



A New Creature

Philemon 10-13

1. Are You Useful? (verse 11)
2. Are You Loved? (verse 12)
3. Are You Helpful? (verse 13)

In recent weeks, we have been in a study of Paul's epistle to Philemon. We began our exposition by looking at the entire letter in one message, all 25 verses, in an overview of the whole. Since then, it has been our plan to return to this letter, taking a bit closer look at some of the smaller details. Our approach isn't so much to be minutely exegetical, as it is to pull out themes that have much to teach us!

My focus this morning is on verses 10-13, where Paul gets to the heart of his argument as to why Philemon ought to take back his runaway slave, Onesimus. After building up Philemon by identifying the working of God in his life, Paul continues on to his main point. Let's consider the entire context of these words, beginning with verse 8.

Philemon 8-16

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you--since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

The core of Paul's argument comes in verse 10, where Paul writes, "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment." Paul was making an appeal to Philemon on the basis of what took place in the life of Onesimus while Paul was in prison. Paul said that he had "begotten" Onesimus in prison. If you write in your Bibles, that would be a great word for you to circle. Because, this word is the entire key that unlocks Paul's heart for this man. Ultimately, it is the reason why this epistle was written.

Now, this word translated, "begotten" is used all over the Scripture to speak about the process of a child being born. Matthew 2:1 tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (same word). Luke 1:57 informs us of how Elizabeth gave birth to John (same word). In Acts 22:3, Paul used this word to describe his own birth in Tarsus (same word). Hebrews 11:23 say that Moses was born into adversity (same word). John 9:1 speaks about the man who was born blind (same word). Literally, you can translate this phrase in Philemon, verse 10, "whom I have brought forth in birth." In other words, Paul was writing to Philemon, telling him that Onesimus had been born in prison by Paul.

Now, obviously, this doesn't mean that Paul was pregnant with a child. Men don't get pregnant. Nor does it mean that Onesimus, a full-grown man, entered "a second time into his mother's womb" (John 3:4). But, what it does mean is that Onesimus experienced a spiritual birth during his encounter with Paul in prison. Onesimus was "born-again" (John 3:3). He was "born from above" (John 3:3). He was "born of ... the Spirit" (John 3:5).

The Bible frequently uses this word which is translated, "begotten," to describe a spiritual birth. When Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus, he used this word on several occasions to describe how one enters the kingdom of God. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born** again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born** of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is **born** of the flesh is flesh, and that which is **born** of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5-6; see also John 3:8). Peter uses it to describe our salvation in Christ, "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be **born** again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." John uses this word six times in his first epistle to describe the child of God (see 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

Theologians call this new birth, "regeneration." It's the changing of a man from being centered upon the flesh to being centered upon the spirit. Wayne Grudem defines regeneration as "a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us." ^[1] Louis Berkhof defined it this way: "Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy." ^[2] This is what Onesimus experienced. What happened to Onesimus was simple: He was a changed man. God had done a work in his heart to open his spiritually blind eyes to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). Upon seeing Jesus for all that He is, Onesimus repented of his sin and believed in Jesus. And the results were clear for all to see.

Now, we don't know exactly what Onesimus was like before he was converted. But, we do know that those who knew him saw that a change had taken place in his life. He was different than what he was before. As people looked upon his life, they could see this. It was obvious. It is always obvious. John wrote, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice

righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10).

We don't know the details of the change that others saw took place in the life of Onesimus. Perhaps those who knew him saw a hateful man become loving. Perhaps they saw an angry man become joyful. Perhaps they saw an anxious man become peaceful. Perhaps they saw an impatient man become patient. Perhaps they saw a violent man become kind. Perhaps they saw a wicked man become good. Perhaps they saw an fickle man become faithful. Perhaps they saw a harsh man become gentle. Perhaps they saw a wild man become self-controlled. These ways are the ways that the Spirit of God works in the lives of those He changes (Gal. 5:22-23). Some (or maybe all of these things) were apparent in his life. Any changes that were made in his life could have been attributed completely to the working of the Spirit of God in his life.

This is how the Spirit of God works in a man's life. When He comes to indwell him, He changes him. It can easily be summarized this way: No Jesus, no change. No change, no Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul said it this way, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." When someone comes to faith in Christ, his nature changes. He has new desires. Gone is the hostility toward God. Present is a love for God. Gone is the pursuit of sin. Present is the pursuit of Christ. Paul uses this very fact to seek to convince Philemon of taking this man back. Paul argues that "Onesimus is a changed man! He is not the same guy who ran away! Philemon, you should take him back."

