

Transformative Life Lessons from Philemon - the power of a lived out faith

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: 17 June 2024

[0 : 00] I'm going to go to the Word of God now, to the book of Philemon. We're going to go through the book together. I know I heard one preacher say we're going to do a six-part series on Philemon.

But no, we're going to do it in one sermon because it's such a short book, so we won't need a whole load of sermons, but we'll try to fit it into one. And looking at the book of Philemon, so just after Titus and before Hebrews, and we're going to walk through it together, God helping us.

Philemon. Paul is held as a prisoner in Rome under house arrest, and here he is writing a letter to a friend, Philemon. And it's a very personal letter, a very individual letter.

Some say it's more like a postcard. If you can imagine a postcard, it's short, just 25 verses. And who is it from? It's from Paul. If you read the From section, it says, from Paul, a prisoner in Rome under house arrest.

Written around 62 AD, along with Colossians. Who is it addressed to? Philemon. He's a wealthy slave owner with a house large enough to have a church in it, lived in Colossae.

[1 : 15] See the stamp? It's the Holy Spirit. It's got authenticity. There's no question that it's authorised by God. The postmark, where it's sent from, where it's sent to, it's content to inform Philemon that his slave was not only safe, but now he was saved.

And to ask Philemon to forgive Onesimus. There's a lot of pictures we could pick up from the book. There's a picture of friendship, of acceptance, of salvation, freedom, forgiveness, providence, reconciliation.

It's really a picture of Christianity in action. There's a whole lot we can unpack in just these short 25 verses. And it's an appeal to Philemon to welcome back Onesimus.

Welcome him back. Onesimus was this runaway slave. He committed a serious wrong against Philemon, his master. And effectively, he was under the sentence of death. This was very serious, that he would run away.

And in the Roman Empire at the time, there's apparently some approximately 16 million slaves, about 25% of the population. So it wasn't uncommon. It was the culture of the day to have slaves.

[2 : 25] Some reckon it could even have been as many as 40% of the population. So basically, it was a common thing. And of course, we know in these days that Christianity is that great equaliser, that there's no slavery in the civilised modern world.

And in large part, that's due to Christianity. And we see, for example, in Galatians 3, it talks about how we are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. There's neither bond nor free.

There's not a free man and a slave. It says, for we are all one, all one in Christ Jesus. And so the book of Philemon, it's Paul's shortest book. And it's a very practical book.

It's addressing some practical issues. And it's got a spiritual message too, about human relationships, and how we're meant to live with others, how we're meant to live out our faith.

It's the gospel at work in real life, in a way. Relationships, real life relationships. And you could see in this letter as well, how it kind of tells the picture of a man as a sinner, running away from God under sentence of death.

[3 : 30] Think of it. Men run away from God. They are guilty, unworthy. They're in that far country, far, far away. And thankfully, though, we can flee to God and find mercy.

Onesimus was this fugitive here. And he'd run away from his master about a thousand miles. So he's a long way from home. And he encountered Paul in Rome here. And now he'd become a Christian, as it reads in verse 10.

He was now a changed man. So now he was returning to Philemon to settle his past and sort things out, set things right. And that's the Christian response when there's a conflict, to own up, to make

good, to bring healing, God helping us to reconcile.

And the gospel calls us to live so, with integrity, with honour, to do the right thing, to take responsibility. So here was Onesimus, this property still of Philemon.

He had an obligation to set things right with his master. Onesimus was actually a bondservant or a bondservant. So it means someone who chose willingly to be a servant for life.

[4 : 35] Usually it's where their master was a good and fair person who treated them well. And so they choose to be a servant for life. Paul wrote to smooth things for his return to his master.

And we think of this book as a demonstration of Christian love in action. It shows the power of the gospel in terms of human relationships. So Paul asked Philemon now to treat Onesimus as a Christian brother.

Welcome him. Welcome him back with love, with forgiveness, especially forgiveness. And Paul asked Philemon then to send Onesimus back to him, to Rome, to serve him during his imprisonment.

So here's Paul's message to Philemon. It was based on this work of love, of forgiveness, that God has worked in Philemon's own heart. And Paul asked Philemon to show that same love, that forgiveness, to the now believing servant, Onesimus.

Paul wanted Onesimus to be accepted now by Philemon as a brother in Christ and not merely as a slave. So there's lots we can unpack here about the power of God, of love, of forgiveness.

[5 : 42] And think of it, for God's love for you. Think of that. It works in our own lives. And we can live out our faith and show that reconciliation and forgiveness to others in our daily lives.

