

Message #5

Philemon 1:18-19

In **verse 14** of the book of Philemon, the Apostle Paul says that he wants Philemon to take Onesimus back of his “own free will.” Now free will is an interesting point of theology to study because the fact is none of our wills are free in an absolute sense. In fact, our wills are fallen and corrupt. Apart from God’s sovereign grace, none would seek God or choose God.

However, after we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are indwelt by the Spirit of God and a process of transformation begins that affects our intellect, our emotions and our will. What Paul wanted Philemon to do is to use his born again will to make a decision to take Onesimus back in pure grace.

Then, in **verse 18**, he says if he has wronged you in any way or in any thing, “**charge that to my account.**” So Paul wanted Philemon to make a mental calculation from his own will to charge any wrong to his account.

This is a key matter of this book. Paul wants Philemon to credit the wrong of Onesimus to his account. **In other words, he wants Onesimus completely forgiven and restored through imputation or through a free will judicial crediting or calculation that Philemon must make in his mind.**

Paul did not say I want you to forgive Onesimus by water baptism. Paul did not say I want you to forgive Onesimus by giving him communion. Paul did not say I want you to forgive Onesimus by his penance of confession. Paul did not say I want you to forgive Onesimus by lighting candles. **What he says is I want him forgiven by imputation. I want him forgiven by judicial mental calculation.**

In our modern world “imputation” means that you substitute something for something else. Often times imputation involves criminals and criminal actions. A court, for example, would attribute provable criminal actions to the individual who did the crime and then substitute a penalty in view of the crime. This kind of judicial calculation or imputation attaches to the person responsibility and liability.

Now as we come to **Philemon 1:18**, Paul is actually presenting the idea of “imputation” in regard to himself, Philemon and Onesimus. **What Paul wants Philemon to do is to impute to him the wrong that was done by Onesimus.** He wants Philemon to charge Onesimus’ wrong to his account. So what that would mean is that he is willing to take the full brunt of responsibility and liability, and he is willing to pay the penalty of what is owed.

So what we see here is that Paul is asking Philemon to make a mental and judicial calculation to charge him with all the wrong Onesimus did. He wanted Philemon to charge it all “to my account.”

We do not know exactly what the sum was that Onesimus stole from Philemon, but we may assume he had no way to make that money back. He is a slave, not a corporate executive. He could not do some consulting work or get some part-time slave job so he could earn the extra money needed to pay it back. So there was no possible way he could go back to Philemon and hand him an envelope that had all the money he had taken.

Now to be completely exonerated from the crime, one would need to pay back everything that was owed. But since Onesimus could not in any way pay it back, Paul said there is another way and that way is for Philemon to charge Paul's account in full for what Onesimus could not pay. In other words, what Paul is asking Philemon to do is to calculate everything owed by Onesimus to him and charge his account because he will pay it in full.

THE ONLY WAY ONE WHO IS GUILTY MAY BE CLEARED OF THE CRIME IS BY MAKING FULL PAYMENT AND RESTITUTION FOR WHAT ONE DID AND WHEN ONE IS IN NO POSITION TO PAY BACK WHAT ONE DID, THEN THE ONLY POSSIBILITY FOR ACQUITTAL IS THAT SOMEONE ELSE MUST REMEDY THE SITUATION AS A SUBSTITUTE AND THE WRONGED PARTY MUST CALCULATE THAT AS SUFFICIENT.

Now I am going to make an assumption here in that Paul had taught Philemon about the great theological doctrine of imputation. In fact, a few years before he wrote this epistle, he had written his famous Gospel of God in the book of Romans and I am sure he taught this great doctrine everywhere he went.

It is clear that the potential of reconciliation between two parties when one is in no position to pay something back lies in the potential of imputation. The word "charge that to my account" (ελλογαω) is the same word Paul uses in Romans 5:13 where it is translated "imputed."

Now there is no possible way that Onesimus could actually pay back everything because even if he could pay back the money, he still had done the wrong and how do you pay that back?

This point is extremely important for us to grasp because we have a big sin problem and there is no way we can pay back our sin debt to the point where we have not sinned. The only possibility we have for resolving our own sin problem is trusting that God, of His own free sovereign will, will make a mental decision to calculate our sin and charge it to another.

This idea of mentally calculating something by imputation is a theological matter that is critical and essential to our salvation. This potential of crediting something to another's account is the whole matter of our grace salvation.

The doctrine of imputation is a doctrine that Paul specifically developed pertaining to our salvation. Paul said that he got this grace Gospel directly from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-12).

Now the chapter in the Bible that has been called the great “imputation chapter” is **Romans 4**. In **Romans 4**, the verb “reckon” or “credit” is used 11 times in 25 verses (**4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24**). The specific word that is used here (λογίζομαι) is one that clearly means that God calculates or reckons something to another’s account.

Now in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew O.T., the word “credited” or “reckoned” in **Genesis 15:6** is this very word used in **Romans 4** by Paul. The text says that **“Abraham believed in the LORD and He (the LORD) reckoned it or calculated it to him as righteousness.”** So the idea that God can charge or calculate something to someone’s account is fully supported not only by Paul in Philemon, but also by Paul in Romans and by Moses in Genesis.

