

## 2 TIMOTHY 1:16-18

### FINDING LOST PREACHERS

“May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.”<sup>1</sup>

**O**ne courageous act can ensure that the name of an individual will live on in honour. David became great, building his kingdom on the exploits of courageous individuals. The names of these bold men live on in honour. Among these bold men are some marked for honour by one courageous act. Shammah, for instance, was recognised for taking a stand in a field of lentils in battle against the Philistines [see 2 SAMUEL 23:11, 12]. Another of David’s mighty men appears to have distinguished himself repeatedly by bold, courageous acts. Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was recognised for vanquishing two ariels of Moab, for going into a pit with a lion on a snowy day and killing the beast, and for killing an Egyptian with the man’s own spear. Small wonder that David set this man over his bodyguard [see 2 SAMUEL 23:20-23]! Our text honours another man who is unknown to us other than for one courageous act.

Onesiphorus is mentioned only twice in the Bible. In our text, he is commended for his search for Paul despite the Apostle’s imprisonment. This was undoubtedly a courageous act. Paul will mention his family again in 2 TIMOTHY 4:19. Some scholars have concluded that Onesiphorus was dead, which would account for why Paul urges Timothy to greet his family though he fails to mention greeting Onesiphorus. Similarly, when the Apostle speaks of this good man in 2 TIMOTHY 1:16, he voices his prayer for mercy for Onesiphorus’ family without mentioning Onesiphorus. What is evident is that Onesiphorus was not with his family at the time Paul wrote. Onesiphorus was likely from Ephesus. We can infer that he and Paul became friends during the Apostle’s ministry there. In fact, whatever we may say concerning Onesiphorus is conjecture. His courage, however, is not a matter of conjecture.

**A MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN COURAGE** — “Onesiphorus ... often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me” [2 TIMOTHY 1:16, 17]. Onesiphorus is not addressed directly in this missive to Timothy. His family receives attention from the Apostle twice, however. In the text, the Apostle writes, “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus” [2 TIMOTHY 1:16]. Then, Paul writes, “Greet ... the household of Onesiphorus” [2 TIMOTHY 4:19]. It is strange that the Apostle greets “the household of Onesiphorus” and not Onesiphorus.

Several explanations can account for this apparent anomaly. Onesiphorus might have still been in Rome, ministering to the Apostle in prison. However, that possibility appears to be precluded by the fact that in our text, Paul uses the aorist tense when speaking of the ministry he had received from Onesiphorus. While the aorist tense is not strictly identical to our past tense in the English tongue, it does speak of an event without regard to how long the action was occurring or how long ago that action ceased. What is important is that the action is completed. Thus, we would surmise that Onesiphorus is no longer refreshing the Apostle.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

I cannot exclude the possibility that Onesiphorus was travelling and in transit from Rome to Ephesus when Paul wrote. However, if the possibility was that he would be home shortly, then why didn't Paul anticipate this and include him in the greetings? How could the letter from Paul to Timothy arrive before Onesiphorus arrived?

Perhaps Onesiphorus was in some way now proscribed from visiting with the Apostle. Perhaps officials interdicted him in this mission of mercy. Since Paul was under sentence of death, it would not be unrealistic to think that judicial officials kept Onesiphorus from visiting Paul as he awaited execution. However, it is puzzling if this prospect is allowed to account for the reason Paul was permitted to correspond freely with Timothy and not with Onesiphorus.

Considering all the evidence, it seems to me that it is most accurate to suggest that Onesiphorus had died, perhaps even suffering death because of his faith demonstrated through ministry to the Apostle. That this is a realistic possibility appears to be supported by the prayer that "the Lord grant him to find mercy ... on that day" [2 TIMOTHY 1:18]. If Onesiphorus was still alive, then Paul would pray for him to be blessed now.

Whether Onesiphorus was alive or dead, the focus of the message is his courage displayed in seeking out the Apostle. Though otherwise unknown to history, this man's singular act stands as a model of Christian courage. At a time when Paul was shunned by most believers, Onesiphorus not only identified as a Christian, but as a supporter of a man condemned to death because of his faith. Onesiphorus did not consider his own life when he acted to honour God and to support the servant of God. His action provides a model for each of us to emulate in life.