So we're going to get to the book, verse 1, shortly. Philemon shows us how we are to treat others. Let's take a look at the book and see what lessons we can learn, how we can learn some practical lessons from it.

Number 1, verse 1. Paul starts off by greeting Philemon. Verse 1. Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy, our brother, unto Philemon, our dearly beloved and fellow labourer, and to our beloved Athia and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house.

Paul counts Philemon here as beloved, as a dear friend, as a fellow worker. And he salutes Athia, his wife, and Archippus, who may have been Philemon's son.

Philemon had this assembly of believers meeting in his very house, his home. Of course, there wasn't buildings of such in these days. And so Paul calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 57] Notice that. When you think about how Paul says, I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ, he did not consider himself a victim of bad luck or negative circumstances.

He was not a prisoner of his circumstances, but he considered himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He considered that even his incarceration was part of his ministry, to serve the Lord and to bring him glory.

It's as if he's saying, when it's his will for me to be in prison, I'm in prison. When it's his will for me to be out of prison, I'll be out of prison. When it's his will for me to be sick, I'm going to be sick.

I belong to him. And since I belong to him, I've learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. He had this contentment. I'm his prisoner. And this is the outlook that we can have in our life when maybe we're not in a situation we'd like to be in.

Maybe there's a negative situation. Life is hard. We can say, I'm trusting the Lord. I'm in his care. I'm his and he's mine. And here's Paul still actively serving the Lord.

[8 : 00] Here he is in this prison cell or this prison environment and he's writing, caring for others. He's reaching out. He's witnessing, seeing people saved. And he's doing this all behind bars.

So it's a picture for us, isn't it? How we shouldn't let our lot in life hinder us from doing something and rejoicing in God's providence, no matter what.

Then we read on, verse 3. He tells us grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of you, of thee, always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints.

Notice how Paul says, he's talking about grace, of love, of faith. And in verse 4, he tells us a really key truth here that we can take heart in and think, how can we apply this?

How that we should pray for each other. Pray for each other. Notice that? He's making mention of this man always in his prayers.

[9 : 10] Sometimes we miss that, don't we? I know some people say they're praying for me and I say I'm praying for them. There's something meaningful, isn't there? That you think, wow, there's

someone praying for me. And we had an answer to prayer this morning.

So sometimes we can miss that, the opportunity to pray. Think of it, brother, sister, to pray for one another. Pray for one another. Are we praying for the people in our lives?

Sometimes we miss that. It's really a key how we ought to interact with others. Maybe the ones that are giving you trouble, you should be praying for them more. Paul prays for Philemon.

In verse 22, we see that Philemon prays for Paul. So it's both ways. Paul's praying for him and Philemon's praying for Paul.

Verse 22. So Philemon, we look at the man Philemon for a minute. He's got this testimony. Verse 1 says he's a dearly beloved man. He's a fellow labourer.

[10:05] In other words, he's a worker for God. And what's he known for? He's known for his love or his faith. Believer, that should mark us, shouldn't it? That that's, hey, that so-and-so, we know about them.

They've got love and faith. They've got love and faith. That marks them, sets them apart. And what's more, they're praying too. Wouldn't that be great if that was said of you? That was your reputation?

That that's what you're known for. Hey, that's a person of love. That's a person of faith. That's a person of prayer. That's your reputation. That you're known as a believer in the Lord Jesus.

And your life is lived out with faith, with love toward all saints. Think of that too. All. It's comprehensive again. Faith and love, they go hand in hand.

We see in Galatians 5, 6, it tells us that faith worketh through love. They join together. Faith and love. Often corresponding kind of together.

[11:01] Mentioned together. Ideally, faith is the inspiration of love. And love is the manifestation of faith. There's some good things going on in this man's soul. In Philemon's soul.

They say, hey, notice this man. He's a man of love and faith. He's a man of prayer. There's something good happening here. We could learn a lot from Philemon about the man, about how to live, about his heart.

Can we be like him? We read on verse 6. It tells us that the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

Now, this word communication is talking about sharing, about fellowship. It's talking about our common faith. There's a fellowship here of his faith. There's a common faith.

It's a mutual faith. It was an effectual faith. And Paul's saying Philemon is a man of faith. He's a man of love. He's a man of encouragement. He refreshes people. He refreshes people as we'll get to.

[12:01] What a load of great qualities here in the man. Again, wouldn't you like to be known as, hey, that's someone who refreshes me. There's a refreshing I get from him or her. What a load of great qualities we see in the man.

