

Philemon

“Paul the Peacemaker”

Jesus said it, and you’ve heard me quote it again and again, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.*” (Matt 5:9). In any given circumstance, in any given situation you and I have a choice to be one of two people, we can be peace makers, or we can be peace breakers, but the blessing lies upon whom (?)...The peacemakers.

In this letter that’s before us this morning we find Paul the Apostle in a situation whereby he becomes a peacemaker. The year, roughly 62A.D., the place; imprisoned in Rome, the circumstance; Paul meets a run away slave named Onesimus, he turns him on to Jesus Christ, encourages him to bear fruits worthy of repentance by returning to his master (a believer named Philemon there in Colossae) and along with him, Paul sends a personal letter to Philemon whom he happens to know, and know quite well.

But there’s been a breach of trust here to say the least. Onesimus has ripped Philemon off, made a run for it never to return again. Now I don’t know if you’ve ever had anything stolen from you but it can make for a real bitter spirit towards that person real quick, especially if it’s someone you’ve previously trusted.

In the Roman standard of rule, a run away slave could be punished by death. They dealt very swiftly with slaves that were in rebellion because there were some 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire and the Roman Empire was only approximately 120 million in population. So, there was always fear of a revolt.

One way they tried to keep the handle on things was to deal very swiftly and severely with those who would seek to somehow rebel. Now, I’m not certain that Philemon would’ve taken that route, but he was no doubt upset to say the least. So, here’s Paul writing a personal letter, to a personal friend, about a personal problem and he’s seeking to make peace in the situation.

Now, as for exactly how Paul and Onesimus met, we’re not sure. This was Paul’s first imprisonment and so he wasn’t down in a dark dungeon at this time. He was more or less on house arrest. He lived in a rental house and could come and go as he pleased as long as the guard would consent and go with him because he was chained to a Roman guard 24/7. He was literally under house arrest.

So it could be that he was in the market one day and as the Lord would have, he bumped into this fellow, was talking with him, and through the course of the conversation, he found out what was up. Paul developed a relationship with this guy, turned him on to Jesus and is sending him back.

Others believe that Onesimus was busted for something, (being a run away slave he was no doubt lurking in the shadows, maybe he stole a cluster of grapes and got caught) and when he was arrested, wouldn't you know that he was chained to this same guard and on the other side of him there was this other guy who was always talking about Jesus and sharing the gospel. Onesimus, receiving Jesus Christ in the process. So, as for how they met, who knows, but they met. Paul introduced Onesimus to Jesus and now he seeks to bring a peaceful resolve to this situation.

Now some people want to know why Paul didn't just come right out and condemn slavery. I believe, it's because Paul wasn't into treating symptoms, he was into dealing with the root of the problem. To the Galatians he wrote, *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ you have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Gal 3:27-28). To the Colossians (which is the same area to which this letter went) he said that you, *"have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all."* (Col 3:10-11).

In other words Jesus Christ is the remedy for the root of every symptom of moral, ethical, social and political breakdown there is, which is sin, and when Jesus becomes the Lord of your life, then He takes care of all the peripheral matters. Whatever they may be. Attacking the core and remedying the problem, which is sin. Wiersbe put it like this, "Had the early Christians begun an open crusade against slavery, they would have been crushed by the opposition, and the message of the Gospel would have become confused with a social and political program."

Paul was careful to keep the main focus on Jesus Christ and Him crucified. As Americans, we pride ourselves on freedom, yet how many millions of modern day Americans are slaves to alcohol (?)... they're not free. They're slaves to various chemicals and drug habits, and they're slaves to the almighty dollar. They think they're free, but they're deceived. They're enslaved by all kinds of snares and vices. You see, it's only in Jesus Christ that you experience true freedom no matter what you're outward circumstances may be. That's why Jesus said, *"**Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.**"* (John 8:34-36).

