



PHILEMON

from bondservant to brother



Sermon Follow Up Guide

Memory Verse:

Philemon 1:14

but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord

Prayer:

Thank you for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives!

Reading Plan:

Monday:	Philemon
Tuesday:	Micah 3
Wednesday:	Micah 4
Thursday:	2 Corinthians 4
Friday:	2 Corinthians 5
Saturday:	2 Corinthians 6
Sunday:	Psalms 2

Song for the Week:

Death Was Arrested by North Point

Consider:

Was there anything that stood out to you in particular from the sermon/passage?

How does Paul undermine slavery in his letter to Philemon?

Why do you think the Bible doesn't come straight out and condemn slavery?

How does "appealing" to Philemon instead of "commanding" him promote love? What is the application of this in our own lives?

What does verses 13 and 14 teach us about dealing with conflict?

How does Romans 8:28 connect to Philemon 1:15?

What is the significance of Paul referring to Onesimus as both his son and his brother?

Application:

I commit to live in a way that seeks unity and Kingdom growth because of love for Jesus.

I commit to pray for lives to be transformed by the Gospel.

Coming Next Week

Philemon 1:17-20



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Sermon Notes

Philemon 1:8-16

“More than a Slave”

1. Obedient to Love

2. Transformed by the Gospel

Remember last week, we saw how Paul gave great encouragement to Philemon and the church in his house. He thanked Philemon, reminded him that he prayed for him and that he'd heard great things about his walk with Christ. Paul introduced his letter this way because he had a request to make: take your slave back, but as a brother.

Now as we return to the passage today, we return to a shift in the language. Paul starts to make the request, "accordingly, though [or since all that I've just said is true...] I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required."

Notice where Paul's boldness comes from. Christ gives him his boldness. Commanding someone to do something is pretty bold behavior. That's the kind of boldness that requires 2 key parts - knowing you have authority and knowing you are right. I know some of you are rabid sports fans and March is a fun month for that if you enjoy college basketball. I've been to a lot games and I've heard a lot of fans "commanding" athletes, coaches, or referees to make certain decisions from their seats in the stands. Almost without exception, they are ignored. Why doesn't Kemba Walker do exactly what the fan in Row C seat 7 say? Because that fan lacks the authority and the knowledge. But if Steve Clifford, the head coach, commands Kemba to pass or shoot or call a timeout, Kemba makes it happen. Why? Because he knows his coach has the authority and knowledge to command this.

Paul is writing to Philemon not only as his spiritual mentor, but also as a bonafide Apostle of Christ. Paul has the authority and the knowledge to make this command. Church - God has placed some of you to make commands of people. Especially parents. God has given you authority and access to

knowledge to command your children. But whether you are a parent or not, you should be spiritually mentoring someone else. Are you heavily invested in someone enough that you can make a command in the right attitude?

Paul can make this command and make it boldly. But he makes sure that Philemon understands that his source is Christ. Another parenting tie in here - parents, make sure you make Christ your source for boldly commanding your kids towards righteousness. Not so much "because I said so." It's not so much that, though that is not wrong. It's more, "because God made me the authority to lead and make decisions over my kids. Because you can honor God by honoring me in obedience."

Paul can make this command and make it boldly.

"Yet"!! There's a better option: "for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you."

Why does love lead Paul to appeal to Philemon instead of commanding him? Because love should work from both sides- check it out...

Paul's love is patient with Philemon, it bears with him, it endures his possible unwillingness. But it also hopes he will do the right thing.

Remember, we were just told in verse 7 that Paul knows of Philemon's love. So Paul expects that Philemon's love is kind, not arrogant, not resentful, and that it will bear and endure Onesimus' past wrongdoing.

Just looking at the 1 Corinthians 13 definition of love, it's easy to see the logic of love convincing Paul to try to appeal to Philemon instead of commanding him.

Jenn Wilken asks the question this way, "How many people spend their days plotting how to have limitless love for others? How many people spend their days plotting how to have limitless power over others?"¹ Paul has the ability to claim Christ's limitless power over the situation, but he wants to reflect God's character by offering limitless love to Philemon. That should be our goal in conflict as well.

Paul continues in verse 9 by clarifying that it was his request - "I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus." It's almost as if to say, "this isn't coming from Onesimus, it's coming from me, Paul." If there is any cynicism from Philemon that Onesimus is using Paul or convincing Paul to do something he really doesn't want to do, Paul is killing that cynicism here. Paul is writing this on his own.