I do not need to agree with every jot and tittle of an individual's theology in order to recognise courage displayed in the cause of Christ. Though I may find many points of disagreement with an individual's doctrinal views, if that one loves the Master and stands courageously for truth, honesty compels me to admire that individual and to urge believers to emulate the boldness and courage displayed. Throughout history are found many individual Christians who stood boldly for truth. Let's take a moment to remember some of these choice saints and look at courage among those with whom we may more readily identify.

Let's begin our stroll down the halls of the halls of Christian courage by remembering Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who chose to stand for his faith rather than embrace governmental promotion. When many professed Christians chose silence in the face of Nazi genocide, Bonhoeffer distinguished between the Confessing Church and a new form of religion that united church and state. Bonhoeffer's determination to stand with Christ and his insistence on freedom for the churches cost him his life. He was executed by hanging only three weeks before Hitler committed suicide. He had multiple opportunities to leave Nazi Germany for the safety of Britain or the United States; and he did go to Union Theological Seminary in New York in June 1939 at the invitation of. Amid much inner turmoil, he soon regretted his decision despite strong pressures from his friends to stay in the United States. He wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr, "I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people... Christians in Germany will have to face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilisation may survive or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose but I cannot make that choice from security."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C. Marvin Pate, **Romans**, Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, (eds.), **Teach the Text Commentary Series** (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 2013), 188

Maximilian Kolbe was another martyr to Nazi evil. Kolbe was a Franciscan priest serving in Poland. When the Nazi's overran the nation, Kolbe refused to accept the rights of a German citizen due because of his parentage; rather, he chose to continue his monastic work when he and other monks provided shelter to refugees, including between one thousand and two thousand Jews who hid in their friary in Niepokalanów. Eventually, Kolbe was arrested and imprisoned in Pawiak prison before being transferred to Auschwitz as prisoner 16670.

There, he was subjected to violent harassment, including beatings and lashings. When three men escaped from the camp, the deputy camp commander picked ten men to be starved until dead to deter further escape attempts. One of the selected men, Franciszek Gajowniczek, cried out, "My wife! My children!" Kolbe volunteered to take that man's place. After two weeks of dehydration and starvation, only Kolbe remained alive. Because the guards were in a hurry to clear the bunker, they gave Kolbe a lethal injection of carbolic acid. Kolbe had chosen to identify with his faith rather than accept release by submitting to the Nazi masters.<sup>3</sup>

Among the English reformers, Thomas Cranmer, Nicolas Ridley and Hugh Latimer were each burned at the stake for holding to the authority of the Word of God and denying papal authority. Cranmer, weakened through being held in isolation in prison for over seventeen months, recanted his faith, avoiding execution for a brief while. Regaining strength, he was offered opportunity to confess publicly his "error" before the papal legates. His sermon was written out and he was allowed to enter the pulpit to read what he had written. However, he astonished those present when he deviated from what he had written to confess that because his hand had betrayed him, it should be punished by being burnt first. He then boldly stated, "As for the pope, I refuse him, as Christ's enemy, and Antichrist with all his false doctrine." Dragged from the pulpit and hastened to where Latimer and Ridley had been burnt six months earlier, the faggots were piled around him. As the flames grew around him, Cranmer held his right hand in the fire, calling it "that unworthy hand." His dying words were, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit... I see the heavens open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."<sup>4</sup>

I've spoken of people whom some are uncomfortable accepting as martyrs of the Faith. A German Lutheran of who revealed himself to be of a decidedly modernist persuasion, a Franciscan monk noted for his devotion to Mary and an Anglican noted for his contributions to the Book of Common Prayer are not normally recognised as evangelicals. Perhaps we make too much of profession and too little of possession. Those who resist the spirit of the age to identify fully with the Master are to be honoured when their devotion leads them to stand courageously. This is not to say that evangelicals do not have heroes—we do.