Verse 7 we read on. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. So it's telling here about the joy.

It's talking about the comfort, the consolation. We see the gospel put into action in this man's life.

There's a communication. And we should have a communication of our faith as well.

So Philemon was this blessing. He was a blessing to others, to many. It says reviving their hearts.

Refreshing their bowels is the literal sense of it. Think of the innards.

The innards that are you. The inner man. The very bowels. There's a refreshing there. It's heart deep. It's soul deep. It's the innards of you. And when people met Philemon, their bowels got refreshed.

[13:03] That sense where, well, that's a good feeling. Yeah, I get a good feeling in my heart because this man's refreshing me. I'm getting a refreshing today. And so let's be like Philemon. That we can see the good that comes out of his life.

To be a person like him. And Philemon, it tells later that he would do even more than Paul asked. So he went above and beyond.

He went beyond the call. So Philemon was this man who blessed the hearts of people. Again, I know it's a bit of a funny term to think of the bowels being refreshed. But it's talking about the inner man.

It's talking about the heart. It's more than the heart. It's the whole of you and on the inside of you. I know when I go for a job interview, I get the butterflies or whatever it is.

You get something scary that you're going to. And you think, oh, you get that feeling on the inside of you. Well, Paul gave a good feeling on the inside of people. Amen. And that's what we should do too.

[14:01] Do our acts and our actions refresh people? Do they encourage their faith? Or do we deplete the saints? Are we refreshing the saints? Or are we depleting the saints?

Think of it for yourself. Hey, I want to be a refresher, not the other. We've seen Proverbs 11.25, paraphrasing it. Effectively, it says, A generous person will prosper, but whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

If you water others, you're going to get watered. If you refresh someone, you're going to get refreshed. Paul's commanding Philemon for this refreshing. He's a man who refreshes the faith of others. That's a good place to be.

Amen. A good place to be. Think how you can refresh others. Be a refresher of others. In other words, fill them up. Fill them up with your faith. Fill them up with your joy. Be an imparter.

Pour into the lives of others. You can be like Philemon, a refresher, an uplifter. Think of it, of the people in your lives. Maybe there's people you know that, hey, this one probably needs a bit of refreshing.

[15:01] Maybe you're the one who can impart that. Be an uplifter. So Paul's appealing to Philemon's love rather than commanding him as well from verse 8 through 9. Of course, Paul is the apostle.

He's the spiritual father of Philemon, it appears. And so we can see that he had a special relationship. He had an authority that he could have called on to command Philemon.

But no, Paul didn't use his authority. He didn't exert it. He didn't pull rank. And he rather appealed to Philemon in love. He appealed in love to show grace, to extend grace, to extend love.

So verse 8, as it reads there, as I've just said, really, he could have kind of exerted his authority.

But no, he didn't do that. So we'll read that verse 8. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee, that which is convenient. So he's saying, you know, I could have been bold enough to command you to do this or that.

[16:06] Do your duty. But he says, no, yet for love's sake, he says, I rather beseech thee, being such in one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

So we see Paul here. He takes this humble place. Hey, I'm an old man in prison. I'm just enjoining you. I'm just exhorting you. I'm urging you in love to do something about this situation, rather than commanding Philemon.

And so Paul's asking here that Philemon forgive Onesimus, that he accepts this slave, this slave now as a brother in Christ. He's not his slave so much now.

He's his fellow brother. He's a believer. He's a fellow believer. He's his brother in Christ. And he's saying, also, maybe consider sending him back to me because he was so helpful to me, to minister to me.

He was found useful in God's service. So look at the situation here. Philemon, it appears that Onesimus had potentially stolen from him, not only left him, abandoned him, but he possibly had stolen as well.

[17:17] And Paul's urging Philemon, look, he's your brother in Christ now. He's useful in God's service. He's ministered to me. Hey, what's going to happen now?

Forgiveness. It's all about forgiveness, isn't it? Really, that's the book. It's about forgive. And friends, it can be hard to forgive. I don't know if you've got situations. There's people in my life that have hurt me hard.

But it's even harder not to forgive, isn't it? Really, isn't it? To not forgive is harder.

It's harder on you. That build-up of bitterness, of toxic feelings. And look, they may not deserve your forgiveness, but you still can give it. You can still at least feel it, that sense of it.

Yeah, I've let it go. When you don't forgive, really you're in disobedience to God. You're actually giving grounds to the devil. Unforgiveness, when you think of it, unforgiveness is a lack of love.

