

ONESIPHORUS ... who loved to visit a prison
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(2 Timothy 1: 16-18)

Some of the lesser known New Testament characters were among the best of God's servants. Their greatness was revealed not in eloquent preaching, but in courageous loyalty to Christ in the hour of peril. It is easier to be a faithful Christian when one is surrounded by friends and not by strangers. The very fact that one is being watched gives strength in the time of temptation. Yet, when one is true to Christ in a strange city, where it would be easy to compromise, that is the test of loyalty. Onesiphorus was a man of this caliber. We are not told the nature of the business which took him to Rome, but it is to his eternal credit that during his stay there he determined to visit the imprisoned Paul.

How Great His Courage

The apostle wrote to Timothy, "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus ; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me." The Romans did not consider Paul to be a glamorous hero. He was a preacher of an alien faith, an enemy of the empire, and a danger to the community. Ultimately he would be executed. Even his associates were suspect, and perhaps it was for this reason that Paul admitted, " Only Luke is with me." Yet this visitor to the imperial city persistently made his enquiries until he was able to locate his friend. He overcame every difficulty, and at the risk of his own liberty succeeded in reaching and ministering to Paul. Was he a convert of the great apostle? Did he owe his spiritual experiences to the inspired ministry of the fearless leader? We are not told. Yet it is clear that resolute courage was an outstanding characteristic of this obscure saint, who but for this visit to Rome might never have been mentioned in the sacred record.

How Great His Constancy

Paul continued, " The Lord grant unto him that he may obtain mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well." This was not the first time Paul had been indebted to this gracious believer. At some time during the apostle's ministry in Asia, Onesiphorus had been invaluable to the pioneer missionary. We cannot be sure what length of time had elapsed between the two occasions, but it is most refreshing to remember that the passing of time had not changed this Christian. Unlike many of the Galatians, whose early successes were offset by later indifference, this man had apparently mastered the secret of " running with patience the race that was set before him." At home in Ephesus, and away in Rome, in fair weather and in foul, Onesiphorus demonstrated the reality of his faith in Christ. Paul was certainly cheered to see the familiar face, and his words, " he of,, refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain," seem to suggest that the prisoner had many visits from the man of Ephesus.

How Great His Confession

It is said that "actions speak louder than words," and this is very evident in the story of Onesiphorus. We are not told that he ever preached to crowds of people. Probably he was not a great orator. Yet the magnificent influence of his confession may be judged by the fact that Paul could speak of

ONESIPHORUS ... who loved to visit a prison "the household of Onesiphorus" (2 Tim. 4:19). The continued consecration of this man had influenced his family in favor of Christ. One of the enigmas of life is that oftentimes Christian parents have unbelieving children. Happy indeed is the father whose influence for Christ completely charms and attracts his family into the kingdom of God. It would appear that the family of Onesiphorus had watched and listened as he practised the faith he believed, and the reality of his unending consecration made it easy for them to follow his glorious example. They were known to Paul, and it was with great sincerity that the imprisoned apostle prayed, " The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus." And as suddenly as he appeared on the pages of the New Testament, so this gracious character disappeared again. Perhaps he was not a great leader of a Church ; maybe he never attained to the office of a deacon ; yet his courageous, dependable devotion won for him a place among the immortals.

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