John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes and John Crandall were three Baptists who stood for liberty in worship. Their insistence on freedom of conscience was met by brutal attempts at suppression by religious authorities in New England in 1651. Obadiah Holmes was whipped with thirty-nine lashes for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Clarke and Crandall were fined an exorbitant amount for accompanying Holmes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pate, op. cit., 189; see also Charles Colson with Ellen Santini Vaughn, **The Body** (Word, Dallas, TX 1992), 318–27

<sup>4</sup> H. P. C-Lim, "Cranmer, Thomas," Timothy Larsen et al. (eds.), **Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals** (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2003), 164–166; **Christian History Magazine**, Issue 48, Thomas Cranmer & the English Reformation (1995)

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Armitage, **A History of the Baptists** (Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1886), 686–704; <sup>5</sup> Isaac Backus, **A History of New-England, with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists**, Early American Imprints, 1639-1800; No. 15240 (Edward Draper, at his printing-office in Newbury-Street, and sold by Phillip Freeman, Boston, in Union-Street, 1777), 215–252; Joseph Bolles, John Bolles and Ellis Hookes, **An Addition to the**

Let me speak of another evangelical from more recent days. After her husband, together with four other missionaries, was martyred by Auca Indians in Ecuador, Elisabeth Elliot and Rachel Saint, whose brother Nate was among the missionaries slain, lived among the very tribe that had murdered the five missionaries. They carried the message of life to a savage peoples, becoming God's instruments of grace to turn the darken tribe to faith in the Son of God. Tragically, these gracious women were castigated for not leaving the Auca in their pagan darkness. Modern concepts of the noble savage continually assailed these women for daring to declare life in the Son of God. Elisabeth Elliot (though married twice more after Jim's death, she continued to be known by this name) passed into the presence of the Saviour on June 15, 2015.<sup>6</sup>

As I prepared the message this week, I came upon the account of a missionary who, though less well-known than other martyrs, demonstrated extreme courage to the point of death. In 1931 a missionary named John Vinson was working in North China. An army of bandits swooped down on his village looting, burning and killing. They seized 150 Chinese together with Vinson as captives. When the government troops pursued, the bandits offered Vinson his freedom if he would write a letter to the commanding officer of the government troops asking him to withdraw.

Vinson said, "Will you let the Chinese prisoners go free?" "Certainly not" was the reply. "Then I refuse to go free," he said. That night the bandits tried to flee, taking Vinson with them. Many bandits were killed, and many of the captives escaped. Vinson could not run because of a recent surgery. A little Chinese girl later reported that a bandit pointed a gun at Vinson's head and said, "I'm going to kill you. Aren't you afraid?"

Now at this point how do you feel? Are you projecting yourself into Vinson's place? If so, do you feel rising within you the power to respond with great serenity and to die with peace? The point of what I have been saying is this: you don't have to feel that right now. What God wants from you now as you sit there is not the strength to die Vinson's death. That is not today's trouble for you; it may be tomorrow's trouble. What God calls you to now is not to have the power to do what Vinson did, but to have the trust in God that when your time comes He will supply what you need.

It was at this point that Vinson looked up and said to his captor, "No, I am not afraid. If you kill me, I will go straight to God." Which he did.<sup>7</sup>

Each of the accounts I have cited no doubt generates admiration of those saints who demonstrated such courage. We are humbled at the thought of such courage demonstrated in fellow believers who sealed their testimony with their lives. What great men and women are found in the spiritual genealogy of believers! But what about the quiet courage demonstrated in more mundane settings of daily life? I'm not speaking now of Christians holding to the Faith in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Syria, in Saudi Arabia or even in Laos, Cambodia or Viet Nam.<sup>8</sup> Undoubtedly the cost of holding to faith in the Son of God is extremely high in many nations. However, there are courageous saints among us who lead quiet lives, never turning from pursuing the Lord despite growing hostility toward the saints in our own nation.

