

Philemon 1:8-18 | David Baumgartner

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 July 2018

Preacher: David Baumgartner

[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Alright.

Anybody here holding a grudge? Maybe you know that God wants you to do something, like forgive somebody or seek reconciliation.

And you know it's the right thing to do, but it's just really hard to do. You know what I'm talking about? Yeah. You are in the right place.

You are. Last week we began the study of Paul's letter to Philemon. If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Philemon. It's got just one chapter, but we're going to be looking at verses 8 to 16 this morning.

It's generally believed that Paul's first imprisonment, that is in Rome, is described in Acts chapter 28.

[1 : 06] Some have considered it to be more or less a house arrest. I don't know what that means. Maybe if today he would wear an ankle bracelet or something like that. I really don't know.

But it's very interesting. If you look on your handout, here's the very last two verses of Acts. Chapter 8, it says this, speaking of Paul.

He stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness unhindered.

So we see a lot of things in this verse. One of the main things I wanted to point out is that Paul had this steady stream of visitors during this time.

Now, many of these visitors would have been his ministry partners. You know, we read about them. Epaphras, Luke, Timothy. And these ministry partners would keep him informed about what's going on in the various churches.

[2 : 11] And they also delivered letters that he wrote. And of course, at this time, among them would have been this collection of what's called the prison epistles.

And that would include Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians. Well, as we saw last week, there's this man with Paul who needed special consideration.

And his name is Onesimus. And he's from the town of Colossae. Just a little bit of background. We covered this last week. But he ran away from his master, Philemon.

And he made his way to Rome. And somehow, we're not told, but he met up with the Apostle Paul while he's in prison. And Onesimus becomes a Christian.

That's amazing. And not only that, he begins helping Paul while he's in prison. That's really great, right? Wouldn't you love to hear something like that? Well, it is great.

[3 : 11] But here's the thing. Onesimus has some unfinished business. You see, technically, he's still a slave. And he needs to return to his master and make things right.

Well, just as my mom would say frequently, easier said than done. You ever heard that? Yeah, it's true. So, it is.

Easier said than done. It's a difficult thing. And so, Paul writes this letter on Onesimus' behalf to Philemon. It's called Philemon.

That's what this letter is. And it's the shortest of Paul's epistles. Only 25 verses. Now, this man named Tychicus, he's getting ready to deliver Paul's letter to the church at Colossae.

And so, Onesimus is sent with him, with this letter to Philemon. And last week, we saw how Paul had these great descriptions regarding Philemon.

[4 : 15] And now he's going to be asking him to do something really hard to do. Let's go ahead and pick it up here. Verses 8 to 16 of Philemon. Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to

order you to do that which 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, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful to both you and to me.

And I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wish to keep with me, that in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel.

But without your consent, I did not want to do anything that your goodness should not be, as it were, by compulsion, but of your own free will.

For perhaps he was, for this reason, parted from you for a while, that you should 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.

[5 : 58] Father, we do thank you that we can be here today and to study these words, Lord, that were written for a reason. And Lord, today may we glean something that's out of this that would be pleasing to you and useful to us.

Because Lord, we know that just through the power of Jesus that you not only save us, but you transform us. You don't leave us alone because of your great love and your mercy.

You're committed to us, Lord. You change us. You redeem us. Thank you, Lord, for these truths. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen. Notice here, verse 8 begins with a therefore, and so we want to ask, what's it there for? Well, this is in consideration of all those good things that Paul said about Philemon.

And he says, Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you.

[7 : 09] Notice here that Paul begins by briefly mentioning these two things. First, in verse 8, notice his apostolic authority.

And that would be to command people to do, which actually came directly from Christ. And the second thing, that his commands are proper.

And notice, they're fitting. They're appropriate for the occasion. But it's very interesting here that Paul immediately takes these off the table and he bases his request on something else.

Something that would be higher. Verse 9, he says, I appeal to you for love's sake. What does Paul mean by that?