So we won't see arguments for or against slavery so much in this letter, (though Paul does encourage him to set Onesimus free) but what's in view is the freedom that's above every form of slavery of this world. The freedom that the human heart longs for that's only found in Jesus Christ.

We're going to outline this book like this for those of you who care to follow along with us; number one, verses 1-3, "Paul's Prison". Philemon is one of what's become known as Paul's prison Epistles, along with Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians. These are letters he penned from his cell there in Rome. Number two, verses 4-7, "Paul's Prayer". As you study the Word of God you find that the men greatly used of God were always men of prayer and with Paul that was no exception. I'm certain you could do quite an extensive study on Paul's prayer life, and find how often he mentions the fact that he's praying for someone or a group of people and what he prayed for them.

Number three, verses 8-16, "Paul's Plea". Here Paul begins to get down to the heart of the matter and why he's writing to his friend and partner in ministry, Philemon. Number four, verses 17-20, "Paul's Persuasion". As Paul seeks to persuade Philemon towards obedience, reminding Philemon of his own debt and assuring Philemon that whatever Onesimus owes him, he'll personally pay it, if it's a problem. And number five, verses 21-25, "Paul's Presumption". Here, he presumes upon Philemon to do even more than what he's requested of him

"Paul a prisoner of Christ Jesus"

Philemon (verses 1-3)... ***"(1) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and our fellow laborer, (2) to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: (3) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."***

To the Corinthian believers Paul wrote, *"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."* (1 Cor 10:31)... so that it doesn't matter whether it be word, or deed, whatever we do, we're to do to the glory of God. Paul, in his service, was a servant of Jesus Christ. He knew that as long as he lived his life in submission to Jesus, that nothing came into his life, or was allowed to come upon him, that wasn't divinely permitted by Jesus personally.

So when things happened to him, he never looked upon the circumstances from a personal perspective, but as unto the Lord, and for the Lord's sake. Now we have a tendency to personalize everything, so that when we're reproached for the cause of Christ (say someone begins to mock you, or get upset with you, as you're sharing Jesus Christ with them, or as you're sharing with someone else and they're listening in on the conversation), I have this tendency to personalize those remarks. Rather than simply realize that the animosity that they feel isn't really directed towards me, but rather the Lord that I represent, but it's important to make that distinction. Jesus said, *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* (John 15:18-19).

You remember when the people of Israel were telling Samuel that they wanted to be like the other nations and have a king rule over them (not acknowledging God as their King), but Samuel took it personally, because he was basically overseeing the nation. So he received it as a personal rejection. And so Samuel prayed, *“And the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”* (1 Sam 8:7 So often times, the reproach that we bear is the reproach of Christ. It’s important to see that.

In the early church when they were beaten and told not to preach anymore in the name of Jesus, they didn’t have a pity party and go on about why nobody liked them. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Jesus Christ. Paul talked about filling up in his body the afflictions of Christ, through the sufferings that he endured. So here Paul doesn’t identify himself as a prisoner of Rome. Rome doesn’t have the authority to hold him. Pilate told Jesus, *“Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?” ‘Jesus answered,’ “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.”* (John 19:10-11). Even so, Paul knew that nothing came into his life, but that it wasn’t allowed from above. The same is true of you. So he was not a prisoner of Rome, but of Christ Jesus, and when we realize that, it gives us the ability to endure. It’s to the glory of God.

Now Timothy was with him and known to the believers in Colosse. So he’s included here too. We see that the letter is written to Philemon (beloved and a fellow laborer, that is, concerning God’s Kingdom) Apphia, who is believed to be Philemon’s wife, and Archippus who is believed to be their son. Now it is also possible that he is the pastor, who is acting in the place of Epaphras, who is currently with Paul in Rome (according to the book of Colossians) and it’s possible that he’s both.

We see here that Philemon had some type of a home bible study going. Again the book of Colossians addresses the whole church, but this letter was more personable. (Notice Paul never draws attention to his apostleship here. It’s more of a friend to friend situation, and he’s not pulling rank). I doubt that Paul realized it would be included in the canonization of the scriptures when he wrote it, but he does say “hey” to the group that Philemon has at his house.