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**Book, Entitled, *The Spirit of the Martyrs Revived. It Being a Short Account of Some Remarkable Persecutions in New-England; Especially of Four Faithful Martyrs of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who Suffered Death at Boston*,**" Early American Imprints, 1639-1800; No. 8085 (Timothy Green, New London, Conn. 1758)

<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Elliot, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisabeth\\_Elliot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisabeth_Elliot), accessed 10 September 2015

<sup>7</sup> This story is taken from "The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter," March/April 1994

<sup>8</sup> E.g., see Matt Sanchez, "The Most Courageous Christians," World Net Daily, 10/03/2007, <http://www.wnd.com/2007/10/43822/>, accessed 7 September 2015

I suggest that courage is displayed by the Christian who quietly holds to biblical principles despite overt pressure to conform to the prevailing views held by those of this dying world. The believer displays courage when she refuses to agree that the unborn child is a mere “piece of tissue” that can be trashed on a whim. When the Christian refuses to laugh at salacious and lascivious jokes or refuses to agree with ribald suggestions about other people, he is exhibiting courage. Simple acts such as giving thanks before a meal can mark the Christian for exclusion from the raucous crowds. Refusing to degrade another person through scathing mockery despite the encouragement and approval of the inhabitants of this darkened world can be courageous. While conformity to the standards (or lack thereof) of the crowd is valued in this modern world, the follower of the Saviour will do well to remember the words of God spoken through Moses, “You must not do wrong just because everyone else is doing it”<sup>9</sup> [EXODUS 23:2A].

Christian courage is demonstrated not only in refusing to go along with what is wicked; courage is demonstrated in doing what is right. When all around seemingly rush to embrace evil, it is courageous to continue to walk quietly in holiness. Daniel stood firm in his resolve to honour God. Despite being a captive in a pagan court, the young man was still a Jew. Therefore, though presented with food that was not koshered, “Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank” [DANIEL 1:8].

I am not recommending that we adopt Jewish dietary laws; we know that “Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the Word of God and prayer” [1 TIMOTHY 4:4, 5]. God created all foods “to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” [1 TIMOTHY 4:3B]. I am, however, recommending that followers of the Christ are well-advised to know what pleases God and boldly do those things. Is this not the import of the Apostle’s words? “Be very careful how you live—not as unwise but as wise, taking advantage of every opportunity, because the days are evil. For this reason do not be foolish, but be wise by understanding what the Lord’s will is”<sup>10</sup> [EPHESIANS 5:15-17].

When we begin to see with the eyes of Christ, recognising the hurt and injury to women that is perpetuated by degradation from movies and television and in music, we will find that we are required to be courageous. When we can no longer watch suggestive scenes presented as entertainment, choosing instead to stand and leave the room without excoriating others who are undisturbed, we are quietly revealing the courage of our convictions. We will be identified as “nut cases,” “wing nuts” and part of a fringe movement. However, standing firm in righteousness reveals the presence of Christ.

I have watched with deep disappointment the degradation of language in this day. To refuse to speak in a coarse or crude fashion may be courageous. Just because others are doing so exerts pressure to conform or at least approve of the evil. After presenting a long, depressing catalogue of sinful behaviour, the Apostle adds to the condemnation of mankind by noting, “[Sinners] know well enough the just decree of God, that those who behave like this deserve to die, and yet they do it; not only so, they actually applaud such practices”<sup>11</sup> [ROMANS 1:32]. One modern translation captures the raw force of his language in this way: “It’s not as if they don’t know better. They know perfectly well they’re spitting in God’s face. And they don’t care—worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best”<sup>12</sup> [ROMANS 1:32]!

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<sup>9</sup> **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005)

<sup>10</sup> **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

<sup>11</sup> The New English Bible (Cambridge University Press; Oxford University Press, New York 1970)

<sup>12</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

**THE COST OF COURAGE** — “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus” [2 TIMOTHY 1:16-18].

When at last the saints of God see Satan thrown down, deposed so that he is no longer “the prince of the power of the air” [see **EPHESIANS 2:2**], and when his angels are likewise thrown down with him—those malevolent beings identified as “the cosmic powers over this present darkness” and as “the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places” [see **EPHESIANS 6:12**], then shall be heard a triumphant shout of victory. “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short” [**REVELATION 12:10-12**]! However, until that day, the evil one shall continue to assail the saints of the Most High and to afflict the righteous. Evil will continue to appear to be in ascendancy for the moment; and courage will be required for God’s people to stand in the Faith.

