

Philemon

An introduction to the letter · transcript

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INTRODUCING PHILEMON

If you open your Bibles with me to Philemon, I will probably say chapter 1 time and time again. There is only one chapter, but hopefully we're on the same page about that. Philemon is the one and only chapter. There are 25 verses.

I want to read the entire epistle with you, at least at the outset here. And then we will take it in chunks. This is just going to be an introduction to Philemon. I like to take a lesson when starting a book to give you some context. And so we'll get a nice overview of this epistle.

If this isn't a familiar letter of Paul's, I hope by the time we're done with it, you're very familiar with it, and that you see really this is the life of Christ being lived out amongst Paul, someone who was a laborer in the ministry with Paul, Philemon, a church at Colossae, and of course a slave, Onesimus, who was once an unbeliever and becomes a believer. And it is the grace of God, the life of Jesus Christ working in all these people to produce a testimony of God's grace that is still echoing on throughout history through this letter.

Uh, it is again brief, but there's so much here, and um, so again we're gonna, we're gonna introduce it, um, in this lesson, and then a few weeks in January we'll be picking it back up. So let's read the whole letter together. We'll have a word of prayer and then begin to introduce it. Philemon, verse one.

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy, our brother, unto Philemon, our dearly beloved and fellow laborer, and to our beloved Apphia and Archippus, our fellow soldier, 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, that 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 forever. 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. I, Paul, have written it with mine own hand. I will repay it, albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. Yea, brother.

Let me have joy of thee in the Lord. Refresh my bowels in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience, I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

But withal, prepare me also a lodging, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. There salute thee, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow laborers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Father, we're thankful for this time to examine Your Word and to look at this wonderful letter, this very intimate, personal letter that Paul writes to a fellow laborer in the Lord, one in whom he had confidence in. And I pray that all the things in which Paul speaks of Philemon, and that he calls him to, he seeks to beseech him, and for love's sake do so, by Your grace, that we would learn from these things, and that we too could have a love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints.

And that the communication of our faith would become effectual of the acknowledging of every good thing which is in us, is in Christ Jesus. And so, Father,

may we start to understand, if we don't, this wonderful letter. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

THE STORY IN BRIEF

Hopefully, just through reading it, you get a sense of what is going on here. Again, we'll dig into details here, but let me just give it to you briefly.

Onesimus was a slave, a servant of Philemon, who ran away, escaped, punishable by Roman law to death, and it is inferred and implied that not only did he escape, but that he probably stole from Philemon as well. He, like many other slaves that escaped, fled to Rome to hide under the coverage of the empire, to seek refuge in hiding, if you will, comes across the Apostle Paul, who is in prison, gets saved just as much as Philemon got saved through Paul's ministry, then knows that Onesimus has fled his friend Philemon and says, you need to go back. You need to go back.

And he is going to hand this letter to Onesimus and to Tychicus, we'll see here in a moment, to go back to Colossae, which is where Philemon is and where Tychicus and Onesimus are from, and the letter to be an intercession and to function as the words of Paul as a mediator between Onesimus and Philemon, that this issue that is punishable by Roman law to death, no longer be an issue at all between them, and that they would be all the better for it in Jesus Christ. So there is much here that we're going to be taking a look at.

ONE OF FOUR PRISON LETTERS

I'll give you some details. This is, as we looked at, if you can recall, when we went through Philippians, this is one of four letters that Paul writes while in prison in his first major imprisonment there at Rome. Remember, he was in prison oft. You go through the book of Acts and you find him in prison many times. But by the time you get done with the book of Acts, which we'll see here in a moment, he is in prison in Rome, and that's his first major imprisonment.

And from there, he writes four letters, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, which are church letters, and then the pastoral letters, which are more intimate to specific people, Timothy, Titus, and here Philemon. Although Philemon, we don't have an indication that he is a pastor, a bishop, a, a teacher there at Colossae. We kind of throw it in there because it's intimate. It's personal, just like the two to Timothy and the one to Titus.

THE RECIPIENTS AND TYCHICUS

Philemon is the recipient of the letter. You see that here in verse 1.

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy, our brother, unto Philemon.

He is the major recipient of the letter, although the Apostle Paul refers to some others, and to our beloved Epaphia and Archippus, and to the church in thy house. So there is a more... of the audience recipient, but Philemon is the major one. Philemon is a prominent member of the church at Colossae, mostly noted because

the church is held in his house. We see that again in verse two, and to the church in thy house, referring to Philemon. So Philemon is a prominent member there at Colossae because that church is held at his home. At least the indication is, we don't know if there's many churches, but the church that's being referred to here is the one that's in his home.

