

How to be a Real Friend, *Part 3* A Study of Philemon 10, 18-19

Characteristic of Completeness: Salvation by Grace

Big Idea: Offer salvation.

Related Scriptures: Matthew 28:19; John 3:16; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 20:30-31;

Romans 1:16; 10:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5; Ephesians 2:8-9

Introduction:

- A. We are in midst of a series of messages titled, ► “How to be a Real Friend.” All of the messages come from a study of the little Bible letter of ► Philemon. Philemon is a great place to learn about friendship because it is a deeply personal letter from one dear friend to another, and we have been studying how the friends interact.
- B. We have learned that the author of the letter is the ► apostle Paul, and he’s writing from prison in Rome. Paul is writing to his dear friend ► Philemon.
 - 1. Philemon was a man of considerable influence and social standing. A church in Colossae met at his home, and he was a devoted follower of Jesus.
 - 2. Philemon owned a slave ► named Onesimus. Slavery was quite common in that day. Onesimus had run away from Philemon, his master, and it seems that Onesimus owed Philemon some money.

In his flight, Onesimus somehow ► met Paul. Onesimus apparently told Paul that he was a runaway slave. So, Paul sent Onesimus ► back to his owner with a letter.

- C. ► The letter to Philemon points out two very important things that serve as a foundation for the message this morning.
 - 1. The first important thing is found in ► Verse 10. There, Paul writes to Philemon,

^{NIV} Philemon 1:10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

This may seem like a curious statement. How could Paul ► have a son? He was single! At first blush, this looks like material for the *Jerry Springer Show* or the *National Enquirer*. The ► headlines might read: “Evangelist Paul Has Love Child Out of Wedlock in Prison!”

► Paul did indeed become a father to Onesimus while in prison. But, Paul’s fatherhood was spiritual, not physical. Paul became a spiritual father to

Onesimus in the sense that he had led Onesimus to Christ. Onesimus had become a Christian through the testimony of Paul while he was in prison. So, Paul considered Onesimus a son.

2. The second important thing is found in ► Verses 18-19. There, Paul says of Onesimus,

^{NIV} Philemon 1:18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 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.

This may seem like another curious statement. Why does Paul say to Philemon, ► “you owe me your very self?” Had Paul somehow saved Philemon’s life? Yes, in a way he did. You see, Paul had also led Philemon to Christ. God had used Paul to tell Philemon about Jesus so that Philemon would be saved. It is in that sense that Philemon owed Paul.

The point is, Paul told his friends about how to be saved. Paul told Philemon about Jesus, and he told Onesimus about Jesus.

- D. That brings us to the ► big idea of this message. The big idea is to ► offer salvation. That’s it. Offer salvation. One of the primary ways of being a real friend is to offer salvation—to tell your friends about how they can be saved through Jesus. Our Characteristic of Completeness in Christ for the week ► is Salvation by Grace.

1. Offering salvation to friends is not optional for a serious follower of Jesus. Jesus says in ► Matthew 28:19,

^{NIV} Matthew 28:19 “. . . go and make disciples of all nations . . .”

To ► make disciples means to invite people to come to Christ and follow Him. Surely, one of the first steps is to tell them how they can be saved.

2. ► But, how do we tell people how they can be saved? This has been a real problem—more of a problem than you think it would be. Let me mention a few of the problems.
 - a. Some of you remain skeptical about Christianity. And your skepticism is fueled, in part, by confusing and conflicting messages you get from Christians about how you can be saved.
 - b. Some of you are new believers. You recently trusted Christ as your Savior. But, sometimes you hear confusing things about how it is a person is saved, and it makes you wonder if it really took with you. Am I really a Christian? Did I do the right thing?

- c. Some of you have been believers for quite some time. But, you've never really been very confident about telling people about how to be saved because you're a little confused yourself. You're afraid you won't know what to say, or you'll say something wrong, or you'll come off like you're trying to sell something.
- d. ► I want to play a little game with you that will at first seem to have no bearing whatsoever on what we're talking about. But, let's just play it anyway, and I'll explain later. We're going to flash up on the screen a very short, familiar phrase. When it appears, I want you to read the phrase out loud, together. I have a total of three phrases. The first one will just be practice.

