

FOR LOVE'S SAKE

PHILEMON 1:1-18 • TV-471A

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By

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“Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, Yet for love’s sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.”

There’s a very small epistle in the New Testament called **Philemon**. I preached this message some time ago and someone was heard to remark: “I didn’t even know where that book was in the Bible.”

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Well, it's over by the book of **Hebrews** in the New Testament. It's the shortest of Paul's epistles, the book of **Philemon**.

But this little book contains some great lessons. And I want you to turn with me. You open your Bibles now. I'm going to make some few introductory remarks and then I'm going to tell you a story from the book of **Philemon**.

Now here's my subject; the title of this message is: "**FOR LOVE'S SAKE**" OR "**FOR THE SAKE OF LOVE**," whichever way you can remember it easily, "**FOR LOVE'S SAKE**."

Now here's the story. You open your Bibles to the book of **Philemon** and let me tell you the background of this epistle. There was a well-known man by the name of Philemon who lived in Colossae.

Do you remember hearing of Colosse; that's where the church was to which Paul wrote the book of Colossians, the epistles to the Colossian Church? Well, there was a man who lived there by the name of Philemon and he was a believer, a true Christian.

And he was known all around that area in Colosse. In fact, there was a church which met in his home, at the home of Philemon. Some say that Philemon was one of the 70 disciples which the Lord sent out in **Luke chapter 10:1** when He sent out 70 disciples to preach, two by two.

I'm not sure about that but that's what has been said. And also, someone else said at one time he was the bishop of Gaza. Well evidently Philemon who lived in Colossae had a great house and a great household and had a church that met in his home.

And he had many servants which was common in those days. Well, there was one of these servants whose name was Onesimus. I don't know how long Onesimus had been in the household of Philemon or how long he had worked for him. He was what you call a slave, a servant, in the house of Philemon.

Well, Onesimus had embezzled some funds. He had stolen some property and some money from Philemon and robbed his master. And he had run away from **Colosse**, he had run away from Philemon's house.

And he fled to the great city of Rome. And like I say, how long he was with Onesimus, I do not know. But I do believe that it is true that he stole some funds or some property or something when he fled, when he left the household of Philemon and went to Rome.

Because when Paul wrote later to Philemon he said; "If he owes you anything or if he's wronged you, then you can put it on my account. I'll pay back whatever he's taken." So he fled to Rome.

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Now, the third person that we meet in this epistle is the apostle Paul. And Paul was in Rome at this particular time. Paul was in prison. Now it was a strange type of prison. Paul was confined to a certain house and to a dwelling.

He wasn't in a dungeon; he wasn't in a public prison; he was in a home. He was confined for a length of time to this home and he had guards all about him. But Paul was allowed in this home, in this confinement, he was allowed to have people come to see him. He wasn't allowed to leave. He was under guard and in confinement but people could come see him. And he had some friends there. Luke was with him. John Mark was with him. Epaphras was with him.

And Demas who later left him was with him. These men were all there with him. And Timothy was also with him. And he could preach to people who came to his house. And he had several friends that came to hear him on a regular basis.

Now here's what happened and here's what lead to the writing of this epistle. This is the reason that this epistle was written and the reason our God has preserved it for our instruction and for our teaching:

Now here was Philemon, the wealthy man down in Colosse who had these servants. And one of them was named Onesimus. Onesimus had stolen some property, stolen some money, and he had run away from home.

But he came to Rome. Here's what I believe about Onesimus, I believe that like the Prodigal Son, he came to himself and he realized what he had done. He had a good master, he had a good home, and he was well cared for, and he wasn't mistreated.

And here he was in a strange city and he'd stolen this property and he'd already used it up like the Prodigal Son. He came to himself and he realized how foolish he was. And he realized what he had done and what a condition he was in. And so he came to see Paul.

You say, "How in the world did Onesimus the slave know Paul?" Well probably through Philemon. I don't believe anyone could have been with Philemon very long without hearing about his friend the apostle Paul who preached the Gospel, who was the apostle to the Gentiles.

But anyway; here was Onesimus the runaway slave in Rome and he came to the house where Paul was in confinement, where Paul was preaching. And he knew Paul. And I believe he came to Paul to get some help, to ask Paul if he would intercede for him, with his master Philemon.

Well anyway; Paul preached the Gospel to him. And this runaway slave, this thief, came to a knowledge of the Gospel. That's what Paul said; Paul said in **verse 10**: "*Onesimus is now my son whom I have begotten in bonds (in jail).*"

And he wrote to Philemon; he wrote him this epistle and he said to him; "I would have kept him here with me but not without your permission. So I'm sending him back to you. I'm sending

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this runaway slave, this thief, this embezzler, who has come here to Rome and heard the Gospel.”