Onesimus at this time, as Paul's writing, is in Rome. And again, he's brought up later on, when you get down to verse 8, Paul is moving into this main issue of why he is writing, and he's made mention, Anisimus, in verse 10, *"I beseech thee for my son Anisimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds."* And there's a lot of, there's a lot of parallelism, I don't know if that's the right word, but although I'm sure Anisimus was treated well by Philemon as a servant, as a, as a slave, he was not free. He was a slave. And yet now the Apostle Paul is not free and he's in bonds. And yet Onesimus is more free than he's ever been, not through his escape from Philemon, but because he's a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. So there's a lot of that stuff going on that we'll touch on as we go through it.

But again, Anisimus is in Rome as Paul is writing this, and he's going to travel back to Colossae with Tychicus. I've brought up Tychicus here. If you come over to Colossians 4, look at verse 7. Paul gets to the end of this letter. Colossians 4, verse 7, he says,

...all my estate shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord, whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate and comfort your hearts.

So that Tychicus is again the go-between between him and them at Colossae regarding the communication of the estate of Paul as well as the estate of the believers there at Colossae. Look at verse 9 with who Onesimus. All right, so there he is, and notice what he says of him: a faithful and beloved brother. Well, Paul depends who you ask, you know. Ask Philemon. He wouldn't say necessarily he's faithful. But in what realm, right? He's talking about now in the Lord that this has changed. And part of this faithfulness of Onesimus is his return to Philemon. And that's going to show, it's going to be a testimony of Christ working in Onesimus' life.

Verse 9, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. So again, Onesimus is one of the Colossians, okay? And um, Onesimus therefore is going back to Philemon, therefore Philemon is a Colossian as well. He says, *"they shall make known unto you all things which are done here."*

Okay, so we'll just stop there. So again, Philemon is the main recipient, a prominent member in the church because it's held in his house. And Onesimus, at the time that Paul's writing, is in Rome. He's going to travel back to Colossae with Tychicus, who all of them are Colossians. So that's just a brief introduction.

AUTHOR AND DATE: PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT

Now, let's look at the date of this briefly. And not so much the years. It's really hard for me to bring up years. I'm just not very good with that. A lot of times I just find myself taking the word of someone else. When I think about date, I want to just put it in somewhere in Scripture. That's what I'm talking about regarding date and the

author. The author, of course, is Paul, right? Paul is writing this and he's writing it while he's in prison.

Come with me and look at the prison situation of Paul. Come with me to Acts 28. Acts 28. We know of other places that maybe we're familiar with as we go through Ephesians on Sundays. Ephesians chapter 3, Paul a prisoner of the Lord. We're getting to the end of Ephesians in chapter 6. We recognize that Paul's talking about that he is an ambassador in bonds. We've seen this in Philippians chapter 1, that he is a prisoner, that some are preaching Christ of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds. So we see him in prison. But it's not as bad as his second major imprisonment that we read over in 2 Timothy that's ultimately going to lead to his death. His imprisonment at this time is just a little bit different.

Let's pick it up here in Acts 28. Look at verse 11. If you can remember, Paul's prosperous journey, as he says in Romans 1, is on a ship to Rome that ends up being shipwreck. And that's what you read in Acts. And they're going through this. They end up escaping to the island, which is called Melita, verse 1. But then down in verse 11 it says this,

And after three months we departed in a ship, and from thence we fetched a compass and came to Regium. And after one day the south wind blew and we came the next day to Ptolemy, where we found brethren and were desired to tarry with them seven days, and so we went toward (where? Rome, right?), and from thence when the brethren heard of us they came to meet us as far as Api Forum and the three taverns, whom when Paul saw he thanked God and took courage. And when we came to Rome, the centurion

Deliver the prisoners to the captain of the guard.

So it seems like the centurion was there with the prisoners this whole time, but really benefiting from Paul and the believers. But

there delivered to the captain of the guard, but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

So this is again, he's kind of on house arrest, if you will. A soldier is keeping him. Uh, he suffered to dwell by himself. Look at verse 17.

It came to pass that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together.

So he can call and have people come and visit him.

And when they were come together, he said to them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or the customs of the fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem in the hands of the Romans.

So he goes on and expounds this upon them. My point isn't to look at all that, but the situation of his imprisonment is really hired house arrest. Look at verse 23.

