

## 20220626 Philemon – The Transformative Power of Jesus Christ

*<sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, <sup>2</sup> to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

### **Philemon's Love and Faith**

*<sup>4</sup> I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, <sup>6</sup> that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. <sup>7</sup> For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.*

### **The Plea for Onesimus**

*<sup>8</sup> Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, <sup>9</sup> 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—<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, <sup>11</sup> who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.*

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

*<sup>15</sup> For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, <sup>16</sup> 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.*

### **Philemon's Obedience Encouraged**

*<sup>17</sup> If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. <sup>18</sup> But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.*

*<sup>21</sup> Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. <sup>22</sup> But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.*

### **Farewell**

<sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, <sup>24</sup> as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.

<sup>25</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.



If you have walked for long with the Lord and walked in obedience, you have had those times when you've just had to do what God called you to, even if it's been a little uncomfortable. Recently, I was looking on the Grimes County Facebook page, and a lady was on there, ranting and raving about how bad a local business was. Many people jumped in to defend the local guy because if you've lived in a small community for a while, you've learned that most people here are doing the best that they can do. Sometimes people will move here from a large metropolitan area with all kinds of goods and services, and they'll become frustrated and tell the world, "Well, people never did this kind of thing in such and such a place where we used to live."

They forget that the thing they hated about "such and such a place" was that it was impersonal, had no charm, and was not a lovely place in which to live or raise a family.

The next day, the same lady appeared back on Facebook. She said that she was sorry for what she had said. She openly said that as a Christian, she is expected to do better than that and have a better attitude. She apologized to everyone in Facebook land for acting in such an unchristian manner. I wrote her a private message and told her that I was a local pastor, and I was impressed that she had let the Holy Spirit take control of the situation; and I assured her that sometimes it is hard for us as believers to step back and not push ourselves and our rights. I told her that what she had done was a hard thing to do, but it was the right thing to do, and it was a beautiful thing to do. Setting things right is often challenging, but it is part of what we do as Christ-followers.

Paul was writing this letter we are studying today to a man named Philemon. He was a believer in a house church in Colossae. Philemon owned a slave named Onesimus. Paul had brought Philemon and his family to Jesus and helped them get a little home church going. After that time, Rome took Paul into captivity. Onesimus had escaped Philemon's household and ended up in Rome. Paul shared the gospel with Onesimus, and now Paul was writing a letter to Philemon asking him to take back Onesimus without hurting him or bringing charges against him. When we come to Christ, we often have to go back and make amends concerning situations that happened before we came to know the Lord. The Christian life is a life of reconciliation. This means it sometimes involves righting wrong relationships. Paul was telling Philemon and Onesimus how to right what had gone wrong in their relationship.



Some of our members know this well as they deal with the legal system. They have come to Jesus, but they still have to deal with things from their past. These things don't go away. I heard a guy in a movie talking about coming to the Lord and having all of his sins washed away. He told his partner in crime, "I've been saved. I've been redeemed. All my sins are washed away; even that Piggly

Wiggly I knocked off in Yazoo City." The friend answered, "Well, the Lord may have washed away all of your sins, but the State of Mississippi may not be so forgiving."

We often have to deal with problems from our past, and that is what is going on in this letter. The slave Onesimus has now become a brother in Christ to the man from whom he ran. The relationship has changed. Jesus has worked a transformative work in the master and the slave. They are now brothers in Christ. Given all the laws and circumstances of that day, Onesimus decided to return to his master, Philemon, and Paul was helping Philemon and Onesimus to enter into a new kind of relationship with one another. This letter demonstrates the power of God to reform us and reshape us.

V.1 Paul was a prisoner of Rome, but he didn't consider himself a victim. Notice that he knew that God was sovereign in his life, and he felt that being in prison was now part of his ministry. Even in chains in Rome, he did not call himself a "prisoner of Rome" but rather a "prisoner of Jesus." He counted it as a joy to serve the Lord wherever he was and continued serving him. This reminds me of one of our men recently incarcerated for running from the jurisdiction where he was on parole.

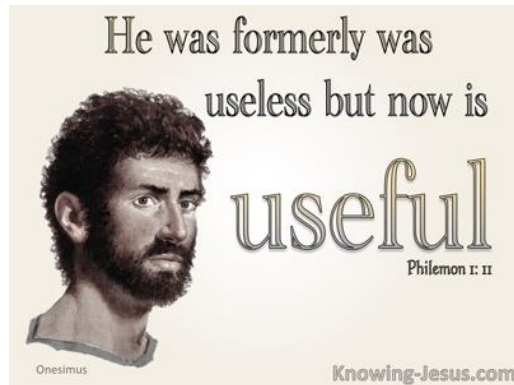
His life has been transformed since he came to Jesus, so he has continued his Christian journey even when he had to surrender himself to captivity. He has brought three other men to a saving knowledge of Jesus while in jail.

V.2 Paul then greets other members of that little house church. Many scholars think Apphia was Philemon's wife and Archippus was Philemon's son. They had a home church. In reading this, I remembered the early days in 2004 when many of us met over at McMullen Ranch in the living room of our home. Pastor Michael preached every third week, and Scott T and Diana often came. Scott baptized their son Matthew in the swimming pool. God was ministering to us then, but he was also equipping us to serve together at the Grove where we now find ourselves. When we met in our home, we talked about how we ARE the Church. We need always to remember that WE ARE the church.

The CHURCH is not the building in which we meet.