My message this morning is entitled, "A New Creature." In my message we will focus our attention upon verses 10-13 and see in those verses three characteristics of Onesimus, which testify of his changed nature. Each of these characteristics of Philemon are also true of everyone who has been born again from above. By way of outline this morning, I want to turn these three characteristics into three questions. As I ask these questions, I want for each of you to search your own heart to see if the evidences of regeneration are seen in your life.

These characteristics of Onesimus are by no means exhaustive characteristics of a regenerate person. Furthermore, they aren't even the most crucial characteristics in determining the true state of your soul. Nonetheless, they are indicative of every believer in Christ. The text we are considering this morning compels us to look closely at them. Though they may not be exhaustive, they are sufficient to expose your soul if you have never experienced the new birth.

So, I want for you to take a test this morning. Are you a new creature? Question #1, ...

1. Are You Useful? (verse 11)

Paul tells Philemon that Onesimus "formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me" (verse 11). These are pretty strong words if you think carefully about them. When Paul looked at the life of Onesimus, he labeled the former days of his slavery to Philemon as "useless." Now, we don't know what type of worker Onesimus was. But, it seems awfully unfair of Paul to say that Onesimus was "useless."

I'm sure that those of you who have children know a bit of what it is like to have a worker at home that disappoints you. With some degree of regularity, we face a problem in our home. When mom or dad gives an instruction to one of our children to do this or that, there are times when the command goes unheeded. At this time, we often tell our children, "You are blowing smoke into my eyes." They know what we are talking about, because they have heard Proverbs 10:26 quoted to them over and over and over again. This Proverb says, "Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, So is the lazy one to those who send him."

As we tell our children that they are blowing smoke in our eyes, they know that we are really telling them that their laziness is irritating us. We have sent them away for a task, but the task was never done. They know that we are being frustrated by their lack of obedience to their parents in "all things" (as Colossians 3:20 tells them to do). But, even with this being a frequent occurrence in the Brandon household, I'm far from saying that any of our children are "useless," as Paul said of Onesimus (here in verse 11). There are many things that our children do around the house that are very "useful."

Certainly, this must have been true for Onesimus as well. No doubt, Onesimus wasn't a happy slave. Any work done for Philemon was probably half-hearted at best. Also, he probably grumbled and complained against Philemon, stirring up others to do the same. But, it's difficult to believe that he was of no use at all to Philemon. So, I don't believe that Paul's words here are to be taken literally, in the sense that Onesimus served no use at all to Philemon during his slavery.

I think that the key in this phrase is that Paul was speaking hyperbole. That is, he was setting up a comparison of the former Onesimus with the present Onesimus. The comparison between the two is vast. In fact, the difference between the two is so vast that to compare them is like comparing a "useless" worker to one who is "useful." Several weeks ago, I told you of how this was a play on words. The name, "Onesimus" comes from a Greek word, meaning, "profitable." The one who was called "profitable" actually was "unprofitable," but now, he was become true to his name.

With this observation, Paul is getting at the simple reality that **a regenerated soul is a useful soul**. When one comes to faith in Christ, it makes him better. It makes him a better worker. When one comes to faith in Christ, it makes him a better husband. It makes him a better father. It makes him a better son. When a woman comes to faith in Christ, it makes her a better wife. It makes her a better mother. It makes her a better daughter. When Jesus is in your life, every single relationship that you have is changed. It is changed for the better.

See, when the Spirit of God comes and indwells a soul, there is a new perspective on life. No longer are you interested only in what you can get. Rather, you are interested in what you can give. Peter put it this way: "fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of see which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:22-23). In other words, you might say it this way, "It is fitting for you to love the brethren to the max, because you have been born again. Being a new creature in Christ changes everything! You ought to love others with your whole heart!"

As a slave, Onesimus would have returned to Philemon with a entirely new perspective. Onesimus had come to faith in Christ. The new heart of Onesimus would be manifest itself with "fervent love [Philemon] from the heart" (1 Pet. 1:22). Rather than serving his master with "external

service" as he had done before, Onesimus was going to return with a desire to serve Philemon "with sincerity of heart" (Col. 3:22). As a believer in Christ, Onesimus was now under a new master, the Lord Jesus Christ, the sovereign ruler of the universe! And any service that he would render to another would be rendered unto Him! When he came back, his heart would be to serve Philemon as heartily as he would serve the Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 3:23).