“And God in his grace and mercy has brought him to a knowledge of Christ Jesus, changed his heart, changed his life, regenerated him, made him into a creature of Christ; I’m sending him back to you, back to Philemon, to his master, and I want you to welcome him and love him and receive him.”

Now, I want you to see this in this letter as Paul wrote to Philemon. He gave this letter to this runaway slave and said, “Take this to your master.”

Now you have it there; opened in front of you, the book of Philemon. This is the letter he wrote. And I want you to notice in this letter; I think this is the key to all of this; I want you to notice the many references in this letter, in these 25 verses, the many references to the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are 25 verses in this epistle and ten times, the apostle Paul mentions the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now here’s this apostle and he’s sending back to his friend Philemon a wealthy man, a believer, a man in whose home a church met, a godly man; he’s sending back this man who’s wronged him, who’s stolen from him, and who’s embezzled his fund.

He said, “I want you to take him back and love him and receive him and forgive him, receive him as a brother.” But all the way through this epistle Paul bases this on his love for Christ, Philemon’s love for Christ, and Onesimus’ love for Christ.

Paul bases everything he says here, every request he makes; he’s basing it on his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And the bases on which he instructs Philemon to receive this slave is because he loves Christ. And Onesimus the slave gets to be taken in as a son of God, as a brother in the Lord.

Now, my friends; who we are and what we are and what we do and our motive for what we do is because of our love for Christ. And that’s the basis on which Paul writes this letter to Philemon.

It’s like he said to the church at Ephesus; *“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you.”* He said: *“You be kind one to another. You be tenderhearted, forgiving one another.”* On what basis? Christ forgave you!

Then in **John 15:12** He was telling his disciples; *“A new commandment I give you that you love one another, (on what basis) you love one another as I loved you.”* That’s the way you are to love one another, *“As I loved you.”*

He sat down by the fire talking to the apostle Peter after Peter denied Him and led the other disciples out on a fishing trip. The Master came and appeared to them after He arose from the grave.

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He said, “*Peter, do you love me?*” He said, “Yes I do.” The Lord said, “*Feed my sheep.*” And He asked him that three times, “*Do you love me?*” Every time Peter would say, “Well Lord; you know I love you.”

And finally he said; “Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.” Well He said, “*Feed my sheep.*”

And my friend; this is the key; this is the key to this book, to understanding what Paul is saying here, is a love for Christ, our relationship with Him.

Now I want you to see that, so take the book there, **verse 1** and it starts out this way, it starts out this way and here's this letter from Paul to Philemon; he says:

“Paul; (I'm the author of this epistle) a prisoner of Jesus Christ and Timothy our brother who is with me. Timothy is with me (he shares in this letter and I'm writing) to Philemon, to my dearly beloved and fellowlabourer in the Lord.”

Now Paul starts this letter off to Philemon saying: “*I'm a prisoner* (but I'm not a prisoner of Nero. I'm not a prisoner of the Roman Empire. I'm not a prisoner of the powers of this city) *I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ.*” “I'm here because this is where my Lord wants me. I'm here because it is the will of my master.” It's like when Joseph gathered his brothers around in Egypt after he'd revealed to them who he is; he said, “I'm Joseph your brother.”

And they were frightened. They sold him into slavery. They lied about his death and mistreated him. They were the cause, humanly speaking, of all of his troubles. And he said to them; “Now don't be upset and don't be afraid. He said, “What you did to me you meant for evil but God meant it for good. I'm here because God wanted me here.”

And that's what Paul is saying, “I'm a prisoner.” Paul was there a prisoner in Rome. God led Onesimus to Rome; if Paul had not been there in prison Onesimus would have never heard the Gospel. He came to Rome and heard Paul. So Paul said, “I'm a prisoner in this house of confinement but I'm here by the will of God.”

Old bishop Samuel Rutherford was in prison in Aberdeen years ago over in England, in prison for preaching the Gospel and in a very severe lockup. And he would write to his friends and this is the way he would begin his letters; he would write, “From the Lord's palace in Aberdeen.”