Thus, though I cannot speak with certainty about why Onesiphorus is not addressed directly, it is evident that he is not available to be addressed. The name “Onesiphorus” can be roughly translated, “Useful One,” or perhaps “Profitable One.” And how he lived up to that name in his service to the Apostle! In a few short verses Paul contrasts the service received from Onesiphorus with the perfidy of Phygelus and Hermogenes [cf. **2 TIMOTHY 1:15**] and others who were apparently known to Timothy, and therefore probably known to the Church in Ephesus. Some have suggested that Onesiphorus was a deacon in the Church in Ephesus.<sup>13</sup> This is certainly possible, and if accurate, it is possible that Phygelus and Hermogenes were likewise deacons chosen by the church. The one displayed godly courage; the others proven craven.

Onesiphorus was commended for two consistent actions—he often refreshed the Apostle and he was undeterred by Paul’s situation. The verb used speaks of being revived or refreshed by cool breezes.<sup>14</sup> The word picture is dramatic. Deserted by those whom he anticipated would stand by him, Paul was suddenly and unexpectedly revived by the appearance of Onesiphorus. The picture conjured up in my mind is the Apostle, perhaps somewhat dejected at the incarceration, restricted in movement by a chain attached to a Roman Legionnaire. Suddenly, he hears his name called and another rough guard announces, “Prisoner, you have a visitor!” Who could it be? Everyone had deserted. He had stood alone before the Caesar, hearing the chilling pronouncement that he was to be executed. Now, someone had come to see him! Who could it be? Suddenly, there was Onesiphorus. How that must have encouraged the Apostle!

Not only did Onesiphorus refresh the Apostle on multiple occasions, but Paul is compelled to note that Onesiphorus “was not ashamed of my chain.” Yes, the word is singular—chain! It speaks of the restriction imposed because Paul was chained to a Roman soldier. The chain was emblematic of Paul’s situation as a prisoner. Thus, it is fair to infer that Onesiphorus was neither ashamed of Paul nor of the Christ whom Paul served.

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<sup>13</sup> See W. F. Boyd, “Onesiphorus,” in James Hastings, (ed.) **Dictionary of the Apostolic Church (2 Vols.)** (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, NY 1916–1918), 112

<sup>14</sup> See John A. Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (Kress Christian Publications, The Woodlands, TX 2009) 334

I have noted that people are often uncomfortable with open demonstrations which reveal faith in the Son of God. To go to church is one thing; to be godly in daily life is quite another. To openly practise your Faith when not in a service of worship is exceptional in this day. To take the Faith so seriously that you allow it to dictate your choices and how you will respond in a given situation is astonishing to many people.

Long years ago, the godly Puritan, William Gurnall, challenged God's professed people, "Say not that thou hast royal blood in thy veins and art born of God, unless thou canst prove thy pedigree by daring to be holy."<sup>15</sup> Akin to this quote and germane to the message presented this day is another from the pen of this same godly man. Gurnall cautioned God's professed people, "We fear men so much, because we fear God so little."<sup>16</sup>

Richard Wurmbrand tells how his imprisonment because of his faith in Christ the Lord cost his family. His wife was deprived of food and of necessities because she would not denounce her husband. He told of his son, Michael, walking past the prison where he was held, and how he wept because he saw that his child did not have a warm coat though it was mid-winter and snow blanketed the ground. Wurmbrand knew there was a cost to holding to Christ.

Allow me to become somewhat personal at this point. When you return thanks for your meal, do you ever note the discomfort of some? Friends know that I will ask God's blessing on our meal whenever we eat. Those who have been friends for some years, though they don't necessarily share the Faith, will wait when the food is served, knowing that when all are served I will offer up thanksgiving to God for His grace and for His mercy and seeking His blessing on the meal. And why should I not express my gratitude to Him?