This would make a radical change in the way he served Philemon. Philemon wouldn't have to constantly be watching over his work, because Onesimus knew that the eye of the Lord, Almighty, was always upon his work (Col. 3:23). Philemon wouldn't have to intimidate him in any way to invoke his service, because his service would now come from within (Col. 3:22). Where once he was "useless," now he was "useful" (Philemon 11).

Now, what about you? Are you useful? Think about your employer. Are you useful to your employer? Think about your marriage. Are you useful to your spouse? Think about your parenting. Are you useful to your children? For you children, I want you to think about your parents. Are you useful to your parents? As you demonstrate your love to them in your service to them, is your service rendered with love and passion and heart? Or, is it all external? Usefulness is one sign of a regenerated soul.

Let's turn to the second question:

2. Are You Loved? (verse 12)

Notice, I'm not asking, "Do you love?" I'm asking a different question. I'm asking, "Are you loved?" One of the characteristics of a regenerated soul is that he becomes dear to those in the body of Christ. It's not that we are loveable in and of ourselves. (Were the truth be known, we aren't.) Rather, it's that God has done a work in the life of the redeemed to transform them more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. God has given us of His Spirit, that the things that interest us are the things of God. He is the object of our affections. He is the object of our speech.

And the plain fact is this: as other believers see Jesus in you, they will be attracted to you with a love that you cannot deny. Consider carefully these words: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him" (1 John 5:1). In other words, those who love God will also love those who are born of God. "Are You Loved? Do other believers in Christ love you?" This is an evidence that you have been born again.

In asking this question, I'm not getting at your longings to feel love. Nor am I asking you what you are doing to try to win the love of others. I'm simply asking this: "Has your life been so transformed by the Spirit of God that other Christians in the body have identified with you because of your love for Jesus?"

I know some of the most unattractive people of this world (by the world's standards of attraction), toward whom I feel a great love. It's not that I love them for who they are as a person. They aren't lovely. But, I love them, because the life of God shines through them so brightly that I am attracted to them, and I want to be with them. I believe that this is what Paul was getting at in verse 12 concerning his own love for Philemon. Paul writes, "I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart."

Saying good-bye is always difficult. In the ancient world, the sheer distances of travel magnified the effect. Paul was sending Onesimus on a thousand-mile journey, across land and sea, from Rome to Colossae. It would be months before Paul could even hope to see this man again.

Paul wants to communicate with Philemon of the extent his love for Onesimus. And so, he gives this word picture: to send Onesimus is to take his own heart, ripped from his chest, and sent away to Philemon. Now, that's not quite true (though the idea is absolutely correct). This word, translated here, "heart," isn't the word *kardia* (*kardia*) that describes the organ in our body that pumps blood. More often than not, the "heart" describes the innermost essence of a person. But, that's not the word used here.

Here, Paul uses the word, *spagchna* (*splangchna*), which refers to the stomach (or the bowels). It describes the deepest source of emotional attachment and affection. Our emotions affect our stomach. When you are in love, your stomach churns. When you are anxious about something, your stomach is in knots. This is what Paul is getting at. He is saying to Philemon, "My affection for Onesimus is very great. It descends to the depths of my innermost being. When I think of being separated from him, my stomach churns."

What Paul is communicating here is far more than simply a sentimental love for another person. I believe that Paul is putting on display the bond that is formed among fellow born-again creatures. As they say, "Birds of a feather flock together." Pigeons flock together with pigeons. Seagulls flock together with seagulls. And those who are born from above flock together.

In college, the cafeteria was the main gathering place where all the students on campus where I went to school. There were certain spots where certain people gathered together to eat their food. The Phi-G's ate in one location. Those who lived at the Beta Theta Pi house ate in another location. The thespians ate in the back corner. The soccer team ate together. The football team ate together. The cross-country runners all ate together. Many people at the college got along with one another. But, it was those with the *common experience* who ate together. It's because they could relate well with each other, because they were all involved in similar activities.