Are you ready? When the first phrase appears, you read it out loud. Here it ► is:

Paris
in the
the spring

► Now, that wasn't so hard was it? Now, we'll go to the second phrase. When it appears, you read it out loud. Here it ► is:

once
in a
a lifetime

► Now, we'll go to the final phrase. When it appears, you read it out loud. Here it ► is:

a bird
in the
the hand

► How do you think you did? If you're like most people, you didn't notice the repeated word in each phrase. ► Look again at each phrase. Did you miss the repeated words? Paris in the *the* spring. Once in a *a* lifetime. A bird in the *the* hand. Chances are you didn't see the repeated words because you weren't expecting to see them. Perhaps you had some preconceptions about what the phrases were supposed to say based on what you've heard before.

What's my point? In considering how a person is saved, I want to encourage you to try to set aside what you may have heard somebody

say before. I want you to set aside or at least be aware of any expectations or preconceptions you may have based on what you've been told, or how you've been raised. The only thing that is important is what the Bible says about how a person is saved. The Bible is our ultimate authority. Not what I say. Not what somebody else says. No matter how well publicized their books are. No matter how popular their radio or television programs might be. No matter how big their church is. It's only what the Bible says that counts. And we need to be careful to recognize and delete stuff that people have added to the Bible that doesn't belong.

I say this because I suspect there are some good-hearted, well-intentioned, God-fearing people who may be operating under the wrong assumptions about how a person is saved.

This morning I want to try to clear things up by addressing some important questions.

- I. The first questions is this: ► What must one do to be saved? Another way to say it is, How does a person become a Christian? Or, how do you get to heaven?
 - A. Let me give you sampling of answers I've heard professing Christians give to this question:
 1. ► "Repent, believe, confess your sin to God, and confess Him before men."
 2. ► "Utter the prayer of the prodigal son."
 3. ► "Come forward and follow Christ in baptism."
 4. ► "Place your hand in the hand of Jesus."
 5. ► "Be willing to forsake all."
 6. ► "Give your heart to Christ."
 7. ► "Ask Jesus into your heart."
 8. ► "Commit your life to Christ."
 9. ► "Make Jesus Lord of your life."

Which one is right? There are over a dozen distinct commands here. Do you have to do all these? Are any of them correct? As nice-sounding and well-meaning as these suggestions might be, collectively they present a pretty confusing picture. Who can

blame the person who says, “I have no clue what you Christians are talking about.”? What’s the answer?

- B. The ► book of John is a great place to look for the answer to that question because it is the only book in the Bible which plainly declares it is written for the purpose of explaining how a person can be saved. John ► 20:30-31 describes this intent:

^{NIV} John 20:30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Note three important things here:

1. First, ► the purpose of the book of John is to produce belief.
2. Second, ► the object of this belief is Jesus as Christ, the Son of God.
3. Third, ► the result of this belief is life. “Life” refers to eternal life. It refers to being saved from the condemnation of our sin. It refers to becoming a Christian. It refers to going to heaven.

- C. Clearly and repeatedly, belief in Christ is presented as the sole requirement for eternal life. Belief in Jesus is the only thing needed to be saved.

1. Here are some examples, all quoting Jesus Himself:
 - a. ► ^{NIV} 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.”
 - b. ► ^{NIV} John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and ► believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”
 - c. ► ^{NIV} John 6:40 “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and ► believes in him shall have eternal life . . .”
 - d. ► ^{NIV} John 6:47 “I tell you the truth, he who ► believes has everlasting life.”
2. Are you picking up a certain theme here? These are just a few of the 53 verses in the book of John alone which speak of belief in Jesus as the sole

condition for eternal life.¹ When you broaden the scope to include the entire New Testament, there are 185 references to salvation by faith or believing in Christ alone for salvation.²

3. You ask, what must one do to be saved? The answer is crystal ► clear: Believe in Jesus Christ, period. It's not believe and be baptized. It's not believe and become a member of a certain church. It's not believe and do good. It's not believe and say a special prayer. It's not believe and obey. It's just believe, period. It's faith plus nothing. We shouldn't add anything that doesn't belong.

II. Well, you say, ► “Exactly what must one believe about Jesus?” That Jesus existed? That He told the truth? That He was a great teacher? That He was the Son of God? That He died? What's essential?

A. That which is essential is something called ► the gospel.

1. The gospel literally means ► good news.
2. The apostle Paul writes about the importance of the gospel in ► Romans 1:16:

^{NIV} Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . .

There's that word again, ► “believes.” The object of belief here is ► the gospel. The gospel, then, is some good news about Jesus. And, it's critically important because Paul says this gospel, this good news is the power of God for salvation.