Some years ago I was invited to speak to a congregation on a Sunday morning in the town of McKenzie. I had spoken at a Christmas banquet on Saturday evening and then addressed the congregation on Sunday morning. In those days I did not preach as I do now. I spoke extemporaneously. I was fiery in those days, not at all reserved and muted as I am today. When the morning message was completed, the pastor and his family made a mad dash to get out of the building. Not a word was spoken to me, which was surprising, since they had asked that I join them for lunch. Nevertheless, I lingered, speaking with congregants and answering questions that some wished to ask. Finally, I did ask how I would find the pastor's house. A kind soul directed me to the appropriate address and I made my way there. When I arrived, his wife was just placing the meal on the table. It would be a favourite meal for me—sandwiches. Imagine my surprise when everyone suddenly rushed to the chairs, sat down and began to grab for bread and meat, all rushing to eat as though there would soon be nothing left.

I cleared my throat and asked, "Pastor, perhaps we could return grace?" He was somewhat taken aback, but allowed that such would be fine. Admonishing the children to stop eating for a moment, he indicated that I might offer thanks for the meal. I did so and then attempted to make polite conversation since there was an awkward silence around the table. Finally, the pastor said that it was not their custom to return thanks. God knew they were grateful and there was no need to seek His blessing. The demeanour of the family was that they were embarrassed at the open expression of Christian gratitude. I trust that will never be said of any of us. I trust that we are a thankful people, and that we are not ashamed of our Saviour or of those godly men and women who seek to live boldly in the presence of the Son of God.

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<sup>15</sup> William Gurnall, "William Gurnall Quotes," <http://christian-quotes.ochristian.com/William-Gurnall-Quotes/page-4.shtml>, accessed 12 September 2015

<sup>16</sup> William Gurnall, [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/205830.William\\_Gurnall](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/205830.William_Gurnall), accessed 12 September 2015

Phygelus and Hermogenes deserted Paul, perhaps out of fear that they would share his fate or perhaps because they were ashamed that he was imprisoned. The language employed in **VERSE FIFTEEN** indicates that the desertion was not doctrinal, but that it was rather a personal defection from the Apostle. Some have suggested that they had refused to testify in his behalf during this second imprisonment.<sup>17</sup> However, such was not the case with Onesiphorus.

In our text, Paul voices a prayer for the family of Onesiphorus to be granted mercy. What I would have you see is that whether dead or alive, Paul thinks of the family of this brave man. The family shared in whatever risks Onesiphorus had taken. It is impossible to shield my family completely from either the difficulties or rewards of my service to the Lord. Just so, whether you live boldly for Christ, or whether you seek to live in the shadows, your family will be affected by your choice. The children of a godly man will have a rich heritage upon which they can build their lives. Likewise, the children of a man who has attempted to draw back from valiantly following the Master will be hindered at the failure of the parents to instruct them in righteousness. For our children learn more from our actions than they ever learn from our words.

I used to quote from the Psalms to my children. One of the citations I made on numerous occasions was **PSALM 37:25, 26**.

“I have been young, and now am old,  
yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken  
or his children begging for bread.  
He is ever lending generously,  
and his children become a blessing.”

One of the sayings of the wise man is found in **PROVERBS 14:26**.

“In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence,  
and his children will have a refuge.”

Yet another of these wise sayings is found in **PROVERBS 20:7**.

“The righteous who walks in his integrity—  
blessed are his children after him!”

Paul’s language in **VERSE SEVENTEEN** is pointed, vivid. He pictures a search driven by expectation and passion. Of Onesiphorus, Paul testifies, “Being in Rome, he eagerly sought me” (literal translation). Onesiphorus didn’t content himself with a cursory effort—he exerted himself to find where Paul was incarcerated. The fact that he had to search so diligently gives evidence that Paul’s situation was now far different from his last imprisonment. Apparently, the location where Paul was kept was not well known and the condition of his imprisonment, when Onesiphorus at last found him, must have been rather dire. The words are aorist, indicating that both the search for and discovery of the Apostle are pictured as one event. In other words, when Onesiphorus began his search, he refused to quit until he had found the Apostle. His devotion to the cause brought a blessing from the pen of the Apostle. Likewise, the cowardice of Phygelus and Hermogenes can only have brought shame to their families.