This is why the church gathers so naturally. On the one hand, the church is composed of a diverse group of people, from all walks of life. Our church is comprised of people from different age groups. We have people from different socio-economic classes. We have people of different ethnic origin here at Rock Valley Bible Church. But, the church is made up of all who have a common experience. Those in the church have experienced the new birth. The church isn't merely a group of good people who get along. The church is a group of people who have been transformed by the power of God. We gather tend to gather together because of our common nature. We are birds of a feather that flock together.

We are different than the rest of the world, because of what Christ has done in our souls. Peter puts it well in 1 Peter 2:11, when he calls believers in Christ "aliens and strangers." That's what we are. He has changed us. Believers in Christ are fundamentally different than those

in the world. Because we are different than the world, we are drawn together. Our common experience of being transformed by the power of God has given us a love for each other that the world simply doesn't understand.

When a church is fully functioning properly, the effects upon others is powerful. I remember one instance while at Kishwaukee Bible Church in DeKalb that really impressed this upon my heart. We had a woman come into our congregation and experience the life of the church. Though she had grown up in church her entire life, her testimony to me later was that the people of Kishwaukee Bible Church were weird. The reason why they were "weird" is because they had been transformed. Those in the church genuinely loved God! When the church gathered for worship, they really wanted to sing! They were very attentive to the word being preached. They had a genuine interest in being with one another. (What took place in Kishwaukee Bible Church is no different than what is taking place at Rock Valley Bible Church today). Being around such an environment had a transforming effect upon her own soul. Soon after attending the church, she too experienced the new birth, believing the gospel of Christ.

This is getting at the heart of what Paul is saying about Onesimus. "He is a changed man. He has been regenerated. He is an alien here upon the earth like the rest of us. Because of that, my affection for him has grown. Paul says, "To remove him is to tear away my inner parts."

My question to you at this point is this: "Are You Loved?" Are you a loved member of the Christian community? Do others love you because of what God has done for your soul?" This is a characteristic of all who have been born from above.

Let's consider my third question this morning:

3. Are You Helpful? (verse 13)

I get this from verse 13, where we read of Paul's perspective of Onesimus, "whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel."

With these words, Paul is explaining how helpful Onesimus could be to him in prison. He says that Onesimus could "minister" to him. This word translated "minister" is the word, diakonew(diakoneo), from which we get the word, "deacon." This is a very common word, used throughout all of the New Testament. The fundamental idea of the word is that it describes the act of service, or, as I have put it here, the act of helping one another. The spectrum of the way in which this word is used is vast. It is used in Acts 6:2 to describe the serving of tables. It is used in Luke 10:40 to describe the serving of guests. It is used in Mark 10:45 to describe the sacrifice of Jesus, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." The basic idea of the word is that it puts you into the service of another. Paul puts forth Onesimus as one who might serve him while he is in prison, "on your behalf, he might serve me in my imprisonment" (verse 13).

The question might easily come, "Well, what sort of ways might Onesimus serve Paul?" Being in prison, Paul's personal needs weren't great. Certainly, he needed to have a regular food supply. From time to time, there would be some supplies that he would need, perhaps some new clothes, perhaps some parchments to use in letter writing, perhaps some study tools, perhaps a cloak for the winter-time. Onesimus may have been able to serve him by helping him supply the needs he had in prison. Onesimus may have worked to keep him well-fed and productive in his work to the church at large during his confinement. It's obvious at this point that Onesimus wasn't a prisoner with Paul, as he was free to travel back to Colossae where Philemon lived. So, he may have obtained some employment in Rome and gave financially to help Paul in his ministry.

Also, being in prison, Paul probably had a need for encouragement as well. He couldn't go anywhere. If he were to see anyone, they were to come to him. If he wanted to see anyone, he would have to send a message by way of courier to invite them to visit him. Onesimus may have been able to serve him in this way. He may have kept him company during the lonely moments. He may have been his messenger to call others to come and see Paul in prison, because he had something to say to them.

Furthermore, Paul's heart for the lost was certainly great. Being confined to a prison didn't much help him get out and talk to people. Perhaps Onesimus may have helped to bring others to visit with Paul and to hear him preach and teach about Christ. Perhaps he would have been able to do some follow up with those who were interested in learning more about the gospel. But, being a new convert himself, it would have been a bit more difficult with any in-depth discipleship work. Perhaps he could have brought the young disciples to visit with and be taught by Paul during the same time that Onesimus was being taught as well.