In other words he regarded where he was to be where God wanted him, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

John Newton wrote:

**“Content with beholding His face
My all to His pleasure resign
No changes of seasons or place**

Would make any change in my mind

**While blessed with a sense of God's love
A palace, a toy would appear
And prisons would palaces prove
If God would dwell with me there."**

Paul said, *"I've learned in whatsoever state I am to be content."* So, when he sits down to write this letter to Philemon he said; "I'm a prisoner but not of Nero, not of Rome; I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ. And I'm writing to you my beloved brother in His name."

And then in **verse 2** he says: *"And greet our beloved Apphia; (that was Philemon's wife) and greet Archippus, (the pastor of the church) our fellowsoldier and to the church which meets in thy house (your home).*

And then he says in **verse 3**: *"Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."* "I'm a prisoner of Christ. And I pray that you might have the grace of Christ and the peace of Christ."

Those are the two most treasured possessions that Paul could wish for his brothers, grace; grace to forgive, grace to save, grace to pardon, and grace to redeem; *"For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it's the gift of God, not of works that any man should boast."*

"I pray for you from God the Father through Jesus Christ His grace and peace." Do you know anything more valuable than those two things? Do you know of anything you'd rather have than those two things, grace, *"That we might come boldly before the throne of God's grace in Christ Jesus and find mercy to help us and grace in our time of need?"* And then by His grace to have peace and joy in the heart.

Not many days ago I visited in a hospital room with a beloved friend about 80 years of age. And there was a possibility, perhaps, the doctor said; she would not survive the night. So we went down to the hospital room to visit with her and talk with her with what we thought might be our last visit together.

And as I bent over her in the bed I said, "Are you resting in Christ?" She looked at me and said, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and His righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame; I holy lean on Jesus' name." "If it's God's will for me to live I'll be happy to live. If it's God's will to take me home tonight I'll be happy to go because I have peace, peace, in me."

Let me tell you something, "Grace and peace" and do you know where it comes from, our Lord Jesus Christ? He said, *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."*

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This is what Paul is praying for, his beloved brothers. “I’ve got some matters to talk with you about but I want you to understand some things before we talk about these matters. I’m a prisoner of Jesus Christ and my prayer and hope for you is that you might have that grace and that peace that God has given me. I pray that it might be grace multiplied.”

Look at **verses 4 and 5**; Paul said, “*I thank God for you; I thank God for you Philemon.*” Oh how we thank God for faithful believers and faithful brothers and faithful supporters. He said; “*I make mention of you in my prayers.*”

Listen to this now, “*Hearing of your love and your faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus Christ and toward all His people.*” Look at those verses. “*I thank God for you. I pray for you. And I’ve heard of your love for Christ, your faith in Christ, and your love toward all the people of God.*”

Did you get that? Paul said, “*I’ve heard about you. I’ve heard about your faith and your love, (your works, and your dedication).*”

My friends; I’ve always believed that a true Christian does not need to wear a religious uniform to show he’s a Christian. I’ve always felt that a true believer didn’t need to wear a cross or a lapel pin that says, “I love Jesus” or a bumper sticker or a tee-shirt or carry a sign that says, “I’m a Christian.”

If he really is a child of God folks will hear about it. Folks will find out about it. They’ll find out about it and hear about it through his attitude or her conversation or their works. That’s what Paul says about this man; “*I’ve heard about your love for Christ. I’ve heard about your faith in Christ. I’ve heard about your love for God’s people.*”

Then in **verse 6** Paul says, “*That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*”

“Your works and kindnesses toward others; point them, not to you, but to your Lord while they acknowledge that what is in you is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Do you see that in **verse 6**?

“People acknowledge that what you are and what you give and what you do is not because you are better in your nature but because Christ lives in you and dwells in you. And the good which is in you is through Jesus Christ and your relationship with Him.”

Now look at **verses 8 and 9**; now, in these verses He tells Philemon; “I’m sending back to you Onesimus whom I have begotten in my bonds and I want you to receive him and love him and forgive him.”

Now look at **verse 8**, Paul says; “I could command you to do it. I’m an apostle.” He said later, “You owe me your life and I could command you to receive this man but I’m not going to do it.”

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Look at **verse 9**; “I rather beseech you for love’s sake because I am your friend and your brother and I’m Paul the aged and I’m the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Now what I ask you to do, you do it because you love Christ, because you love me, and because you love this dear man.”

There you have it my friend. There you have the motive for all that we do which is acceptable to God; for all that we do that’s acceptable with God. It’s for love’s sake. It’s for the sake of love.

God would accept nothing else. He’ll accept no other foundation. He’ll accept no other work, merit, no sir, if we do things for reward, no sir. If we do it out of service, no sir, duty, responsibility, restitution, tithe, whatever; do it because you love Christ.

