

THE EXAMPLE OF ONESIPHORUS

Sermonette by Robert Schmid

December 1991

If I would ask you: Who is your favorite New Testament Bible character? What would be your answer? Would it be Paul or John or perhaps Mary or Elizabeth for you ladies.

Well, let's just answer the question in your mind. Who is your favorite New Testament Bible character. Let's see -- how many of you picked Paul? How about Mary?

How about **Onesiphorus**? Nobody. Who has ever heard of **Onesiphorus**?

Well, some of you have, but it's obviously nobodies favorite character. Well, don't despair, Onesiphorus is after all one of the least known characters in the New Testament. In fact he is mentioned **ONLY** twice. I said **ONLY** because Paul for example is mentioned some 160 times and Mary about 40 times and Onesiphorus **ONLY TWICE**.

ONLY TWO TIMES! You know how often I am mentioned in the Bible? **NONE**. Not at all. Not even once. I searched in vain for a Robert, a Bob or a George - not in there. So, being mentioned twice as is Onesiphorus is beginning to look better all the time. **How would you like to be mentioned twice in the Bible?** And especially in a positive context. Well, Onesiphorus may be only twice in the Bible, but we know that God inspired *all scriptures* for a reason, so let's learn what message God has for us in these two passages.

First, let's consider some historical background to the story. After the New Testament Church was founded on the day of Pentecost, the Church of God began to grow for the next 30 years all throughout Asia Minor and Europe. The true Church of God grew, but so did a lot of false "Christianity."

The term "Christian," then as today, covers both the true and the false. Only God really knows who is the true and who is the false church, who is the true and the false Christian. Nero had become Emperor of the Roman Empire and he began persecuting all those who called themselves "Christians." In 64 AD Nero burned down Rome, but blamed it on the Christians. And so everyone who was even suspected of being a Christian was arrested and many became martyrs for their believes.

It was about that time that Paul, who went about the country side preaching the Gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, was arrested and thrown into prison. Paul was no ordinary prisoner. He was one of the leaders of this Christian movement and so, even visiting Paul in jail, was dangerous and not the smartest thing to do. And so, against this backdrop, let's look at the two scripture that mention Onesiphorus which are in II Timothy.

II Timothy 1:16-18 and II Timothy 4:19.

Now, as I mentioned before, it was dangerous to visit Paul in prison. But Onesiphorus, Paul says "*was not ashamed of my chain, but when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me*". That took a lot of courage. There were obviously others that Paul counted on to visit him, but they didn't. They didn't want to take the risk associating with a known *Christian* and so

we can begin to see some of the character and faith that Onesiphorus had. He obviously went over and beyond the call of duty to find and visit Paul and thus he became a *profitable servant*.

In contrast let's take a quick look at verse 15, that's II Tim. 1:15. Paul writes to Timothy saying: "You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, and among them Phygelus and Hermogenes." Paul was deserted by all of his friends and fellow Christians. And especially hurtful was the fact that two that he counted on, Phygelus and Hermogenes, turned away from him, did not come to visit him.

Now, these two fellows are mentioned only ONCE, but their reputation is forever established in the biblical record for having defected Paul when he needed them the most. They remind me of some of the people leaving the Church of God today, when their brethren really need them!

But, back to Onesiphorus. Frankly, I have problems with his name. I didn't know how to pronounce it. But, as is true with everything God does, his name is important for it means "**Profit-bearer.**"

So let's see if Onesiphorus lived up to his name. Paul gives us only a very brief description, but it tells us that Onesiphorus was very profitable to Paul who said:

- 1) *"he often refreshed me"*
- 2) *"he was not ashamed of my chains"*
- 3) *"he sought me out very diligently and found me"*
- 4) *"in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus"*

Looking at those 4 points, we can see and understand more clearly why Paul asked God to grant mercy unto the whole household of Onesiphorus: It was because of his service. He was a *profitable servant*.

And so, even though little is mentioned in the Bible about Onesiphorus, God inspired Paul to write about him so that we today could learn from his example.

All of us need to be more like Onesiphorus. Look at his qualities:

Dedicated, Persevering, Faithful, An over-comer
A person who sets and reaches goals
One who goes above that which is required
One who gave of his life and time sharing himself with others
One who visits those in prison or in bonds of whatever kind
One who ministers
One who humbles himself
One who is not afraid to do menial work
One who is willing to take a risk for his beliefs.

Onesiphorus was profitable, a profit-bearer, a good example for all of us.

Jesus said in Matt. 20:26-28: *"Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister (servant) and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant (slave). Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Certainly, Onesiphorus was an outstanding example; but, Christ was the **supreme example**, having suffered the cross and having died for our sins.

Let's ALL strive to be, at least, an Onesiphorus, and be a *"profit bearer."* Let's ALL be profitable servants and have OUR name written in the book of life.

I like to conclude with a poem. I do not know it's author, but I am sure that he or she would want it to be shared with others.

The poem is entitled: LOVE - SERVE - TELL

Three people met to do God's will,
They sought to do it well.
They planned that each should do one thing
One, love; one, serve; one tell.

They all went forth and with great zeal
One loved, one served, one told.
They met again to check results,
And see God's plan unfold.

The one who loved, reported first,
And found with great dismay:
"I could not love until I served,
God has no other way."

The one who served, then bared his heart-
"I must confess 'tiss true.
I could not serve until I loved,
So I did both things too."

The one whose aim was to proclaim,
With wisdom did agree-
"You cannot separate each one,
For God combines all three."

"I tried to tell, but no one heard
Until God's love shown through.
And both of you proclaim with deeds-
All three we each must do."