He goes on by calling himself an old man and now a prisoner. What he's doing here is leveraging his position as a man without political freedom in sending back to Philemon a man who's political freedom he's taken away. There's no question that Paul is poking holes in the institution of slavery in this comment, at least for Christians slave owners. It's a matter of grief to Paul and the Colossian church that he's locked up. It would obviously be better if he had his freedom. It's from this position

¹ *None Like Him* by Jenn Wilkin pg 25

that he's asking for someone else's freedom. How can Philemon desire Paul's freedom and at the same time desire Onesimus' slavery? It's almost impossible to justify that position.

"10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment." Verse 10 is like the big poster for drinking milk hanging up in your middle school library. Except instead of promoting drinking milk its promoting mentoring.

Take a second and think about how Onesimus came into contact with Paul. Remember Onesimus was a slave in Colossae and ran away to Rome. It's possible he went to Rome to try to blend in and get lost in the city. If that's the case, consider how God must have orchestrated his and Paul's meeting. Another possibility of why he went to Rome is that he remembered Paul from Paul's trip to Colossae and thought if there was anyone who could help him, it was Paul. In either case, God's providence was obvious in giving Onesimus Paul as a mentor.

To call Onesimus his son, shows the affection Paul has for him. It's a deep relationship that recognizes a responsibility to each other. Paul could have called Onesimus a brother here, but doesn't because he's trying to bring attention to the type of bond they share. It's one of mentor and mentee. The beauty of this example of mentoring is how it's mutually beneficial: Onesimus grows closer to Christ and has help restoring and important relationship and as you see in verse 11, Paul loves him and finds him useful in his own ministry.

Who are you investing in? Who are you mentoring? Titus 2 clearly commissions believers to mentor the younger generations.

And who are you getting to mentor you? Onesimus made it easy for Paul to invest in him. I mean, Paul was in prison. He couldn't really invest in Onesimus unless Onesimus sought him out. Seek out wise, God following people to invest in you. Pulling from Titus 2, this makes the most sense when men disciple and mentor men and women disciple and mentor women.

It's neat to think that, in mentoring Onesimus, Paul is doing what he had experienced through Barnabas in Acts 9 and 11. Paul was once taken in and loved well, it makes sense that he's replicating that process. Lakeview, we need to be replicators of this process. It's the New Testament example for how we should be discipling each other. I know this is going to be shocking to some of you, but Sunday School didn't exist in the Bible. But one on one mentoring, one on one discipleship absolutely did. It's clear that discipleship didn't happen in programs, it happened as Christians lived their lives with other Christians.

Paul is setting an example of mentorship in verse 10 but he also draws out another very important problem with slavery by calling Onesimus his son. Go read Galatians 4 where verse 7 says, "So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." and verse 31 says, "So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman."

Or flip over to John chapter 8:34-36

34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave**[b]** to sin. **35**

The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. **36** So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

When Paul calls Onesimus his son, he is making clear to Philemon that he is no longer a slave in God’s kingdom. A son is not a slave. How then could Philemon pray for God’s kingdom to come and then keep his brother as a slave? It would be inconsistent at best.

In verse 11 Paul says, “Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.” Consider the type of person that Onesimus was when he arrived to Paul. He would have been a poor, lawbreaking, slave. This isn’t the kind of person you imagine Paul investing in. But yet, here we are. I can’t help but think of Mark 2:17 when Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

God’s work doesn’t take useful people and make them more useful. God takes unuseful people and makes them useful.

If you’re here today and you’re not a Christian, this may seem harsh. Is the pastor saying that I’m not useful if I’m not a Christian? Well, not eternally useful. Without Christ, people are stuck going day to day looking for purpose and meaning. Without Christ, people try to ignore the feeling of emptiness. Without Christ, people spend their days in vain looking for their usefulness in the world. And I’m here to tell you that Christ is the answer! He gives purpose. He makes you useful. He gives hope.

Jesus lived a life we couldn't live, died a death we deserved because of our sin, and rose again to break sin's curse so that you could be saved. If you're in the congregation this morning and you know that feeling of uselessness, find your usefulness in Christ this morning. He provides it.

Surrender to His Lordship this morning! Onesimus did. And it gave him a purpose and use for God's eternal kingdom.