that illustrated the inconsistency in Bills statement of beliefs.
 - If you believe the stories of Noah and Jonah are just not credible as literal accounts of events as recorded in scripture,
 - How is it that you believe in the virgin birth and resurrection?

Q – What are the fundamentals from scripture regarding what one must do to be saved?

- Acts 16:29) The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30) He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31) They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”
- John 3:16) For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.
- Luke 23:39) One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” 40) But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? 41) We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” 42) Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43) Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.
- Romans 10:8) But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: 9) If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10) For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.
- Ephesians 2:8) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9) not by works, so that no one can boast. 10) For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Q – Do you believe that if someone acknowledges that Jesus is the son of God and that He died for the sins of the world that they are in fact a Christian? One who will spend eternity with God?

- Some Christians will have some misgivings about the simplicity of this statement.
- They will want to hang some caveats around the qualifications for becoming a true Christian.

Q – What is our problem? Why can't we simply accept some statements of belief? - Because we know the true test of a statement of faith/belief is a consistent demonstration of corresponding actions, attitudes and behaviors.

Q – Why do some people say they believe when their consistent actions, attitudes and behaviors transmit an opposite impression? - Because they don't recognize the difference in belief/faith and mental assent.

Q – How is mental assent defined?

- A mental or intellectual acknowledgment of something.
- Accepting, agreement or approving without argument.

Q – Do some of us have mental assent toward other aspects of the promises of God?

- We do!
- My mother could not accept the concept of God's commitment to us, our children and grandchildren.
- There are many believers who have mental assent concerning “by his stripes we **were** healed”.
- We display mental assent to “I will never leave you or forsake you an ever present help in trouble”.
- Some of us say the Spirit of God lives in our hearts but we live in a constant state of anxiety.
- The peace of God that passes all understanding evades us.
- We say we believe God will meet all our needs but worry constantly about finances.

Q – How is true faith defined?

- Faith is a spiritual as opposed to a mental force or product of the soul, (will mind and emotions)
- Faith is the substitute or evidence of things not seen.
- The absolute conviction of their reality.
- Faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses.

Q – What are the ingredients of faith?

- A promise of God that has been revealed to a human heart.
- Divinely inspired hope in that promise and it's applicability to the individual's situation.
- A willingness to act in concert with the Spirit of God in the matter.

Q – How do we recognize faith vs mental assent? - All consistent actions and behaviors follow our beliefs

Q – How would you respond if someone told you in conversation that some of the stories of the bible are allegorical?

- I would say I believe the accounts described in the bible are literal but the bible was not written as a text book, scientific journal or “how to” manual.
- If the person is really interested studies are available that display the accuracy and consistency of scripture.
 - It was written over a period of approximately two thousand years.
 - By about 40 different authors.
- The assumption that some stories are allegorical becomes a slippery slope.
 - - If you accept the ultimate source as divine one has to ask the question which of the accounts are too hard for God?
 - The answer is obvious. Nothing is too hard for God.
- In the case of some of O' Reilly's assumptions, Jesus himself made reference to Jonah and Noah.
- Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, God's only son was;
 - Born of a virgin, walked on water
 - Fed over 5,000 people with a little boy's lunch, turned water into wine.
 - Paid his taxes by “finding” a gold coin in a fishes mouth. He raised Lazarus from the dead.
 - Died for your sin and mine, spent 3 days in the grave and was Himself resurrected.
 - His life and ministry has more documentation than any other person who ever lived.
 - Much of the literature about Him has been validated more creditably then that of any other person in history.
 - He was/is able to do these things because He is the son of God!
- An encounter with Jesus changes lives.
 - John Newton, former slave trader who wrote the words to Amazing Grace.
 - Carla Faye Tucker, infamous Texas murder, hacked two people to death but later accepted Christ as her savior and lived a different life prior to her execution.
 - Chuck Colson, convicted felon from the Nixon White House and head of Prison Fellowship.