[18:20] It's not of God. And it's going to hinder our fellowship with Him, our Lord. Don't stay there. Here's what someone put about forgiving. I thought this was really telling to quote it to you.

To forgive is to turn the key, open the cell door, and let the prisoner walk free. To forgive is to write in large letters across a debt, nothing owed. Cancelled.

To forgive is to pound the gavel in the courtroom and declare not guilty. To forgive is to shoot an arrow so high and so far that it can never be found again.

To forgive is to bundle up all the garbage and trash and dispose of it, leaving the house clean and fresh. To forgive is to loose the moorings of a ship and release it to the open sea.

To forgive is to grant a full pardon to a condemned criminal. To forgive is to relax a stranglehold on a wrestling opponent. To forgive is to sandblast a wall of graffiti, leaving it looking brand new.

[19 : 20] To forgive is to smash a clay pot into a thousand pieces so it can never be pieced together again. What a picture of forgiveness. When we forgive, let's fully forgive.

Let's just let it all go. All the hate, all the bitterness, the resentment, the wanting payback, vengeance. Forgive. It'll set you free.

It'll set you free. And we see the picture here of this brotherhood. We actually have a brotherhood in Christ. He's saying to Philemon, hey, Onesimus, he's your brother now.

And it's interesting, this word for brother in the Greek, apparently, literally, it's from the same womb. He's from the same womb as you. I know people joke, he's my brother from another mother.

No, that's wrong, isn't it? No, it's from the same mother. It's from the same womb. There's a sense of it here that you're literally from the same womb. And that's the closeness, isn't it? Picture of closeness.

[20 : 17] So we ought to live like we are brothers and sisters who love each other, shouldn't we? Shouldn't you be like that? Wow. I like to, I know Julie prompts me to say it sometimes because you're my brother, you're my sister.

And that's special. That's really important. And we should love each other so that we are such brothers and sisters. Hopefully brothers and sisters who get on with each other. Brothers and sisters who love each other.

That's the picture that he wants for us, isn't it? And Paul sees himself as this prisoner of Jesus Christ rather than a prisoner of Rome. He says, I'm his prisoner. Don't worry about Nero.

I'm the prisoner of Christ. I'm his servant. And Paul's saying, I appeal to you on the basis of love. Love. Really love is that overarching principle above all things, isn't it?

And notice how Paul puts it, verse 10. I beseech thee for my son, Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds. First time he uses the name of this one, Onesimus, him.

[21 : 20] Verse 11, which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me. So Paul introduces the name Onesimus and he introduces him in a special affection as my son.

My son. It's a joy when you see someone trust the Lord and you're instrumental. You're the spiritual father. That's a special thing, isn't it?

Think of that. Or a spiritual mother. And so he introduces Onesimus as his son. Now in the households of the time, there's two extremes. You're either a son or a slave.

That's the status, isn't it? So Paul elevates Onesimus and says, he's my son. My son. Takes him out from the slavery, the status of slavery, to say he's got sonship.

He elevates him, calls him his spiritual son. So Onesimus, this man, he's been born again. He's a new man. He's not the old Onesimus. He's become a child of God. He belongs to the saviour.

[22 : 23] He's your brother. And in verse 11, there's a play on words too, that the name Onesimus means useful or helpful. So that's the word meaning of that name.

The name meaning is useful or helpful. Now before his conversion, Philemon was pretty much useless. But now he was going to live up to his actual name and actually be useful.

So here's Philemon. Onesimus, this man has wronged me, stolen from me. He was a robber. He's not made restitution.

He's a thief, a runaway. You're asking me to forgive him. Onesimus could have faced serious consequences, a serious punishment. Even crucifixion of the day, there was that penalty.

It was very severe for failing his master. And the point here is that the gospel transforms men and women. That's not the man you used to know. And that's still true for you and me today, isn't it?

[23 : 24] When we saved, you're a new creature. Old things are passed away. It's still true for you, for me. We who were once unprofitable, useless, really, unfruitful.

Now we're made profitable, we're made helpful, we're made beneficial, we're made effective, we're made fruitful. And we become able to serve God. Think of it for yourself.

Someone's put it like this. We're not every one of us slaves to sin and useless to the Lord when our condition was BC, before Christ.

Amen. Life changes, doesn't it? When you think, BC, I was a different man before Christ. Yeah? Got that? But when Christ comes, you're a new man, a new woman, by grace, through faith. And so, in Christ, we're God's masterpiece. We're not the BC version anymore. Amen? We've been transformed, we've been made his workmanship, made his masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus, useful for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[24 : 43] So before Christ, BC, we were unprofitable, but now. See that? Verse 11. But now. He used to be unprofitable, but now.

