

# For Love's Sake

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] we've read a short time ago and we can take us just the leading theme of the epistle where you find Paul here addressing Philemon in this way where he's saying about the love that that he has for Philemon and Philemon has for him as well so if you look at verse 8 accordingly though I am bold enough in Christ to commend you to do what is required yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you especially these words will take the whole letter as it is but look at it under the direction of these words because really I think that captures the spirit of the letter for love's sake how well that describes the apostle's own relationship with Christ and also his work as an apostle I'm sure you've done this a number of times I certainly have when you've opened a letter that's come into your possession into your house recently there was one came in and I didn't have my glasses on and it I noticed the word James and 46 Francis Street so off I went and opened it and then when I opened it it was actually a document addressed to James Murray fortunately it was nothing really private or anything like that but it's always a privilege to be able to read the likes of a letter like Philemon because this is a very personal letter and it's a letter in many ways different to any of the other letters of the apostle although the letters to Timothy and to Titus are personal they're addressed to them as individuals but they're really much more in the context of the wider church and the way in which they they're being given directions for their place in the church but this is a letter to this individual loved by the apostle and dealing with this escaped slave Onesimus Onesimus who had escaped from Philemon's household and had come to be and somewhere other made and made a contact with with the apostle Paul and under the apostle's teaching came to be converted and that changed man and now Paul is sending him back to Philemon with these directions instructions really as well so that Philemon will receive him back even as he would have received Paul himself so first thing to take from the letter really I think is that grace the grace that brings us to know the Lord and the salvation grace produces a Christian character grace produces Christian character in every single one of us who knows the grace of God as it operates in our lives that means that it doesn't matter what kind of background we have what kind of upbringing we've had what kind of situation in life we've got the grace of God that brings us to know the Lord actually produces a Christian character it actually brings us to be a Christian people in the image of Christ himself to serve the Lord in different ways and you can see that this man who was converted through the apostle Paul if you look at verses 4 to 5 you can see what Paul is saying that I thank you uh my God this is in writing to talking about Philemon I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have towards the Lord Jesus and all the saints and I pray that the sharing of your faith goes on to say might be effective so the apostle is giving thanks for the faith and the love that Philemon has already and that is actually reaching out towards what he calls the saints especially and the Lord Jesus and the saints Paul has come to know of this man Philemon as now he serves the Lord as grace has changed

his life and reached into his life this is the product of that grace this Christian character this concern for the love that he has for the Lord Jesus the love that is in Paul himself of course as well so that's the first thing he's saying faith and love towards Jesus and the saints is one of the chief evidences that you have of someone whose life has been changed and the second thing in verses 6 to 7 that then has a positive impact on the whole of the Christian community and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ for I have derived much joy and comfort from your love my brother because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you what a magnificent statement how much would you want that and I would want that to be said of myself by somebody who could genuinely say that's what I see in you that's what I find in you not only do you love the Lord and do you love the saints but the sharing of your faith the sharing out of your faith the way in which you relate to other people

and show your faith to them and express your faith to them that it may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you there's a wonderful image there a picture there of how the grace that changes our lives or the lives that have been changed by grace are themselves lives which affect those within the Christian community the Christian church the Christian congregation but also out with that that it may become effective

I think he's including they're not just among the saints but effective out with that as well so that knowledge the full knowledge of everything that is in us for the sake of Christ and that's really resulted in Paul's joy and comfort I have derived much joy and comfort from your love my brother doesn't just mean the love that Philemon has shown to him personally but the love that Philemon has shown to his fellow Christians to the world around him for the apostle that is a source of much joy and much comfort and isn't that how it is for ourselves what gives you greater comfort than to know that God is using you however small a way you might see it to be or I might see it to be if it brings refreshment if it brings comfort if it brings some help to those who are in need and struggling then that's surely a source of much comfort of much comfort and joy for ourselves that's really what our Christian life is directed towards directed by grace towards the refreshing the help the teaching the support of others now that's really the description of Philemon what grace has done to Philemon is expressed there and what he is to Paul and what he is to his fellow Christians and even what he is out with that as he shares his faith that God has given him then he speaks about Onesimus as well I appeal to you he says verse 10 for my child Onesimus whose father I became in my imprisonment and by that he means I became a spiritual father in my imprisonment Paul had come into contact on Onesimus somehow came into contact with Paul during this imprisonment and here is the result of it he had become a Christian he was converted and now he is saying I appeal to you for this my child my spiritual child whose father