(verses 3-7)...” **(3) Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (4) I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, (5) hearing of your love and faith which you have toward all the saints, (6) that the sharing of your faith may become more effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. (7) For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.”**

So Paul's prison, not of Rome but of Christ Jesus. Here we have Paul's prayer, he says, (verse 4)... "I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,". Thanksgiving and prayer are consistent earmarks of the apostle's life. Here he sits in prison and he is just beaming with thanksgiving. He has reason to give thanks. (I notice that none of you are in jail today. I wonder if you've given thanks to God for anything today?)

Paul was continually in prayer. Among other things, the men that God uses are always men of prayer. Sitting in this same imprisonment, Paul told the Ephesian believers, "*I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.*" (Eph 1:15-16). To the Philippians he wrote, "*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy.*" (Phil 1:3-4), and again to the Colossians, "*We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints.*" (Col 1:3-4). All this thanksgiving, all this joy and all this prayer taking place while chained to a Roman guard. Again, what was it that gave Paul the incentive to pray for Philemon? The same thing that inspired him to pray for the Colossians and the Ephesians. After he heard of his love and faith which he had towards the Lord Jesus and all the saints. This was Philemon's testimony. This was the word on the street about him, and this is what Paul was hearing about him. What a wonderful thing.

How great it would be if what people heard about me was of my love and faith towards Jesus, and towards all the saints. Wouldn't it be great if love and faith characterized your life? Do people remark about you along these lines, or do they dance on eggshells around you for fear of setting you off? You see, what's your testimony as far as others are concerned?

Proverbs 27:21 says, "*The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man is valued by what others say of him.*" Concerning Philemon it was, "Man that guy loves the Lord, and he puts his money where his mouth is" "He demonstrates his faith towards the saints" (the saints simply being a referral to believers).

Paul is saying whenever I hear that someone is doing well, I just pray for them. All the more that they might do even better. So often we wait until people are in a rut, or are stumbling around getting ready to go off the deep end and then we say, "Man, I really need to pray for her, or for him." but I suggest to you that many of the struggles that we face, or the temptations that ensnare us, could be avoided if we prayed more for one another while things were going well.

I can't even begin to emphasize the extreme value and profit that there is in prayer, we so often emphasize service. Service is a wonderful thing, and often times an expression of our faith, but if I'm chained to a Roman guard, my service is radically restricted to say the least, but my prayers can continue to impact lives around the world. Don't think that because we're in Nigeria that your prayers for us are pointless. It's not like our prayers have a 10 mile radius and after that you're out of range. There are no bounds known by prayer. So no matter where we are or what's going on, we're to be a people of prayer.

Paul says here I mention you always in my prayers, every time I hit my knees you come up. The specific request is found in verse 6 (and I would like you to pray it for us while we are gone). (verse 6)...*"that the sharing of your faith may become more effective by the acknowledgement of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus."* His prayer for Philemon is that the sharing of his faith might become effective.

Man pray for us that the sharing of our faith might become more and more effective. That others might come to know and trust in Jesus Christ, even as we have. That we might be effective in our witness and that which God is calling us to do.

You see, what do we have but that we haven't received it. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of Lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. There is no good thing that dwells in me, but that it's not in Christ Jesus. It's Christ Jesus in me that brings about any and everything good about me or that I have to offer, and as I acknowledge that then my witness becomes more effective. Because I'm not drawing people to myself seeking to convince them that I'm really something special; but rather, I'm open about the fact that all I am is a sinner saved by grace and the only good thing about me is Christ Jesus in me. So if there's anything about me that's to be desired it's Him. By that acknowledgement, I'm pointing people to Jesus and not drawing them to myself. So acknowledge the fact that every good thing that there is about you is that which is in Christ Jesus and become effective in your witness so that it's not you that's appealing to people, but it's Jesus in you that they realize they want.