Things have changed. Paul issues this plea for reconciliation. In the next few verses, it says, Paul tells Philemon, whom I have sent again, I'm sending Onesimus to you again.

Thou therefore receive him. Receive him that is mine own bowels. He's using this colourful language again. And I think it's actually, it's telling here that Paul's telling us, he's telling Philemon, I love him so much.

He's my heart. My heart. My heart is his. He's my heart. He's my bowels. He's part of me. He's important to me.

He's got that compassion. And what does he say? Receive him. Receive him. Receive him with grace. Receive him gently. Receive. It has this aspect of totally forgive and be reconciled.

[25 : 52] Reconciled. You know, brothers and sisters, it says, receive one another. There's a lot of rejecting going on, isn't there? I felt a bit rejected.

Oh, I'm separating from you, brother. Oh, thanks. You know, it hurts, doesn't it, to be seen to be, oh, you're not conforming.

You don't fit. Your doctrine doesn't fit my doctrine, so I'm separating from you. That's the spirit of some people. Now, there is need for separation.

Amen? There is need for separation from error, from falsehood, from false teachers, from immoral practice and inappropriate conduct.

There's need for separation. But the emphasis here that Paul has, look, he was unprofitable. Now he's your brother.

[26 : 49] Receive him. Put your arms wide open and receive him. Now, that's the heart of God, isn't it? Receive him. It's got a sense he's forgiven. Receive him.

Don't hold it against him, whatever he's done wrong. Whatever wrongs he's done, just receive him. And shouldn't we have that heart to others in our lives? When we, oh, there's been a difference, look, receive him.

Just let it go, whatever it is. Don't hold it. And verse 13, it reads on, Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.

So he's saying, I'm going to give Onesimus back to you, but I really like him back. He's ministered to me. He's ministered to me in the bonds of the gospel. And verse 14, but without thy mind would I do nothing, that thy benefit should not be, as it were, of necessity, but willingly.

So it's saying there, I want him back, but I'm going to ask your permission. He's your property.

Strictly he is the property of Philemon. He's saying, look, he's ministered to me.

[27 : 53] I really would like him to come back and help me further. But I've got to ask your permission for it. Next one. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season that thou shouldest receive him forever.

So he's saying here, he's really putting the message across here that God's worked all this out. This has been God's plan. He's departed for a season.

Perhaps it was all God's plan, in effect, that God was orchestrating all of this to happen. That's how his providence works, isn't it? So as much as it was trouble for Philemon, hey, this man's got saved while he's come to Rome.

And now he's been made useful. He's made a son of God. He's been made your brother. And that's how providence works, in all the circumstances. And sometimes it's the case that, without us realising it, when there's some problem or other, that God's in it.

God's in this thing that might be not how we'd want it to be, but God's got to bring it all out for the best. And yet, you can still trust God in whatever's going on for you.

[28 : 55] That was the case here. That, hey, we can trust God. We can still trust him in it all.

Because God is behind and above everything that's going on in our lives. Receive him, says Paul.

Verse 16. Not now as a servant, but above a servant. So not now as a servant, a slave, but receive him as above a servant, a brother, beloved.

Especially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord. Onesimus now, he's become this beloved brother. He's a brother, not only so, but he's a beloved brother.

He's a brother beloved. Onesimus is now a beloved brother. Previously he'd been this slave, this servant. Paul calls him now beloved. As he also called Philemon.

Verse 1. So he's got that special relationship. As much as Paul loved beloved Philemon, he says Onesimus is beloved as well. Now Onesimus, he was above a servant.

[29 : 53] Now he's a member of the household of faith. He's your brother. He's part of the family. And when we come to God through Christ, think of it, friends. We've become part of God's family.

We get all the rights and privileges of sons. And so we think of this contrast between slave and son. And here's how someone has put it.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross. There's no one higher or lower. There's no status or class or type or difference between any of us.

It reads on this quote. All distinctions between Christians are done away with in Christ. We're all brothers and sisters together. There's no difference in our attitudes towards one another because of any superficial distinction or background of training, of colour, of education or whatever.

As the Lord Jesus says, one is your master and you are all brethren. Matthew 23 verse 8. So it's the same for us, isn't it? It doesn't matter which side of the train track we're from.

[30 : 58] We're all brothers and sisters. We're family. We're equally united together as God's people, as brothers and sisters. And Paul appeals for forgiveness here.