For love's sake? It's interesting, in the original language, there's a definite article before the word love. In other words, it's the love. It's for the love's sake.

[8 : 10] And what this tells us is that Paul's not referring to his love. He's not referring to Philemon's love. Paul's referring to the love that Christians are to show to others, regardless of who they are.

These are the feelings and the actions that God wants to see in his children.

James, in his letter, he calls this kind of love the royal law. In other words, he's talking about how believers are to treat others.

He says in verse 8 of his letter, If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to Scripture, and here he says, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

These are the words from Jesus himself in Matthew chapter 7. Love your neighbor as yourself. And if you do, that's the royal law.

[9 : 15] And he says, you're doing well. And Paul agrees with him in his letter to the Romans, chapter 13. Paul says this, Oh, nothing to anyone except to love one another.

For he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. That's the royal law. That's the love that God wants to see in all of us.

And in our text, that's the basis of Paul's request here. This kind of love. Now, personally, brothers and sisters, I find this very hard to do.

You know, it's very easy to love certain people, isn't it? Maybe family. Maybe people here. Very easy to love someone, especially when, you know, I can relate to them.

But I'll tell you what, we live in a culture and in a society that's opposed to Christ. Do you love those people? It's difficult.

[10 : 14] I know many people who couldn't care less about Paul's apostolic authority and neither would we agree on what's proper.

Now, they'd say a lot of things are proper that I wouldn't agree with. But there's a reason for this. And if you find that you're in disagreement with people in the world, it's for this reason.

They're unbelievers and you are not. They don't and can't love the way God wants us to. But as a Christian, you and I are to be different. You know, we are new creatures in Christ. God has revealed His grace to me.

And He has, the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in my life. Look at what Paul says speaking of believers in his letter to the Colossians.

[11:10] This is in your handout here. Speaking of Jesus, He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.

That's past tense, friends. In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. what great resources we have.

And there's no need to command a person who's been given so much. Paul appeals here to a higher motive. It's for love's sake.

Paul's building up to his request here and he mentions a few more other considerations that I believe give us some insight into his relationship with Philemon.

First notice in verse 9, he says, since I am such a person as Paul. In other words, this tells me that Paul's well known by Philemon.

[12:09] He's such a person. You know me. He probably has a lot of pleasant memories among both of them. Secondly, verse 9, Paul refers to himself as the aged.

Now a lot of Bible scholars, they think that Paul's in his 60s by this time. But I'll tell you what, he's got to be an old 60. You know what I mean?

If you look at his second letter to the Corinthians, he talks about his being beaten and shipwrecked and stuff. Guy's probably got a lot of bumps and bruises. He's an old 60.

But Paul, he's now the aged. A lot of things can be said about that. But look at it. He goes on. And now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

I think Paul here is reminding Philemon, look, I'm engaged in ministry right now. In fact, I'm in prison right now. And I really need for you to do what I'm going to get ready to ask.

[13:12] And so here's the request. He wants Philemon to know these three things about Philemon's ex-slave. Look at verse 10.

I appeal to you for my child whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus. Boy, here's some new information about him.

First, Onesimus is now a believer. He's one of us. Isn't that great? Philemon, boy, what a surprise that this guy would convert.

He's the last person that I would expect to become a Christian. Do you know anybody like that? You know anybody in your life who you would say right now, boy, that's the last person I would expect to become a Christian?

Yeah, if you're honest, you probably do. I'd see you call a show of hands, but I won't do that. Maybe you have somebody in your past that maybe just the mere thought of them brings up some bad memories.

[14:19] He'll never become a Christian. You know, I'd like to mention a few in my life, but these messages are being recorded and they're being posted on a website. So, but again, as my mom would say, never say never.

She's a wise woman. Here's a testimony to the power of the gospel, friends. You know, you and I may say that person will never come to Christ, but God might have something else in mind.