I became in my imprisonment and then you notice what he says it's in brackets but it's actually a really powerful statement formerly he was useless to you but now he is indeed useful to you and to me you see how how much a change has happened in this man who who ran away as a slave from Philemon's home from the works that he was doing there ran away as somebody who was just then openly and seeking to escape from that way of life but now he's been converted normally he says he was useless to you that word's important it means um more than just well we use the word useless usually don't we of somebody that you're giving some work to or somebody that's trying to do something for you and ends up making a mess of it some so you just say that's you're useless just I'll get somebody else or I'll do it myself that's not the the the meaning of the word useless it's stronger than that useless here has the idea of being harmful being actually bad not just being useless and not able to do the work properly or something like that the word really means he was bad he was not dependable he he was somebody who who was harmful and did harm to you but that's changed into the opposite now he is indeed useful to me and that word means very beneficial you see he's gone from somebody who was really out to do harm somebody whose life was really about damaging other people including his former employer but now he's become a christian now he's been changed by grace he's become the opposite of what he was he's become useful he's become very beneficial and if there's one thing that should characterize your own life and mine it's this whatever background we've come from whatever we were when god came and converted us and changed our lives around the one thing that should be obvious about us to some degree or other in some way or other is that we are useful people useful for the lord because we are servants of christ we are servants in the sense that we want to be useful in his employment for him to use to bring benefit to those around us to those near to us to those in our christian community in our congregation to those out with that in our neighborhood in our workplace wherever if it said of us that we are useful for the lord that's a great thing because that's really what the christian life is all about isn't it to be useful now i'm not saying by that that you would say of yourself that you're a very useful person and i wouldn't say it of myself but god changes us so that he makes us of use in some way or other to other people and to be useful in a world that has so so many needs is itself a wonderful emphasis and we may never be the best at any kind of job that we're involved with there may be others who are far better at it than we as christians may be that doesn't mean because we're christians or because a christian a doctor or nurse or whatever work we're doing um that they're christians that they know the lord that they're going to be the very best at doing that job that they're going to be the most skilled at doing it it doesn't follow that way but there should be nobody more dedicated nobody's nobody more dependable nobody more honest nobody with a greater

desire to be useful in every way than a christian than a person whose life god has touched this is what he's saying the grace that has turned philemon that's affected philemon and brought him to be a means of refreshing to the saints well that grace has touched the life of onesimus and now onesimus has turned from being useless harmful to being very beneficial in fact his name itself onesimus actually has to do with the idea of being useful and the way that he puts it here he's useful to me or to you and to me i think paul is striking a note there that's important and it's something like this he is useful to the kingdom of god to the work of the kingdom whether he's working for me or alongside me or working for you back with yourself i'm sending him back to you doesn't matter where he is but this is for you and for me for the kingdom he is now useful he's a useful instrument under god and of course grace as you see it here it comes through and what the apostle is saying of himself as well not just about philemon and about onesimus but also about himself his attitude for example to his imprisonment he launches out into this little wonderful letter full of love all a prisoner for christ jesus and timothy our brother he goes on speaking of himself through the epistle a number of times he refers to himself in different ways and you can see there in verses 18 and 19 if he has wronged you at all or owes you anything charge that to my account i paul write this was my own hand i will repay it to say nothing of you're owing me even your own self the words paul is saying you actually under god owe what you are to me through my ministry for god but he said i'm not really concerned about that i do want you to realize that if this man has wronged you if he's robbed you if he's done something bad to you as previously uh he's saying he was that kind of person put that on my account i'll pay it for him i'll make up for it even if he's not able to make up for it i'll do it for him what a wonderful heart the apostle had and what a wonderful insight that gives us into the way that a christian prioritizes not just the needs of others but the needs of others even to the extent that they would put themselves out in order to actually support them and make up for whatever deficiencies this man had to his employer philemon it shows itself doesn't it in i mean paul is really saying here well there's no need for it in a sense that you would receive him in this way other than your christian duty but when we had ourselves converted one of the great tests of that is that when things don't go your way what is your reaction when things are different to the way you'd have ordered it yourself or myself how do we respond to that here is paul in prison he wouldn't have chosen that for himself it's not something he would have said this is what i'd really love to be therefore i'm going to make my way into prison and just stay there it just so happened he's there for christ and whatever led to it we're not sure but he's there for the lord jesus christ's sake because he was prominently a christian an apostle in some way that led to this but still see he's saying here if he has wronged you charge that to my account in other words paul is really saying however things fall out however things come to be