And it's the same for us. Whenever relationships get strained in our lives, can we have the heart of Paul who exhorts Philemon, receive him?

When relationships get strained in our lives, can we just swallow our pride and say, actually, it's not a big deal. And actually do the godly thing and resolve it.

If we've unresolved issues with someone in our lives, we ought to do our part to make it right. Make it right. And exercise brotherly affection.

In Hebrews 12 verse 14 it says, Follow peace with all men. Try to be peaceful to everybody that you can.

[31 : 55] God helping you. We've had some people attack us. And they're still going on on social media. They just love attacking me over nothing. There's nothing to it.

No substance to it. But we've just got to be gracious, don't we? Just let it go over you. Just let it go over you. Don't let it hang on to you. We can have all kinds of resentment about people hurting us. Just let it go. Just be at peace with all men. It reads there, Colossians 3, Forbearing one another. Forbearing. Oh! It's got a sense of, yeah, just endure it.

Put up with one another. Forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do you. Like Christ forgave you. Wow, that's a big thing, isn't it?

If Jesus, our Lord, forgave me, and I should, as he loved, as he forgave, I should forgive. That's a big call, isn't it? God calls us to forgive and restore.

[32 : 57] So let's forgive as Christ has forgiven us. Forgiveness. It calls for practical steps and personal sacrifice. Think of it, the practical steps you can take. Yeah, I'm going to let it go.

I'm not going to hang on to that. God can help you live out your faith through your actions. And so this is a big call for Philemon. Being wronged as he was. He had every legal right to vengeance and punishment and wrath.

Paul says receive him. Love him. Forgive him. Reconcile. He's your brother now. He's not the same man. And so we see the grace of God, don't we? Verse 17, it reads on, If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him.

As myself. Here's the bottom line. Receive him. I'm repeating it. Paul repeated it three times.

Receive him. Paul appeals again. Receive him.

Christ does this for us. He pleads for us. Think of the picture of the runaway, of the one going to the far country. It's a picture of ours as lost people, isn't it? And Paul exhorts as Christ appeals for us.

[34 : 07] He pleads for us. For forgiveness and reconciliation. What about when we are wrong, do we forgive? Honestly, brother, sister, unforgiveness.

There's no excusing it. Please, please be exhorted. Don't have unforgiveness. Do not have it. It's not good. It's not good for your soul.

Verse 18, If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account. Think of our Lord. He says, put that on my account. We owe a debt that we cannot pay.

He's the one who's paid it. Jesus paid it. All our sin debt was paid in full by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Paul says to Philemon, Paul says to Philemon, look, if he's wronged you, whatever he's stolen, whatever wrong he's done, put it on my account.

And Jesus says that to you, doesn't he? Our Lord. He says, put it on my account. Your sin debt. The sins of the sinner were put on Christ.

[35 : 10] He paid the penalty. Our penalty. Fully paid. And it reads on, verse 19, I, Paul, have written it with mine own hand.

I will repay it. Albeit, I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me, even thine own self besides. So really, it's Philemon who owes Paul.

Hey, you heard the gospel. You got saved through my witness. And, you know, you probably owe me a thing or two. It's kind of, in effect, what he's putting there.

Verse 20, yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord. Refresh my bowels in the Lord. In other words, refresh my heart in the Lord. Oh, look, refresh my heart.

Let's sort this out. And verse 21, having confidence in thy obedience, I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou will also do more than I say. Paul had this confidence. Hey, I'm asking you this, Philemon, but I know you're going to do more than I say.

[36 : 08] I know you're going to go above and beyond. You're going to go beyond duty, beyond what I'm asking you. Who knows whether it could be that Philemon put Onesimus on the next ship back to Rome, with a whole bundle of things to take back to Paul.

You can imagine that. He's going to do above and beyond, not just forgive and reconcile, and let Paul take Onesimus, but let Onesimus take more back to Rome to help Paul in that prison environment.

He's going to do more, more than I say. Wouldn't it be good to have the heart when God puts something on your heart? Hey, I'm going to do more. I'm going to do more than the minimum.

I'm going to do more than the least. I'm going to do extra because I love God. I want to do more.

And that's the heart of Philemon. Verse 22, it reads on, So he's saying there, prepare for me in this guest chamber.

Another quality of Philemon was he was hospitable. Paul felt sure that Philemon would do the right thing, even go above and beyond. Have that heart. That was the heart of this man.