Other than that, it's a bit difficult to imagine much more that Onesimus could do to serve Paul during his days in prison. But, don't think in your mind for a moment that any of these things are insignificant. Paul didn't think that they were. He didn't want Onesimus to leave! He wanted Onesimus to stay and help him in the ministry in whatever ways he could. He greatly prized the any ministry Onesimus would have done. In fact, he wanted Onesimus to stay and help. Look again at verse 13, "I wished to keep [him] with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel."

This is even more astonishing when you realize the number of other faithful servants who were around Paul. Verses 23 and 24 of this epistle give us a few names of others who were with Paul. Here, we read of five well-trained men laboring alongside of Paul. He labels all of them, "my fellow workers" (verse 24). Paul had a small army of trained men who could help him in the ministry. **Epaphras** was with Paul. He was a church planter, planting the church in Colossae (Col. 1:7-8). His ministry extended to others neighboring cities, like Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13). He was pastoring the church in Colossae for a while. **Mark** was also with Paul. Though he had failed Paul on one occasion, he later came to be useful for Paul (2 Tim. 4:11). Certainly some of his usefulness later came because of the faithfulness that he was demonstrating with Paul in prison as he wrote to Philemon. **Aristarchus** was with Paul in prison. He was one who had been with Paul for several years in his ministry. He was fully capable of preaching and teaching, as he was doing this in Ephesus (according to Acts 19:29). **Demas** was with Paul. Though he later left the faith, at this time, he was laboring alongside of Paul. **Luke** was with Paul as well. When you chase Luke's story through the book of Acts, you discover that he was with Paul during many of his missionary journeys. He probably became Paul's personal physician. He was very bright and certainly capable of many tasks that Paul would have him do. He may have had more. When Paul wrote the book of Colossians during the same time period, he also mentions a man named **Justus**. In Colossians 4:11, he

was identified as a "fellow worker." He was a great "encouragement" to Paul.

So, why was Paul so emphatic about his desire to keep Onesimus with him to minister. I believe it's because Paul valued any service that anyone could give for the cause of Christ.

The lesson comes easily to us. Never minimize the service that you render unto the Lord. Jesus said, "whoever in the name of a disciple give to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Matt. 10:42). The size of the service given doesn't matter. What matters is the fact of service. And for that reason, Paul desired that Onesimus would be able to stay with Paul to minister with him.

In our house, we often call my son, "ice-cream boy." That's because it's generally his job to fetch the ice-cream from the freezer when we have it. We say, "Hey, ice-cream boy, can you do your job for us?" Upon hearing these words, he often turns on his heel and runs to the downstairs freezer to retrieve the ice-cream. Once the ice-cream is served, he dutifully returns the goodies to the freezer. This may have been what Onesimus was like. He was "errand-boy."

Let's get back to our question: "Are You Helpful?" Onesimus shows us that it isn't about having great gifts or abilities or responsibilities that should be important. What's important is that take what God has given to you and use it for His glory. I can say it no better than Peter said it in his first epistle, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." This verse says that we have received something. If God gives you the ability to speak, you are to speak. If God gives you gifts to serve, you are to serve.

Whatever God has given you, you are called to use it. If it means being an "errand-boy" like Onesimus was, then be an errand-boy. If it means being a writer like Luke was, then be a writer. If it means being a teacher of the truth like Aristarchus was, then teach. If it means praying like Epaphras, then pray.

Please realize this: My message this morning isn't a call to serve. My message this morning is a call to evaluate your life. Are you one who serve? Are you helpful? This is the sign of a regenerate life. Those who have been born again by the Spirit of God are characterized by a willingness to serve others, whatever that may mean to you in your particular situation.

As Onesimus was a servant of God, it was simply an indication of his changed heart. And so, the greater question this morning is this: Do you have a changed heart? Are you a new creature? Has God opened your eyes to see His glory and His majesty and His grace and kindness to us in Christ Jesus? If you are a new creature, you will be useful, you will be loved and you will be helpful.

As I close my message this morning, I want to read for you the testimony of Ray Comfort. He is a passionate evangelist from New Zealand. In recent weeks, I have been reading his auto-biography, entitled, "Out of the Comfort Zone," because I want to catch a great heart for evangelism. He writes of the day that he and his friends went surfing on a holiday weekend. Early one night, he was engaged in a conversation with his friend Graham. Ray Comfort writes, ...