B. What is the gospel? What exactly is the good news that we are to believe?

1. The apostle Paul—the same guy who tells us how important the gospel is in Romans 1:16—the same guy who wrote Philemon—he helps us define the most important parts of the gospel in ► 1 Corinthians 15:1-5. First let's read it. Then we'll identify the key elements:

^{NIV} 1 Corinthians 15:1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you . . . 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

¹ Fankhouser, “The Concept of Belief in the Book of John,” Unpublished paper, Western Seminary Phoenix.

² Oberholtzer seminary notes.

- a. Two critical things happened, according to this passage. Some of the other details are merely provided as proof that these things two things happened.

(1) ► First, Christ died.

(a) He died according to the Scriptures. That means He died just as the Bible had predicted.

(b) And He was buried as proof of His death. You do not bury people who are alive.

(2) Now, here's the ► second thing: He was raised.

(a) He was raised according to the Scriptures.

(b) And He appeared to Peter and others as proof of his resurrection.

- b. These two critical things—His death and His resurrection—happened for a reason. Christ died and rose again ► “for our sins.” That is, to be our Savior from sin. He died and rose again so that we might have eternal life. He died and rose again so that we might go to heaven. So, there are three key elements of the gospel. Christ died. He rose again. And He did it for our sins.

His death was the necessary payment for our sin, our wrongdoing, our problems which separate us from God. That's the basis for Christ's offer of eternal life.

- c. Christ's payment for our sin is pictured beautifully in Philemon. Paul says of Onesimus in ► Verses 18-19,

^{NIV} Philemon 1:18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it . . .

Evidently Onesimus owed his master a debt—a debt he could not pay. So Paul offers to pay it for him.

Just as Paul paid what Onesimus owed financially, Christ paid what we owe spiritually. Our spiritual MasterCard is maxed with sin and we can't pay it. But Jesus Christ died and rose again to pay it for us, to save us from the penalty of sin.

2. So, ► here's the gospel in a nutshell: ► Christ died and rose again to be our Savior from sin; ► and on that basis He promises eternal life to all who will simply believe Him for it. That's the good news. That's the specific object of our belief. That's exactly what we are to believe.

III. ► What exactly does it mean to believe? How serious do I need to be? Do I need to be absolutely, positively convinced beyond all doubt? Is it simply mental assent to the facts of the gospel? Does believe mean surrender and obey?

A. It would be useful to determine the definition of the original word translated "believe."

The original Greek word translated ► "believe" is *pisteuo*. The word ► means "to think to be true; to be persuaded of; to credit, place confidence in,"³ "to believe (in), trust,"⁴ "to have faith (in)."⁵ So the Greek word, *pisteuo*, means pretty much the same thing as our English word "believe."

So to believe in Jesus ► means to trust Christ alone to save us from sin. To believe in Christ, to trust Christ, to rely on Christ, to receive Christ, to have faith in Christ all mean the same thing in the Bible.

B. ► Some have argued that the concept of belief includes obedience and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Let me say up front that I am a strong proponent of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Every believer should obediently surrender to Christ's leadership in life. But this is not a requirement for eternal salvation.

1. I can't find a linguistic shoe horn big enough to squeeze the idea of obedience and surrendering into the simple concept of belief.

Don't get me wrong. Obedience and surrendering are things children of God are expected to do, but not as a condition of salvation.

It's a little like us being adopted as children into a family. A parent's gracious love and adoption get us into the family. *Then*, we are expected to obey and surrender to parental authority in the home as a part of maturing. But obedience and surrender aren't conditions for adoption.

Within the last couple of months, Fred Chay and John Correia have ► published a good book titled, *The Faith that Saves*.⁶ It's pretty thin. And pretty

³ Thayer, *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

⁴ Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

⁵ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*

⁶ Fred Chay and John P. Correia, *The Faith that Saves: The Nature of Faith in the New Testament*, (Phoenix, AZ: Grace Line, 2008).

thick. It's a scholarly study of the nature of faith in the New Testament. They show that adding works to the definition of faith is simply not justified.

And ► yet it's very common. Linking works to faith has its own saying that goes all the way back to John Calvin: "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."⁷ Which is very catchy. "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone." Catchy. And deceptive and confusing and contradictory.

And, I don't know, but I think car dealerships may have picked up on this idea. You see a nice car on the lot, and on the window it says in day-glo paint, "Yours for only \$19,995." So you write a check for \$19,995, you hand it to the car guy, and you say, "I'll buy it; give me the keys!"

And the guy says, "I'm afraid you're short; it's going to cost you more than \$19,995."

"But wait a minute," you say, "it says, 'Yours for only \$19,995.'"

And the guy says, "Yes, I know. But here's the deal: You are sold by price alone, but the price that sells is never alone. There's tax, license, and dealer prep."