[16:20] and you find them as they are you bring it to god and you say well how can i be useful how can i be useful even in regard to this thing how can my savior come through in my attitude and action in regard to this thing that i hadn't chosen for myself but this is how it is for him philemon onesimus and paul three lives intertwined each of them changed by the grace of god but intertwined into being useful instruments for the kingdom of christ so grace produces a christian character but grace also positively affects relationships you see here why paul is writing to him and describing to philemon our beloved fellow worker and then archipias our sister archipias our fellow soldier and the church in your house and then in these ways you can see how he's describing there um the way in which uh these people are so precious to the apostle uh there's no rivalry mentioned there there's nothing of jealousy mentioned there there's a paul the prisoner but timothy is his brother his spiritual brother philemon is his brother his beloved fellow worker there's no jealousy on the part of the apostle as to how much he's achieved compared to philemon or vice versa they're in it together they're in it sharing in the work of the gospel and it's all about helping each other however god allocates success or otherwise and he calls here archipias our sister archipias our fellow soldier he paul is very much aware that he's not alone in the battle and he's thankful for those other christians that support him and he's calling them his fellow soldiers that's what you are here i am tonight standing in this pulpit as i often do and thankful for it and thankful for your own presence to receive the the gospel through the ministry of the gospel to the preaching of the gospel but where would i be without you being fellow soldiers if i was just the only person on the front line in the gospel here in this congregation where would that be i would certainly not be at all confident of much but i am because you are my fellow soldiers you are conjoined together and joined with me in the preaching of the gospel in the ministry of the gospel you're taking your own share of what it is to

be in the battle for christ and to actually be at the forefront sometimes of that battle what a great privilege it is to be able to call each other fellow soldiers poor soldiers poor workers in the kingdom of christ and that really as you see in verses eight to nine leads on to though i am bold enough in christ to commend you to command you to do what is required yet for love's sake i prefer to appeal to you and these again are wonderful words paul is saying i'm an apostle actually i'm not going to stress that he's saying i'm not going to really um build what i'm saying on the fact that i'm an apostle although it's true i could command you i could actually set it out by saying look i am the apostle paul you owe under me you owe yourself to me in the sense that i was used for your conversion but he's saying that's not the road i want to go down instead i appeal to you for love's sake or love's sake whatever we can or cannot achieve through loving each other

it'll certainly always be a lot more that we can what we can do by way of command or forcing the issues i was talking in the school yesterday and today to a class about what is the work of a minister what does a minister do and one of the questions that was asked they sent in the questions ahead of them they were very very good questions and it was a privilege to be there but one of the questions was would you force an atheist to believe what you believe good question would you force an atheist would you try to force an atheist to believe what you believe and of course my answer to that was no because the work of the gospel whether it's in the minister or any christian it's not about forcing people's minds it's not about trying to force the issue so that you're pressing people against their will into believing what you believe into being the kind of person that you would like them to be for love's sake you set out the love of jesus the love of god you show your christian love as a product of god's grace and our appeals always have to be for love's sake of course that doesn't mean that in the church there should never be such a thing as an instruction given or rebukes given whenever that's necessary or commands in the sense that we come from god's word to say to somebody maybe whose life has gone somewhat astray and say well this is what god is commanding you've got to you've got to really take note of that that's there's a place for that but even that has to be done in the spirit of love for love's sake because nothing is as effective as love and the workings of love and the emphases of love and love always has to predominate in everything that we do and that's how god persuades us isn't it um it's not that necessarily that we have no experience of his law touching our lives showing our sins bringing us guilt before the lord and if the law does that then that's god at work but what does god then do he brings you to the gospel he brings you to the love that's shown in christ and in his death and in his resurrection and there is where um the law having done its work if you like if that's been the case it always brings us to the gospel to the love of god and for love's sake really is something you could say is applicable to god's way of working as well the love that is shown to us in christ and that's how it it does change people this grace that changes people it brings about this great product of of love this fruit of that change is love i remember hearing once about two elders weren't in the same congregation weren't in the same congregation but uh they were now at a ripe old age and having reached an age where they were both in a care home and both failing in health um but they had been somewhat um uh well they weren't really on the best of terms let's say always uh in the earlier stages of their life were different congregations but they ended up in the same care home and one actually uh lost his sight completely physically still very strong he was a big man but he had lost his sight the other one was very slight and although he had his eyesight he was very weak physically and really needed support and uh somebody had said they had seen them one day walking out in the garden of the care home holding on to each other and you can see what's happening there the one who was slight and really weak and finding it difficult really to get the strength to walk was hanging on to the big man who had the strength but didn't have the eyesight and the fellow who was the weak he was the eyes of the fellow who was strong i think that's a wonderful illustration of how with our different needs we help each other through the course of life we are endowed by god to fit in alongside of others different in many respects but for love's sake and through love that support is so crucial to the progressing of our christian life and experience for love's sake and that's why paul mentions the word heart here you'll notice that as we read through it verse 7 so what he's saying that i've derived much comfort joy and comfort because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed verse 12 you go there you see mentioning again i'm sending him back to you sending my very heart and then you find verse 20 yes brother i want some benefit from you in the lord refresh my heart in christ in other words paul is really taking us into the inner substance and working of our souls and he's sending on esimus back he's sending his own heart