We may be surprised. In fact, I say we will be surprised when we get to heaven and we find out who's there and who's not. That song we just sang, Amazing Grace, written by John Newton, he's talking here about God's, His grace is so amazing and that's because it would save a wretch like him.

And so, if he's a wretch, you and I are wretches too. Secondly, first, Onesimus is a believer, but secondly, Onesimus, who was formerly useless to you, but now he's useful both to us, to both of us. Paul might be reflecting here on something that Philemon told him before about Onesimus. Boy, what a useless guy this guy is. I just bought him and he's useless, but friends, all that has changed.

[15:50] And again, I think that this testifies to the life-changing, transforming power of the gospel. God changes us, makes us useful.

Amazing. My wife and I, our relationship goes back to when we were both before we were Christians. I remember her before she was a Christian.

She remembers me before I was a Christian. And I can tell you what, I know you ask her, she'll say, boy, he was a useless guy. But the Lord's grace, hopefully I've changed a little, honey.

Let me ask you, do you feel useful? Do you feel it? I really hope you do. I hope that this is a church, this is a community of faith, where you can plant yourself in and become useful.

We have ministry teams that you can join. There's lots of things to do here. It's a wonderful place to do, to be, and to find your place in Christ.

[16:53] Not only is Onesimus a Christian, not only is he useful, third, Paul wants Philemon to know that Onesimus has my deepest affection.

Look with me, he says in verse 12, I've sent him back to you in person, that is, I'm sending my very heart. And Philemon must have, he must come away with this, boy, Paul must really like this guy. He must love this guy. Here's what Paul is asking Philemon to do. One, grant forgiveness to his ex-slave.

Secondly, relate to him now as a brother in Christ. And third, verse 13, send him back to me that in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel.

But here's the key, brothers and sisters, Philemon, Paul is saying, I want your consent for all this.

Look, verse 14, I did not want to do anything that your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion, but it's of your own free will.

[18:07] In other words, Philemon, it's up to you. I want to do these things. I want to bless this guy. But the ball's in your court. It's up to you.

Onesimus was not free to travel around the country. He's not free to go to camps. He's not free to do whatever he wanted to do. Technically, he's still a slave under the subjection of Philemon. But not only that, now he's a runaway slave. He's an unfaithful servant that Jesus talked about. He's a deserter.

And I'm picturing Onesimus right now standing before Philemon right in front of him. And maybe he's kind of nervous since he doesn't know how Philemon will react.

And perhaps, maybe even most likely, Philemon is thinking, you know what? You ought to be nervous. You ought to be. This guy caused me a lot of pain.

[19:13] And I ought to turn him over to the authorities. I have every right to do that. In fact, I think most of the people around me would say that it's the proper thing to do to turn this guy over to the authorities.

He needs to pay for what he's done. But, but, I got this letter from Paul. And in this letter, he says that this guy is loved by him.

And this guy is esteemed by Paul. And now my ex-slave is a brother in Christ. And he actually has the fruit of repentance because he listened to Paul and he's standing right here before me, showing up at my door.

Maybe even while the church members are gathered in my home. You there? What would you do? What would you do?

Would you look at your little armband that says, what would Jesus do? It's a tough situation, friends. The flesh wars against the spirit.

[20:23] And Philemon is stuck here and he's probably got a burning hole in his gut. Sometimes difficult things are asked of us as believers, especially when it's dealing with things like forgiveness.

Maybe you can relate to this. maybe you're facing something right now in your life and you know that the Lord wants you to seek reconciliation, forgiveness, understanding.

But friends, it's tough. Last week, we learned that Philemon refreshed others and maybe now it's time that he needs to be refreshed.

But here's what's going to happen. the Lord through using Paul is going to help Philemon and I believe by extension he's going to help you and me today to do what's pleasing to him.

And there's three considerations that we can take home when we're facing difficult choices. Difficult things like this. First of all, follow with me in your outline here.

[21:33] Consider that God might be involved in your situation. You might think it's kind of funny to say, why would you say God might be involved in the situation?