It is specifically stated and defended in **Romans 4** that justification is specifically by imputation and justification is by faith in Jesus Christ and not by any works (**Rom. 4:2-3, 5, 6, 16/22-25**). So clearly this idea of calculating something to another’s account is a pure grace calculation that comes by faith.

Now since Paul asks Philemon to calculate the wrong of Onesimus to his account and since Martin Luther said we are all God’s Onesimi, we would like to present the theology behind this matter of imputation. This is clearly a matter developed here in **Philemon 1:18-19** because **Paul wants Philemon to charge the “wrong” of Onesimus to his account with the end result being Onesimus has full standing with Philemon and his family and all in the Colossian church.**

In the Bible there are three major imputations, or judicial calculations or credits that are in existence:

JUDICIAL CREDIT CALCULATION #1 – The sin of Adam and the penalty given to Adam has been credited or calculated by God to every human. **Romans 5:12-21**

When Adam sinned, God made a judicial calculation that we all sinned at the same moment. The verb “all sinned” in **Romans 5:12** is an aorist tense verb, which means in the mind of God there was one point in time, one moment of time when God made a judicial calculation in His mind that every human sinned and, as a result, all were sentenced to die and given the death penalty. That specific moment of negative crediting came when “one man,” Adam, sinned.

So we are not going to die because we have personally sinned, although all of us have personally sinned. We are going to die because of Adam’s sin. When he sinned, God made a judicial calculation that we sinned in Adam and we received the death penalty. Now we may easily prove this point four ways:

(Way #1) - This is the only thing that this can grammatically mean with the aorist tense verb-
“all sinned” (**Rom. 5:12**). One point in time when all sinned.

(Way #2) - The context of **Romans 5** is a contrast between the negative things we have in
Adam as opposed to the positive things we have in Jesus Christ (**Rom. 5:15-21**).

(Way #3) - The immediate text specifically says this - **5:16, 17, 18, 19**.

(Way #4) - The illustration in **verses 13-14** introduced by the explanatory conjunction
“for” illustrates what Paul meant in **verse 12**.

- 1) Sin was in the world before the Law. **5:13a**
- 2) Sin was not calculated against the individual until the Law. **5:13b**
- 3) All people died from the time of Adam until the time of Moses. **5:14**

If death is a penalty for sin and sin is not calculated to the individual until the Law was given to define sin, then why did people die? They died because of the sin of Adam. When Adam sinned, God made a judicial calculation that all sinned and all were given the death penalty. As Spurgeon said, “When Adam sinned, the world was turned into a vast cemetery.”

Now most people do not like the fact that they have been declared guilty in Adam. Do you want to know why most people don’t like this? Because most people are so proud, they do not like the idea that someone else represents them. Most people are so arrogant they do not see their own depravity and helplessness.

But we who know the Lord love this idea of representation because if God can deal with us by sinful representation and calculation, then He can then also make another calculation that we are righteous in Jesus Christ (**Rom. 5:18-19**).

JUDICIAL CREDIT CALCULATION #2 – Our sin is judicially credited and calculated to Jesus Christ.

Now there are several verses that say just this:

II Corinthians 5:21 says - “He (God the Father) made Him (God the Son) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

I Peter 2:24 says - “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

Now it is quite clear that we have two major problems when it comes to a relationship with the Holy God. **First**, we have a sin problem and **second**, we have a lack of righteousness problem. We are in no position to resolve either one of these issues.

Jesus Christ is the only one who can take care of both of these problems.

JUDICIAL CREDIT CALCULATION #3 – Christ’s righteousness is credited and calculated to us.

Now the phrase “the righteousness of God” that shows up in the book of Romans (**1:17; 3:22; 10:3**) refers to a righteousness from God rather than just to the fact God is righteous.

Paul was very clear to point out that he did not have a righteousness of his own but a righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:9). Paul said in Romans that righteousness was a grace imputed gift (**Rom. 5:17**) and he also said that by faith in Christ we are “made righteous” (**Rom. 5:19**).

Paul stressed even to the carnal Corinthians that Jesus Christ is our righteousness, sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:30). Paul says in II Corinthians 5:21 that we “become the righteousness of God in Him.”

This imputation that gives a believer the legal right to stand forever in a relationship with God cannot ever be minimized. God the Father will only make this judicial calculation to one who has believed on Jesus Christ.

So here is Paul’s concept of calculate that to my account. We are calculated as sinners by God. Our sin is calculated as being nailed to that cross by God. When we believe on Jesus Christ, we are calculated as being righteous by God because He calculates our sin to Christ and Christ’s righteousness to us.

So this world is theologically comprised of two groups of people by God’s calculation:

- 1) God calculates one group still condemned in Adam because of their sin.
- 2) God calculates one group as not condemned in Christ in spite of their sin.

Faith in Christ or no faith in Christ determines the matter.

Now with that as a backdrop to Pauline theology, he says to Philemon use your own will to completely forgive Onesimus by imputation and charge it all to my account.

This is illustrative of exactly what Jesus Christ does for sinners. We are all Onesimi’s. We have all sinned against God and we are in no position to settle the account. Jesus Christ said, “I’ll take care of your account.” He says to the Father, “Charge it all to me.” When you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you are forever saved and your account is settled!