his own love he's talking about the heart of the saints the hearts of the saints the very spiritual inners of the saints have been refreshed by philemon and for paul of course love is so important the matter of the heart what he's saying to the to the philippians chapter 1 verse this i pray that your love may abound more and more your love collectively started somebody the other day about sanctification and how sanctification by and large in the new testament especially in paul's writings it's not a matter for individual growth there is that but paul is right into the context of the church together and when the church together is required to grow it's together that they grow you and i contribute to each individual's growth to our own personal growth but to the growth of the body in love as he puts it in ephesians and so it's for love's sake you're never to be satisfied with something other than the very heart of things and the very heart of things is the heart of love so there's paul and philemon but you can see philemon and onesimus we've mentioned some of this already onesimus has caused much pain so you could say really that this this very personal little letter is about reconciliation it's about a reconciliation between philemon and his former slave onesimus and uh that's really a test here for philemon verse 16 very much a test where he's saying i'm sending him back to you no longer as a slave but more than a slave as a beloved brother especially to me but how much more to you both in the flesh and in the lord now paul has said i would have been glad to keep him here with me had i thought that was the right thing to do that's what i would have done in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment but i prefer to do nothing without your consent so that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will so he's saying that that's what he's then saying sending him back to him is how much he's now to receive

him no longer as a slave well what a test that was for philemon here was a man who had wronged him who had been bad who had not been good in any sense in the way that the word means uh to be good to to actually be reliable he'd run away he'd done some damage and now paul is saying receive him back but don't receive him back just as a servant or as a slave receive him as a brother in christ receive him as somebody who will be alongside of yourself in the kingdom of god in the work of of of serving jesus and that's why he calls him um beloved it's a forgiveness that he's asking for for for philemon to forgive this man uh to forgive him by such in such a way as will demonstrate that forgiveness by receiving him back as a brother in christ that's a test that he has to meet it's a test that he has to overcome and you see what he's saying in verse 17 if you consider me your partner receive him as you would receive me receive him as you would receive me in other words paul is saying to him if i was to appear on your doorstep philemon tomorrow the spirit in which you receive me there is how i want you to receive onesimus coming back to you as a brother christian you see how grace has changed things now grace is now what philemon needs to to have and to know and to to show in receiving onesimus back receiving paul is saying in other words he's not just to receive him back into his employment he's not just to forgive him in a sort of outward sense or in a formal sense he's saying what i want you to do is to welcome him there's the test for you and for me when we have been wronged when we've fallen out with some folk then they come back and they ask i'm really really sorry forgive me it must never be in the spirit of reluctance or just a formality the challenge is to welcome the reconciliation to welcome the opportunity to forgive because that's how god dealt with ourselves so welcome him he's saying um and uh you can just imagine the picture just now of onesimus having gone back to philemon and the lord's supper is going to be next week wherever it's going to be this church in the house uh the church in your house of aras aras arquebus our fellows and the church in your house he's saying to philemon all of those those people i think it's philemon's house he means there and you imagine well let's let's imagine they're going to observe the lord's supper and along comes philemon and who's with him onesimus and where do they sit beside each other not one above the other not one more important than the other at the lord's table all is on the same level there are no ranks at the lord's supper we are all one in christ jesus for the sake of love we say so grace produces christian character grace positively affects our relationships in christ and it shows the power of the gospel friends power of the gospel to to change matters positively to restore not just individuals to each other so that they welcome the reconciliation this is the gospel that has the power to extend beyond that to change broken homes broken lives communities nations even through the power of christ for the sake of love let's pray almighty god we give thanks tonight that we are here in the love that you have shown to us and we ask oh lord that you would help us to respond in love not only to you and to our fellow believers but also to the world around us for you require us to go beyond loving one another even to the love of our enemies we give thanks lord for the opportunities you give us to do this but we pray

your forgiveness for the times we fail you as we do lord so often and we pray that tonight we might indeed increase in our love for each other that our love may abound more and more that we may welcome whenever reconciliation and forgiveness is required lord help us lord not to enter into any of that reluctantly give us to be glad that issues are mended when they need to be mended give us lord to to know that even in the larger sense whether it be between congregations or denominations or communities as well as individuals we thank you lord for the pattern set by the love of god in christ jesus we pray these things seeking that you would receive us and hear the prayers of your people silently and also spoken and all for jesus sake amen we're going to now conclude