(verses 8-16)...*"(8) Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, (9) yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you- being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ- (10) I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, (11) who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. (12) I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, (13) whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. (14) But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. (15) For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, (16) no longer as a slave but more than a slave- a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord."*

So this is the heart of the matter, Paul's Plea. The word "therefore" in verse 8 ties us to verse 7, "Since you're one with the reputation of refreshing the hearts of the saints, I could command you to do what's right, but I'm not going to pull rank but rather, I'm giving you an opportunity to refresh my heart as well." Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ and, as an apostle; he had the God given authority to order an individual, as a believer, to do a particular thing. He said, "I could order you to do this, but I'm not going to do that, but rather out of love I'm going to beg you, or appeal to you." He's choosing, (if you would) the more excellent way. The way of love. Now Paul wasn't afraid to command what was right when the situation demanded that. Sometimes people won't respond to a loving appeal, but when possible Paul sought to encourage the believer through love.

Jesus said that the gentiles loved to show authority and to lord over people, but he said, "Not so among you, if you want to be great in the kingdom, then becomes the servant of all." So here's Paul, he has the authority to command, but he appeals in love. I like how he kind of tugs on the heart strings of Philemon here saying in essence, "Philemon, I'm an old man, and a prisoner in chains, and so I'm asking a favor of you in love." (verse 10)...*"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains,"*

The ASV renders this more properly in Greek by saying, "I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus" placing Onesimus' name at the end rather than at the beginning. The reason I point that out is because Onesimus' name probably incited some real anger in the household of Philemon. Even as it would in your mind if you'd opened your home to someone, they were staying with you, and then out of nowhere they ripped you off, stole some money and took off.

So Paul is careful here to wait until the last possible minute to bring up his name. Kind of cushioning the name by indicating, before he even brings him up, that there's been a change in his life, and it's been a good one. He's now my son; I've begotten him while in my chains. In other words, he's been born again. He's received Jesus Christ.

His name is Onesimus. (verse 11)...*"who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me."* Now the name Onesimus means "profitable". So Paul is sort of making a play on words here, making a pun (if you will). So every now and then, the apostle was known to throw in a cheesy joke or two when among friends. He's saying, "Hey, I know that at one time he wasn't living up to his name, but now he is."

(verse 12-14)...*"(12) I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, (13) whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. (14) But not without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary."*

You see Paul is really laying it on thick here. He's been a great benefit to me, but I'm sending him back. I wanted to keep him, because in essence, since he's yours it's like you personally ministering to me, since I'm in these chains. But I don't want to constrain you by guilt, so if you want him to minister to me, you send him yourself (he was probably on the next train back to Rome). But what I want you to see here briefly is two things; number one, in (verse 12)..." I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart,". Our new life does not relinquish us from past debts. Paul could've said, "Philemon, I know Onesimus has wronged you, but hey, he's a new creature now. Let's just let bygones be bygones and he can stay here with me forgiven and forgotten."

He didn't do that, he said, "Onesimus you've really wronged Philemon and you need to go back now and make it right. You've been forgiven in God's sight, but you need to be made right in man's sight". It's a lesson in integrity.

You see if you've wronged someone before you came to Christ, even though it's been forgiven in Christ, you need to go back and make it right with that person, or that organization, or that company. Don't just let it slide because now you're a new creation. Be a man or a woman of integrity, whose witness is real. Go back and make it right. And secondly, (verse 14) ..."But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary." Whatever you do, whatever you give, whatever good deed you may choose to avail yourself to, make sure it's voluntary, and not through guilt or compulsion that you're doing it. Because God doesn't honor you're giving out of guilt or pressure, be it time, energy, efforts, money or anything else.