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<sup>17</sup> Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney, **The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, H-L** (The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, MI 2009), 130–131



**PRAYER FOR RECOMPENSE** — “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus... [M]ay the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day” [2 TIMOTHY 1:18]!

Onesiphorus’ family were the focus of a prayer for blessing penned by God’s Apostle. Now, Paul turns his attention directly to Onesiphorus. Wordplay here may not be apparent in our English version. In verse seventeen, Onesiphorus had laboured to find Paul; now, Paul prays that Onesiphorus himself will find mercy from the Lord. Sacrifices made to further the cause of Christ will never buy acceptance at the Judgement Seat of Christ. Only His mercy can provide me acceptance. And that is Paul’s prayer for Onesiphorus.

When we receive ministry in the time of our greatest need, there is no way we can repay those who have refreshed us. Perhaps your heart was broken by some disappointment. God sent a godly man or godly woman into your life. They didn’t say much, perhaps just weeping with you. However, they lifted your eyes from the momentary trouble to look again at the eternal glory of Christ our Lord. How can you repay such a person? You cannot! What you can do is to ask God to show mercy to them and to bless their family for sharing them with you in your time of greatest need.

Nearing the finish line of a life well-lived, Onesiphorus refocused Paul’s vision on what was to come. It was the courage of Onesiphorus that permitted the Apostle to look ahead, as he does near the conclusion of this letter. “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” [2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8].

When the dark days come and my body betrays me through weakness, remind me that I shall shortly receive a new body made in the likeness of the Risen Christ; admonish me to remember that I shall shortly be translated into the presence of Christ who conquered death. When deep sorrow clouds my vision so that I despair, lift my eyes from this momentary darkness that I might see again the glories of His coming kingdom. When hope has fled and friends have deserted me, may God send one friend who will courageously stand with me, encouraging me to continue living boldly for the Master.

And so it is that I have often prayed for many of you, asking God’s rich mercy on you and on your family for the service you have rendered in His Name. I trust that you recognise and are grateful for the quiet courage demonstrated by fellow saints who now live holy, godly lives day-by-day. I do not ask you to look forward to some great event that will demand courage; I ask that you determine to stand firm in the grace of God in the daily challenge of living holy and righteous lives in the midst of a fallen world. Our battles are not fought tomorrow; our battles are fought each day. We seldom stand in a great conflict in which we unite with many others; we are assailed in surprise ambushes when we are alone and often unprepared. Nevertheless, when the great assault is launched against us and we are reeling from the attack, may God send into our life an Onesiphorus to refresh us and to stand boldly that together we may face what is coming.

I have spoken to believers today. For those outside the Faith, even for those who are merely church members though not having life in the Beloved Son, know that the world cannot hate you, as the Master has stated to his own brothers [see JOHN 7:7]. However, for those who know the Master, we are taught that “Because you are not of the world, but [He] chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” [JOHN 15:19b].

But what of those in the world? How shall we speak to them? Jude teaches us, “Have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh” [JUDE 22, 23]. To any such who hear the message today, it is not a trite thing to say that we hate the sin and love the sinner. I understand that you are so identified with your sin that you believe that if we condemn your sin we are condemning you. We cannot condemn anyone; our own sinful condition condemns us.

However, we bring Good News to any who will receive it. God has sent His Son to bring us freedom. We were dead in trespasses and sins. Though alive in the flesh, we were dead to God. We neither knew Him nor were able to know Him, though we may have heard a rumour of God. Jesus, the Son of God, lived a sinless life that we cannot live. Then, He presented His life as a sacrifice because of our broken and lost condition. The Good News is that He didn’t stay dead. He conquered death, rising from the dead and ascending into the Glory where He is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Now, God calls all who will receive the offer to come to life. The Word of God urges us, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Master,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with God and with the mouth that you openly agree with God and are set at liberty.”<sup>18</sup> The promise of God is iterated from words written by the Prophet Joel long years before. “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:13]. Certainly, that is our prayer for all who will receive the offer of life, all who are appointed to life. We pray that includes you. Amen.

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<sup>18</sup> Author’s translation of **ROMANS 10:9, 10**