[37 : 30] Hey, I'm going to go above and beyond. I'm going to do more than what I'm asked to do. There's a whole lot of fellowship in this letter of Philemon. Notice he talks about his fellow believers.

He's not a sole flyer here. There's a team aspect to Paul in the sense that he often refers to co-laborers. He's not a one-man band. He's working with the fellow believers.

And it's interesting, as I say, this fellowship in the book of Philemon, fellow believer, fellow prisoner, fellowship of his sufferings, fellow soldier. We're in the trenches together.

And fellow laborer, workers together. But on a sad note, we could reflect that of these commended workers, Demas became a wayward believer. What a sad thing.

Here he is listed, verse 24, Demas, and we see later, Paul says, Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world. Now, he didn't stop being a believer.

[38 : 29] It's not that he, it doesn't say, Demas has forsaken Christ, but he says, Demas has forsaken me. He'd let Paul down. He'd failed. He'd left Paul at this point.

I believe he was still saved. It says he loved this present world or the present age. He's got this sense where he's had this, he's lured away.

And I guess it pictures for us, what a shame that Demas, once listed as a fellow laborer, and he'd been through the trenches with Paul, he'd been on the front line, he'd been going through all the sufferings of Paul, he was by his side.

So he'd been through some tough things, but there's a blot on his record here. A blot on Demas' record. And we all have to watch out for that. The traps. And avoid them.

Let's not fall like Demas fell. And it's interesting when you look at the names here, Marcus as well, verse 24. Mark also was one who deserted his post for a time as well, didn't he?

[39 : 32] Mark deserted. Paul said, I'm not going to work with him anymore. Yet Paul later counts Mark as one of his helpers. One helpful to him in his ministry. 2 Timothy 4.11.

So Mark, he deserted Paul as well. In effect, he let the mission down. He let the team down. But then, at the end of Paul's life, 2 Timothy 4.11, he says, Mark is someone who's helpful in his ministry.

So, are we going to be like Demas, you know, fly the coop and throw in the towel? Or are we going to be like Mark? Hey, maybe, yeah, I messed up, I'm going to get back on the team.

You know, that's the heart, isn't it? And Onesimus was himself now a servant. Here's one that was counted as useless, now he's counted useful. So, are we going to slip up like Demas, like Mark did, who at least got back on track?

Or are we going to be like Onesimus, one counted useful for the work God had caught him to do? And you can be counted as a fellow labourer, in other words, a helper, in other words, being willing to lend a hand.

[40 : 37] You know, there's a lot in that word, fellow labourers, isn't there? Am I a fellow labourer? Could it be said of me, hey, I don't just go to that church, I'm one of the labourers. That'd be good, wouldn't it?

That'd be a good thing. Amen. And you can be counted a fellow labourer. Verse 25, it says, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Amen. Written from Rome to Philemon by Onesimus, a servant. So, just to kind of pull it all together, there's a theme of grace right through the book. Grace from beginning to end.

Grace from right, from the start, verse 3. Grace right here, the last verse, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul starts off with grace and he ends with grace. God transforms people, it's the work of his grace.

Even the worst of characters, even Onesimus. It's grace, isn't it? There's thief, there's vagabond, there's runaway, there's good for nothing. Now he's a new man.

[41 : 34] That was the BC version. Now he's a new man. He's devoted, he's conscientious, he's trustworthy. He's a servant you want to have. He's a godly servant, he's useful. And so the book of Philemon teaches us lots of things.

We think of ethics, do what's right. Paul could have said, hey, we'll just let it go. No, he's saying, oh, we've got to sort this out. There's some unfinished business here. We've got to do what's right.

There's some principles for life here.

And there's the principle when you get saved, restitution. The sense of, hey, there's some things that I need to sort out, that I've not sorted out. Make restitution. So Paul's saying to Philemon, hey, Onesimus is coming back to sort this out.

And to do right. We see providence at work right through the book. We see that God was behind everything that was going on, above and beyond all the events of life, life, that God is overarching. And Philemon came to know the Lord through it all. Another truth we can pick up from the book is that God cares about our real life. And now the practical side of life. Think of this. This is almost like, this is kind of machinations of a personal, social, kind of nitty gritty level.

[42 : 42] God cares about the nitty gritty of your life, the practical things. He cares about practical problems, about relationships, about principles of faith, of love, of truth. And they're applicable for everyday life.

So that Paul took the time to write this letter because this is something that needs sorting out. We can think of our own lives too. What's the practical things in my life? Hey, I've not really sorted that out yet.