From time to time I reiterate that whatever you give to this ministry, please limit it to only that which you can give with joy in your heart to the Lord, because God doesn't want anymore than that. Neither do we. Paul told the Corinthians, "*But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*" (2 Cor 9:6-7). The point is that God doesn't need your money. It's just an opportunity for you to express your love and give of yourself to Him. It's an aspect of your worship. It's your sweat and your life, and you're saying, "Here it is God, I'm giving of my very self to You."

Now do I believe in the tithe? I believe that's a great place to start, but if you can't give 2% without griping about it, than please keep it, because it does about as much good in the kingdom as it would if you flushed it down the stool. God is honoring the position of your heart. So whatever the case may be, in any aspect of your service to the Lord, your giving to the Lord, check your heart, make sure it's not by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary, out the overflow of your love for God.

(verses 15-16)...”(15) *For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever,(16) no longer as a slave but more than a slave- a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the lord.*”

Now the insinuation here is, “Philemon I want you to set him free” no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother. Paul is saying look at it like this, maybe the reason all this happened, him ripping you off, running to Rome, and getting hooked up with me was so that he might receive Jesus Christ and return to you in the true spirit of his own name. You lost him for a moment, but you’ve gained him for eternity. Rom 8:28...”*And we know all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.*” God’s taken that which was meant to do harm and used it for His purposes and His glory.

(verses 17-20)...”(17) *If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. (18) But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account. (19) I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay- not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. (20) Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.*”

Remember in verse 7 Paul said, “We’re overjoyed at how you refresh the hearts of the saints” and here he’s saying, “Now refresh my heart in the Lord by receiving back Onesimus.” There’s no where near enough time to even sort of exhaust this, but this is a beautiful picture here of what’s known as the doctrine of imputation. Paul acting as a type of Christ here in that, he’s taking upon himself the guilt and wrong of another, and giving to him in his place a good and upright standing.

Onesimus’ guilt is being imputed to Paul, and Paul’s integrity is being accredited to Onesimus. We see here Paul’s personal persuasion, “If you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. If he’s wronged you put it on my account. I’ll personally repay it on his behalf, but I won’t bring up the fact that you owe me a great deal your own self.” Evidently Paul led Philemon to Christ. How could you ever repay someone for that? But Paul is here standing in the gap for Onesimus, the innocent on the behalf of the guilty. He’s interceding for him.

The bible says concerning Jesus, “*He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*” (Heb 7:25) He stands in the gap for you, and says, in essence, “Father, I know that Jeff has wronged You. I know he’s ripped You off. He’s taken that which You’ve blessed him with and used it for his own purposes. He’s spent time running from you, and has balance due that he could never repay. But if you count Me as a partner, receive him as You would Me; place his wrong on My account. I’ve paid it in full.”

We're all Onesimus, but God laid on the Lord the iniquities of us all. Jesus intercedes for you, and then He turns to you, and to me and says, "Jeff, you know that guy or that gal who's wronged you, who's stacked up debt in how they've treated you? If you count Me as a Friend, and as a partner; then receive them as you would Me. Place their wrong on My account. I've paid for it in full. You don't need to make them pay, I've already paid."

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Eph 4:32) "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." (Col 3:12-13)

(verses 21-25)... (21) Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say, (22) But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you. (23) Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, (24) as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. (25) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

Paul's presumption; I've asked a great favor of you, but I know you're going to do even more, and by the way I'll be checking in on you soon. Paul knew that he was praying for him and he says, "Philemon, I'm an old man, in chains, out of love I make request. Now, I could command it but I won't. And remember how much you owe me, but I won't bring that up. Put Onesimus' debt on my account. Forgive him and I'll pay you back. I know you're going to do what I ask and more, and I'll be there to make sure of it soon. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

If you're here today and you don't know Jesus Christ then you should know that He stands willing to receive your debt, and impart to you His righteousness. He was crucified for our transgressions and raised for our justification. He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. You don't need to bear the weight of guilt any longer. Jesus already has, and if you'll receive Him, and repent of your sin, turn from sin unto God, then though your red like crimson, you'll be washed white as snow, brand new in Jesus.