V.3 Paul extends grace and peace to Philemon. As Pastor Larry often emphasizes, the word order of God's Word is essential. The word order reminds us that we must experience God's grace before we can honestly know peace.

V.4-7 Paul then lets Philemon know that he continues to thank God for his kindness which is known by how he loves people. All know of his love for Jesus and the believers there in Colossae. Philemon's faith has been infectious. It has permeated into the hearts of all of the believers in Colossae. The text describes Philemon as one who has "refreshed the hearts" of the saints with his great joy and love. Philemon is the kind of believer we should all desire to be.



V.8-11 Paul starts with the word "Therefore." The term "therefore" is always a cue of what the last words are "there for." Paul is telling Philemon all that is right in his life, and he will now appeal to him to live up to his spiritual reputation. And Paul says that even though he is of higher rank in the Lord, that is not the basis of his appeal. In other words, Paul is not pulling rank.

He says that he prefers to make his appeal for Onesimus out of love instead of strong-arming Philemon. Any of us who have children know how sweeter it is when a child acts obediently and in love instead of being coerced into doing something. It is sort of like that with the Lord and us. Our true motivation to walk in obedience should be out of our deep-felt love for Him, not because we're scared of Him or something. Paul explains that he is now old in the faith. He explains that he is a prisoner of Jesus, but even while in chains, he has brought Onesimus to Jesus. And now, instead of being a bother, Onesimus has been transformed into a person of profit to Paul and Philemon.

It's incredible that Onesimus' name means "profitable" or "helpful." He has become both to Paul.

V.12-14 Paul says, "I'm sending him back, and it's like I am sending my own heart." He doesn't want to send him back because Onesimus has become SUCH A BLESSING TO PAUL. But Paul knows that under Roman Law, Onesimus belongs to Philemon. The Romans always feared a slave uprising. There were over 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire, and the penalty for runaway slaves was severe, often even the sentence of death. Both Paul and Onesimus knew that going home could be deadly, but they had to do the right thing. As I began this teaching, I was clear that we often have to settle up with our past even when we have become believers. Larry and I were talking to one of our men who is on parole, and Larry beautifully explained that this person might have a "rap sheet" here on earth, but in heaven, the only thing his "rap sheet" says is "RIGHTEOUS BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS." Paul's telling him, "I don't want you to feel pressured to take Onesimus back without punishment because you feel compelled to do it, but because it is what you want to do.

V.15-16 Paul conjectures that maybe God ordained it that Onesimus left Philemon "for a while" so that they might be brothers for eternity. Paul says that their relationship has been transformed from a slave-master relationship to one of brotherhood. He says you and I are now both Onesimus' brothers, both as it were in the flesh (like real brothers born in the same family) and like brothers in the family of God. Paul was trying to get Philemon to see things from a bigger perspective, from God's perspective.

V.17-20 Paul then says that "since we're partners" *κοινωνόν* (*koinonon*) in the Lord, receive him back just like you would receive me if I were to arrive at your house. Paul goes a step further in saying that if there is anything that Onesimus owes Philemon financially, "it's on me." Paul says, "I'll take care of it." Paul repeats himself, saying, "Philemon, I mean it, and it's me writing this letter." Paul then throws in a little understated Jewish sarcasm and says, "And by the way, I won't mention while you're thinking through whether Onesimus owes you anything that you

owe me your very life!" He says, "do this great good deed, and you'll refresh my own heart more than you can imagine."

Verse 21-22 Paul says, "I know you're going to do the right thing. You'll go above and beyond what I'm asking for in this letter."

Paul thinks he'll soon be released, so he tells Philemon to get a room ready for a visit.

Verse 23-25 Paul then bids his farewell and gives greetings from other believers with him there in Rome: Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demus, and Luke.

I always like to ask the question: "Why did God put this in the Bible?" What can we learn from this? It's always good to focus on what God is trying to teach us instead of trying to shoe-horn what we believe into a particular scripture. At the time of the American Civil War, many pastors attempted to use this book to say that slavery was okay, or Paul would have spoken out against it. This book is not a commentary on the institution of slavery. It is a commentary on the transformative power of God. It is the power that can reconcile us through all wrongs. It is the power to change our relationships with one another completely.

The love of Christ is so compelling and powerful that it overshadows EVERYTHING ELSE in our relationships with others. This is more transformative than any social construct that has ever existed. When we think of "social constructs," I am referring to all those things that end in **-ism** like communism, socialism, capitalism, Marxism, wokeism, or any other dialectical pursuit.

The POWER OF GOD IS THE ONLY THING THAT CAN SET THE CAPTIVE FREE. Imagine the revolutionary nature of things when the gospel came, and the person who might be your household slave on Monday through Saturday might be your pastor on Sunday. There is nothing that transforms like Jesus. There is nothing that reconciles relationships like the love of Christ. There is nothing that heals racial tension like the love of God poured into the hearts of man to overflowing.

The Book of Philemon tells us that when the faith of God enters us for real, it makes a long eighteen-inch journey from our minds into our hearts, and it works its way from our hearts into the thoughts and deeds of every true believer. Won't you sing with me,

Everyone needs compassion  
A love that's never failing; let mercy fall on me  
Everyone needs forgiveness  
The kindness of a Savior, the Hope of nations.

Savior, He can move the mountains  
My God is mighty to save.  
He is mighty to save.  
Forever, author of Salvation  
He rose and conquered the grave.  
Jesus conquered the grave.

Let us pray.