Graham and I spoke for six and a half hours that night. During that time I found myself confronted with the fact that I had violated the Ten Commandments. One Scripture sank like a sharp poison arrow into my heart: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27, 28). It was the death of me. If God created my mind, He could see what He had made. He saw my thought-life. I was guilty of the sin of the heart a thousand times over. I know that I would be condemned on Judgment Day and end up in hell.

I was trapped, a guilty criminal in the prison of Divine Justice. Suddenly, the door began to open. Jesus Christ, God in human form, came to this earth and suffered and died in my place. He took the punishment due to me. He paid my fine. He alone had the keys to death and hell. For the first time in my life, the gospel made sense. I learned that the bible says the whole of creation was subjected to futility and death because of sin. When Jesus came to this earth, He took the curse of sin upon Himself. That's why He wore the crown of thorns. That's why He died on the cross. Then He rose from the dead and defeated death. Graham told me that, if I would repent and trust in Jesus Christ, God would forgive my sins and give me the gift of everlasting life. Would I?!

I asked God to forgive me for violating His Commandments. I gladly embraced the Savior as a man dying of thirst grasps a cup of water. It was then that I found the God who gave me life. ...

I went to bed at 3:30 that morning. As I drifted off to sleep, I had a fear that what I had found would be gone when I awoke. It wasn't. In fact, it was so real, for the first time in ten years I didn't want to go surfing! I was quite happy to sit and read the Bible. That was very strange. It was in the Bible that I read about what had happened to me. The incredible peace I felt was what the Bible referred to as "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). I didn't just feel peace, I felt like a new person. My eyes fastened on 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." The Bible seemed to come alive as I read its words" [\[3\]](#)

My simple question to you this morning is this: Have you experienced the new birth? Onesimus had. We read about some of the fruit of that

experience this morning. The new birth made him useful! His relationships were instantly improved. His work ethic increased. The new birth made him to be loved! Those who were Christians around him immediately identified with the life of God in him. It made him helpful! He had a heart to serve in the ministry of the gospel.

Certainly, there are other ways in which the Spirit of God within us manifests Himself. all who are born of God believes that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1). a new creature has a desire for the Word of God (Jer. 31:33). those who are born again have a desire for righteousness (1 John 2:29). Our lives manifest the fruit of the Spirit. We live in love, in joy, in peace, in patience, in kindness, in goodness, in faithfulness, in gentleness, and in self-control. But, our text has compelled us this morning to look at the three characteristics that Paul brings out concerning Onesimus that identify him as a changed man. He is useful. He is loved. He is helpful.

If you are not a new creature, I would call you to repent and cry out to the Lord for His mercy in your life! It's not an easy thing to become a new creature. In fact, it's a mysterious thing. After Wayne Grudem introduces the topic of spiritual regeneration in his Systematic Theology, he then speaks about how mysterious is the act of regeneration. [4] Jesus said that it is much like the wind, "the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). In fact, Ray Comfort continued in his autobiography to explain what took place the day after he was converted.

We told Brian, another surfing buddy who was with us, what had happened during the night. He was raised in a Baptist home, but he had never been born again as I had just been. He said that he desperately wanted whatever had happened to me, so that night we tried to duplicate my experience. We waited until it became dark, went into the same room, turned down the light, and prayed. Nothing seemed to happen. Brian was very disappointed. However, he simply had to have faith that, if his repentance was genuine, then his salvation was real. [5]

You can't manufacture when and where the Holy Spirit will come upon an individual. It's up to God's sovereign design to do so. He needs to regenerate you before your nature is changed and you are able to believe in the truth of the gospel (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4-6).

While disciplining my children, I always pray with them (and for them). One of my constant prayers during this time when I demonstrate my love for them is for God to give them a new heart. There is no other way that our children will ultimately be obedient "from the heart" (Rom. 6:17), than that God would change them. If you are unregenerate this morning and have a desire to be a new creature in Christ, I urge you to cry out to Him to transform your heart. It's your only hope! May the Lord have mercy upon your soul.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 25, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 699.

[2] Louis Berkhoff, Systematic Theology, p. 469.

[3] Ray Comfort, Out of the Comfort Zone, pp. 113-115.

[4] Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, pp. 701-702.

[5] Ray Comfort, Out of the Comfort Zone, p. 115.