The practical side of life. Paul cared enough to write to his friend about this conflict to see these things resolved. We can see how God works. His mighty work of salvation.

And that it impacts this man, once a slave, now a son. The work of salvation, it transforms people. There's no barriers anymore. There's no status. There's no class system.

There's no hierarchy. We're all brethren. All brethren. Anyone can be saved. There's no barriers. We see Paul's tenderness in reaching this situation, reaching out.

[43 : 40] Numbers and mentions of beloved, of love, of brethren. Of brethren. This book's full of love. It addresses the dynamics of broken human relationships. He's full of love, of affection, of grace.

And that's true for us too. There's principles here. God cares about the practical side of our lives. And he puts truth into action in our own lives.

And so there's pictures here also of law, of grace, both the Roman law and the Mosaic law of the Old Testament. They said to Philemon, you've got a right to punish this runaway.

You've got a right to punish this slave because it's your property. But then we see grace, the covenant of grace through the Lord Jesus. It allowed master and servant to fellowship in love on an

equal basis.

No more this, but this equal in the body of Christ. Paul doesn't command Philemon, but he does make it clear what he thinks is best. And we can have that heart too when we've got to sort something out.

[44 : 44] Appeal in love. Don't be pushing your own barrow and pushing, you know, thumbs on people. Appeal like Paul appealed.

When there's a conflict situation, let love prevail. This book shows that believers of that time, they're called to treat slaves as brothers and sisters in Christ. And it's the same for you and me, isn't it? We're brothers and sisters. Let's care for one another. Let's have that family heart, that brotherly love for one another. And the heart of Ephesians 4, be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you.

So think of it as we think about the nitty gritty, hey, that struck a chord for me this morning. Yeah, maybe there's someone that I haven't quite sorted something out with, and I should.

And this book shows us how, how to approach conflicts, how to look at situations with love, with humility, that God calls us to restore relationships.

[45 : 46] And of course, we know when we might reach out, it might be rejected. Just have the heart of Jesus. Just have his heart. Rather than asserting your rights, just have his heart.

Philemon shows us the truth of brotherhood, that we've got an equality in Christ. We're brethren. Regardless of station, there is no station. We see the power of forgiveness at work.

Grace resolves conflicts, doesn't it? Resolves offenses. We see the truth of servanthood. We've got a new and greater master, to which we're all subject.

The book shows reconciliation. Of our reconciliation to God, the offended master, through the intervention and intercession of Christ. Christ. It's like how Christ's love acts to plead our case before the Father.

He stands as our defense, as our mediator between God and man. When we follow Christ, he transforms the way that we relate to others in down-to-earth practical terms.

[46 : 54] And even if Onesimus remains Philemon's slave, from the view of the social structures of the day, yet he is his brother in Christ, and that will be forever. And we think of that relationship, trumps everything, doesn't it?

Friends, I urge you today to think of the love of God, the grace of God, the reconciliation of God, the forgiveness of God. Think of, hey, that was the BC version.

I'm a new man now. I'm saved. That was the old me, that transforming power of grace. It happens now. It happens today. It can happen right now in your heart, by faith, as you trust Christ.

God's strength to forgive can help us to love others, to restore broken relationships, to exercise brotherly love. When things are damaged, we can heal that. And Onesimus became this, now a fellow worker with Philemon, and with Paul.

In fact, tradition tells us that Onesimus went on to become the bishop of Ephesus. Ephesus. He became the pastor at Ephesus. So we see, God changed that man, the BC version, to actually a servant of God.

[48 : 05] And God's got a plan for you, in all the events of your life. He's working all things together for good. Even when it seems things are hard, it's all part of his providence, if we can just see his hand.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for the grace of God, that you show to us in Christ. Christ. Lord, undeserving, unmerited as it is, that we can yet receive it.

Lord, we pray, help us to learn from Philemon, his example of faith and love, of his refreshing of others, of his heart. Lord, help us to have the same mind.

Help us, Lord, to not be the BC version, as it were, to revert to that, but rather to be, as a brother, a sister in Christ to others. Lord, help us to have that mind, that is in you, that humbled yourself.

And Lord, we know, there's no one better, or smarter, or greater than another, amongst us. We're all, equally undeserving sinners, of your grace. Lord, thank you for it, that you should so, freely shed it, upon us.

[49 : 17] Lord God, pray, Lord, work in our hearts, help us, Lord, touch us, Lord, to see where we might be giving, giving space to the devil, as it were, with any hurts, that are not healed, Lord, to resolve it, to love one another, to pray for one another, to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.