## “Having Confidence in Your Obedience”

by Harry Osborne

The book of Philemon in the New Testament is short in length, but teaches us a great lesson about dealing with others. The apostle Paul wrote it as a letter to a fellow Christian, Philemon. The letter was carried by Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus, who had been converted to Christ by Paul. The letter is basically a request by Paul for Philemon to release Onesimus from physical service so that Onesimus might join Paul in the spiritual service of preaching the gospel. Paul does not ***require*** Philemon to do as he wishes, even though Paul had authority to do so. Listen to the way Paul expresses it:

Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ - I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me (Philemon 8-11, NKJV).

Instead of compelling Philemon to release Onesimus, Paul shows the confidence in him to act of his free will and grant the request. Near the end of the letter, Paul affirms that trust in Philemon saying, "Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say" (Philemon 21). The apostle Paul did not use feigned compliments or flattery to trick one into some action (2 Cor. 4:1-2). Evidently, Paul had seen or heard of some goodness in the character of Philemon which was the basis for this confidence.

However, the fact that Paul saw some good in the character of Philemon spurring this trust does not suggest that Philemon was without faults. No doubt, Philemon had the same weaknesses and faults as all of us. If the apostle had wanted to look for deficiencies in Philemon, he could have found them. If Paul had focused on those shortcomings, he could have declared his doubts about Philemon rather than his confidence in him. The result would have been a far different letter than the one we have preserved by God in our Bibles.

Jesus had the same approach as He showed confidence in people of the world to turn from their sin and error unto His truth. The disciples did not understand in John 4 why Jesus was talking with the sinful Samaritan woman. They saw no potential in her for anything good. As Jesus looked out on a field recently planted, He gave a simple illustration of the difference between His view and that of the disciples. "Do you not say, `There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (Jn. 4:35). Simply put, Jesus saw what **could be** based on the Samaritan woman's desire to hear His teaching. The disciples merely saw what was presently so. Jesus looked for the good that was in the woman and where it could lead. The disciples looked at her faults and stopped at that point. Both saw the woman as a sinner, but Jesus' hope for her redemption separated his view of her from that of the disciples.

Which view do we have of others? Do we look for the good in those who are presently engaged in sin and seek to show them the truth of God's word? Jesus saw an adulterous woman and tried to convert her through the truth of God (Jn. 4:16-26). If we came in contact with a woman who had been married and divorced five times, would we see her as a good prospect for the gospel? Surely we should see such a woman as one who needs to be shown the error of her present path, urge her to repent, and show her the truth leaing to salvation. Paul saw a runaway slave and taught him the truth of the gospel instructing him to a new life in obedience to God (1 Pet. 1:22-25). How many sinners of Bible times would we have overlooked as beyond hope?

Too often, we look at those caught in the practice of sin as unreachable and a waste of time to teach. We tend to seek prospects who are morally decent and already interested in religious matters. Clearly, those people need to hear the gospel message. However, the "down-and-out" sinners of the world also need to hear the gospel message. Paul, a former murderer and blasphemer, made the point this way:

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life (1 Tim. 1:15-16).

If Paul could change, we should have confidence that the gospel has the power to change sinners today. Let us never sell short the power of the gospel or the hunger of the lost for salvation.

When we have problems with our mates, do we have the proper confidence in them that we can resolve the trouble? The divorce rate of our society could be reduced drastically if husbands and wives would look for the good in the other and act with that in mind, rather than looking for the bad and seeking revenge. All too often, couples get into the "never-always syndrome" in dealing with the other. The wife says, "He always ...." To which the husband responds, "She never...." As long as each sees the marriage as "always" a problem and "never" a blessing, no solution to the trouble will be reached. Each partner must look for the good in the other as the starting point towards progress. Separation and divorce are not the solution to problems!

The Bible declares a positive basis for marriage on the part of both spouses (Eph. 5:22-33). The husband is to "love" his wife and seek her good above his own. The wife is to respect her husband and submit to his leadership. The things commanded of each partner suggest they must have some confidence in the other. After all, love and respect do not flourish in the midst of suspicion, animosity and resentment.

In dealing with our children, do we see the good in them, letting our actions be tempered by the expectation of better things? Or do we see their faults and constantly rebuke or berate them? The Bible maintains a difference between proper discipline and provoking a child to wrath (Eph. 6:4). Provoking brings the child to be discouraged rather than corrected and benefitted (Col. 3:21). Proper discipline points out the right way and seeks peace, not constant conflict (Heb. 12:9-11).

When a parent constantly dwells on the burden presented by a child, the child hears it. When an exasperated parent expresses a desire to get away from a child, it has an effect upon the child that endures beyond the tension of the moment. Our children need to feel our love for them and our confidence in them even in times of correction. Misbehavior needs to be seen as a departure from the child's norm, not a norm from which the parent would like to escape. There is a big difference between the two!

The same principle should govern other associations. Whether it be the classroom teacher interacting with the students or a boss dealing with the workers, proper confidence in the good qualities of others is more productive than constant fault-finding. In a local church, this quality is absolutely essential if peace and brotherly love are to prevail. Let us have confidence in others and show our expectation of their goodness. It may have a greater impact for good than we think!