Of course he is. But look at how Paul puts it. Verse 15, perhaps he was for this reason parted from you for a while, that you should have him back now forever.

What do you say to somebody? Yeah, it's fate, it's coincidence, it's karma. No, God allowed it. He allowed it.

The fact is Onesimus did mess up and he deserves to be punished. We don't know the details. Maybe there's some of the tasks that needed to be done went undone.

Like maybe there were some crops that needed to be harvested and Onesimus he's gone, he's not there. Maybe Philemon's reputation suffered. But here's the key, there are times when God allows bad things to happen to his children.

[22 : 40] Here's a very well known verse, Romans 8, 28, we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purposes.

Just to be clear that we understand this passage, friends, Onesimus' running away was not good. We don't ever want to twist our theology to say, oh yeah, everything is good that happens.

No, but here's the key, somehow, some way, and this is why he's almighty God, God changes things.

He turns situations around and ultimately brings good out of them. Look what happened to Joseph. You know the story, he's sold into slavery, and then in Genesis chapter 50, he says this, as for you, you meant it, evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result to preserve many people alive.

Look what happened here. This guy runs away, but then he gets saved. He's now a Christian. I think that this is a good way to think about life.

[23 : 57] I really do. That God might be in it. No, God is in it somehow. He lets things happen.

And this is a good way to think, especially when things don't go our way. And I'll tell you, friends, this is a really, this is a very tough thing, and I know I'm treading on some very slippery ice here. Consider that most recent tragedy in Branson. where all those people died from that boat that sank. We were on that boat years ago, but it's a fun ride, but man, how do you explain to people what happened?

What do you say to believers that lose their loved ones like that? The world says, well, it's karma. The world may say, well, it's just bad luck.

you know, we would say, you know what, it's difficult to understand this, but I do know this, that God is good all the time, and we have to wait and see what he's going to do with this.

[25 : 10] So, God is in things. Secondly, you and I must align our values with what God values. Notice here, Paul is talking about that you can have him back forever.

Verse 16, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother. Now, Dave Stow is going to talk about a lot of this next week, and so I'm going to save a lot of this.

But today, just in these remaining minutes here, I want to ask you to consider just how God can change relationships.

Think about these guys. At one time, these two men had what you'd call a functional relationship, master, slave. But then they became estranged.

Maybe they even became enemies, we really don't know. But look how different this relationship is possible now because of Jesus Christ. Philemon, he's a solid pillar of the church there in Colossae.

[26 : 20] The church met in his home. His whole family serves the church. He's wealthy, he's successful, and he has a reputation. But Onesimus, he has nothing.

He's a slave who ran away for reasons unknown. But it occurs to me that a humble guy like Onesimus.

He can be closer to God's heart than me when I'm so satisfied with my success, satisfied with my reputation.

Because of Christ, this guy can be a beloved brother, both physically and spiritually. He can be another ministry partner.

all Philemon needs to do is just let it go. Let it go. Give it to God.

[27 : 22] Receive this guy back. Agree with God and do what he says. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

And aren't you glad that God deals with you on the basis of what you need rather than what you deserve?

Aren't you glad? That's the love that we're supposed to have. Listen to, it's on your handout here, this is our founding verse for Bethel.

It's out of Philippians chapter 2. Let me take it at verse 1. If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there's any consolation of love, if there's any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection, any compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united

in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not look merely out for your own personal interests, but also the interests of others.

[28 : 46] So consider, friends, brothers and sisters, God might be in it. Secondly, align our values to him, and here's what I'd like to end with. We must base our decisions with eternity in mind.

Look at this, what he says, you can have him back forever. How long will your relationship be with the person next to you if you're believers?

How long? Forever. This describes a person who's looking beyond the here and now. This is looking at a person who has eternity in mind.

My last verse here is out of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

As we look not to the things that are seen. Boy, how often do we focus on the things that are seen.

We look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

[29 : 52] are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Let it go.

Let God have His way and agree with them.