But saving faith has no add-ons. No tax, license, and dealer prep. No add-ons. Not church membership. Not church attendance. Not baptism. Not forsaking all our sin. Not being good. Not getting our acts together. Not feeling really sorry. Not saying a prayer. Not a public profession. Not coming forward in response to an altar call. Not making a promise. Not obedience. Not reading the Bible. Not giving our hearts. Not confession. Not even repentance when repentance is understood as anything other than believing.⁸ It's faith alone in Christ alone.

2. Ephesians ► 2:8-9 says,

^{NIV} Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

This and other verses indicate that we are saved by a gift of grace. That means

⁷ Attributed to John Calvin in response to the Council of Trent canon 11 in his Antidotes to Trent.

⁸ Most often, the Bible uses the term "repent" or "repentance" to signify a change of mind in a direction away from sin and toward God. So the biblical command to repent is normally a command to get right with God. To turn from sin toward God. To seek relational harmony with Him. Some scholars argue that, in a few isolated cases, repentance may actually be synonymous with faith, on the thinking that the change of mind is from unbelief to belief. While that may be true, that is not the usual meaning of repentance in the Bible.

salvation is completely unearned. We receive it through faith. Our works of obedience and surrender play no role in our salvation. Only faith. It's faith alone.

3. ► Finally, for the person who insists submission to the Lordship of Christ is required to be saved, two questions are troubling.
 - a. First, how much of myself must I surrender in order to be saved? What's the percentage? If it's 100%, then I'm afraid I'm in deep trouble. And so are you. I'm working at raising my percentage over time as I mature. But, I'm not at 100%. If I were, I'd be sinless. Yet I know, and the Bible confirms, that I am not without sin.
 - b. Second, for how long must I maintain the minimum level of submission in order to be saved? It it's 98.6 %, do I have to reach that level for just an instant? Or, must I maintain it for a lifetime?

Fortunately, we need not be troubled with these questions because the Bible says plainly that we are saved by grace through faith alone.

Conclusion:

- I had two groups in mind when I prepared this message.
 - A. First, I'd like to address those of you who are believers. I want to give you a clear understanding of how a person is saved so that you can be a real friend to others and tell them.
 1. The message is quite simple:
 - a. ► What must one do to be saved? ► Believe in Jesus Christ.
 - b. ► What must one believe about Jesus? ► That Christ died and rose again to be our Savior from sin, and on that basis, He promises eternal life to all who simply believe Him for it. Amazing grace.
 - c. ► What does it mean to believe? ► It means to trust Christ alone to save you from sin. It's simply to take Him at His word.
 2. Friends offer salvation. How can you apply this?

If you're like me, you may be a little apprehensive right now. You're thinking that maybe I'm going to ask you to preach to your neighbors or in some other way be embarrassingly obnoxious about your faith and if you don't really want to, then I'm going to make you feel guilty and tell you what a lousy Christian

you turned out to be.

Relax. I'm not going there. Here's what I'm suggesting. It's simple and every believer can do it right now. Two words: Ask God. Ask God to show you. And keep on asking. Ask God to show you the who, when, and how of offering salvation.

Who? Lord, please show me who needs to hear from me.

And when? Lord, please show me the opportunities you have orchestrated for me to share the gospel.

And how? Lord, please show me how I should I go about this.

I suspect that many Christians find it so difficult to offer salvation because they think of it trying to get people to buy something, and they import all kinds of cultural sales baggage into it. You know, memorize the spiel, overcome objections, accentuate the positives, close the deal, yada, yada. I've always hated sales.

Forget sales. It's not about your sales; it's about your story. Put the simple message of the gospel in the context of your life. What's the story of Jesus in your life? What happened to you? What's the gospel mean to you? How do you feel about it? You're not imposing anything on anybody. And it can be as natural as telling a friend about a good movie or a good restaurant, only this is about a good God.

So just ask God, and keep asking. Who? When? How? The opportunities will come to offer salvation.

- B. Now, I'd like to address those of you who are not believers in Jesus. This morning I've tried to be a friend to you by offering salvation—by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ as plainly as I can.

In a moment, a closing song will be played. Maybe for you it can be a time of reflection, a time of believing. Perhaps you haven't really believed in Christ the way the Bible says. Perhaps you've been trusting in a lot of things, maybe even good things. But, you haven't really trusted Jesus.

Maybe the time is now.

If you find that you are trusting Christ for the first time this morning, or if you've recently trusted Christ as your Savior, I invite you take just a moment after the service to let me know. I'll be in the back. Let's pray.