Paul gives us that basis, “*The love of Christ restraineth thee.*” I’ll tell you it was because God loved us that He gave His Son. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His Son.*” That was the basis on which Christ came, He is the foundation of all salvation.

“*Christ having loved His own loved them to the end.*” That’s what took Him to the cross, His love for His Father, His Father’s will, and His love for His people, believers. Christ said, “*If you love me; keep my commandments,*” if you love me.

And when He sends this runaway slave back to his master he says: “Now Philemon; you receive him as you would receive me, mine own bowels, mine own innermost being; you receive this young man, you love him. You receive him not only as a servant but as a brother. And you do it for one reason because you love Christ and you love His people and you love me His son.” Now that’s the basis on which you do it.

Now look at **verses 10 and 11**, Paul said; “I have forgotten him in my bonds. In times past, he was unprofitable to you; I know that. He was no count. He was worthless. He was a thief; I know that. In times past he was no count. But now it’s different; he’s profitable; not only to you but to me.” You mean a man like Onesimus, a runaway slave, a thief, could be profitable to the apostle Paul? Yes, on one basis, because of one fact, God’s in him, Christ is in him.

That’s what’s happened. How do you account for this? I’ll tell you, the grace of God. This man met the Master. He didn’t just meet the Master’s servant, Paul. He just didn’t meet the Master’s doctrine. He didn’t just meet the Master’s people; He met the Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the Gospel came into his heart and changed him and made him a new creature in Christ Jesus. Our Lord lived in his heart. And because the Lord lives in this man’s heart there will be strong evidence of His presence.

And Paul is confident. He’s sending Onesimus back to Philemon and he says; “Now here comes a man; he’s not the same. He was unprofitable, he was worthless, he was no account, but now he’s profitable to you and to me and to all God’s people. You watch him. He’ll labor in love and he’ll work in faith.”

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Now **verses 13 and 14**; Paul says, “I would have kept him here that he might help me in your place but I wouldn’t do it without your willingness. I wouldn’t do it because your benefit should not be of necessity but willingly, not of necessity.”

In other words he said, “I’m not going to keep this man here and write and tell you I’m keeping him and then you’d have to let him stay because I said to. No, I’m going to send him back to you because I don’t want any service from you except that which is willing, that which is willing.”

Oh somebody often says to me: “If you need anything, now ask me.” No, they’re not going to ask. Let it be not of necessity, not of responsibility, but willingly, willingly.

Now look at **verse 15**; I love this: Paul says “Perhaps he departed from you for a season that you should receive him forever.”

Don’t you know that morning when Philemon got up and called for Onesimus to come and do his duty and he was gone? And Philemon was upset and he began to check around the house and some money was gone and some property was gone, gold and silver was gone. And maybe some of his wife’s treasures were gone.

And his heart was just broken. Here one of his servants, one of his employees he’d had for years; maybe the man’s father worked for him too, maybe some of his brothers or sisters worked for him.

He was gone and his property was gone with him. And Philemon was heartbroken and stunned. And then Paul sent this letter. Here comes Onesimus back and he’s got this letter. And Paul said, “Remember Philemon, perhaps he left you for a season.”

It was a terrible time; it was a great trial, it was a great heartache, but God was in it all and God planned it all. “He left you for a season that you might receive him forever.” That ought to teach us not to fret over some of these temporary things in life, over these trials and sorrows in life.

I had this experience one time. One of my sons at 18 years of age finished High school, just 17, almost 18, and left home. I didn’t want him to go but he left and went to another state, he and some more boys.

And they left. They were gone a long, long, time, two, three, or four years. I don’t remember but it was a long time. I didn’t see him for a long time. And he lived a rough life there. But finally he came back home and he came back home in a repentant nature and heard the Gospel and God saved him and now he’s a pastor of a church and preaching the Gospel.

And that’s what Paul is talking about here, Onesimus left home, he left home. But God was in it all. And he went down there to Rome and he heard Paul preach the Gospel and God opened his heart to receive Christ, that he was saved and came to know the Gospel, came to love the Gospel.

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And Paul sends him back to Philemon and says; “Now you receive him for Christ’s sake, forgive him for Christ’s sake, and love him for Christ’s sake, because, perhaps, all of this; he was gone for a season, was in order that you might have him back forever, and forever, and forever.”

Do you know that’s so? “*All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose, for love’s sake.*” That’s the foundation of all that we do with which God is pleased, and which God will accept, in which He will use for His glory, for love’s sake!