And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading

them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets from morning till evening.

So there's people coming and he's expounding the gospel to them from morning till evening. So they're able to approach him. He's able to teach and preach God's word in this imprisonment. Verse 24,

And some believe the things which are spoken and some believe not.

Jump down to verse 30. Verse 30 of Acts 28.

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house and received all that came in unto him.

And I would suggest to you that somehow Anisimus was one that came in unto him and he heard what Paul was preaching and expounding and persuading and he became a believer. Look at verse 31.

...preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding Him.

So, Paul writes this. He's in prison. The situation of his hired house. He can have visitors. Onesimus is one of them. And he gets saved through his preaching. Now we don't have the detail of that, so in one sense that is my surmising, but I don't think it's an evil surmising. I think it's just an educated guess that somehow

Anisimus hears the preaching and teaching of Paul. Paul can't really go out, but people are coming to him. We know that much. Someone brings them, or he comes on his own accord, or he hears it and he gets saved.

So the timing of this fits and it doesn't fit in really any of the other imprisonments. I don't want to substantiate that too much. But this is really where it fits. Acts 28 time when Paul's there at Rome in a hired house guarded by soldiers, but yet he can have visitors. He writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

THEMES

Now, some of the themes. I'm just going to kind of give them to you. But one of the themes that is important to note, and we'll take a look at this a little bit, is the church's relationship to slavery at this time. And I think it's an important thing to consider. And I think it's very helpful for our day when you're dealing with certain social issues. And so we'll talk about that.

However, the main theme is really one's identity in Christ and action through faith working by love. One's identity in Christ in action through faith working by love.

PHILEMON: LOVE AND FAITH

Come with me back to Philemon, and this is where Paul begins with Philemon the person. Of course, you have the letter here that he's writing to the person, but look at verse five. Notice what Paul brings up about Philemon, what we know of him.

He says,

Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus.

And when you have that toward the Lord Jesus, you're going to have it toward all the saints, because the Lord Jesus is going to teach you how to live and how to think about others. And that's what Philemon has, so much so that he has opened his home to host the gathering together of the saints, right?

And then he gives this long, somewhat maybe for some convoluted expression, but it's so beautiful. Verse 6,

That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

Let me put it to you in other words. What is working in Philemon... is the Lord Jesus Christ and the communication of it and the activity of it. The communication, not only the speaking of it, but the service of it, the giving of what is in Him becomes effectual and begins to influence everyone else. Now, we know that makes sense because of the next verse, verse 7. *"For we have great joy and consolation in thy love,"* which is coming from Christ in Him, *"because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee."*

So, Philemon's love refreshes the bowels of the believers there in Colossae. And where does that love ultimately come from? It is not derived within Philemon himself, but rather... Christ Jesus, and therefore every good thing that Philemon expresses is coming from the Lord Jesus Christ, and it refreshes them all. And there's a reason why Paul's bringing this. It's not only true of Philemon, but he's

going to utilize this to have Philemon abound in the same in this most difficult situation of one of his servants fleeing from him and stealing from him, that according to Roman law, you could just kill him. That's the power and the authority that a master had over his servants in the Roman Empire. And that is definitely not what is going to happen. Quite drastically different is going to be the situation.

THE MAIN THEME AND GRACE-BASED DECISIONS

So, the main theme is, is one's identity in Christ and action through faith, working by love, and therefore we have the issue of forgiveness and reconciliation being the main theme.

One of the other themes that we're going to take a look at in view of this is grace-based decision-making. If you want to know how to make decisions based upon the gospel, based upon the grace of God, look at what Paul is persuading Philemon to do. He is leading him by the gospel. He is leading him by grace. He is leading him by what is working in him, to do something that's very difficult, and to the point where I don't think it becomes very difficult for Philemon in view of what Paul says here. So the church's relationship to slavery, the main issue being grace in action, forgiveness and reconciliation, but then we'll also see the issue of decision making based upon God's grace and based upon the gospel.

BACKGROUND: PHILEMON

Let me give you a little bit more as far as the background and the setting. Look at verse 19. Just some more things here regarding Philemon himself. Says, *“I, Paul, have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it, albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.”* Now what is he saying there? Is he saying that, uh, ultimately Paul is the master and Philemon is a slave? No. He's saying that Philemon was saved, became justified, by believing the gospel through the Apostle Paul's ministry, and in that sense all that Philemon truly owned and truly had and truly possessed was, of course, ultimately due because of Jesus Christ, but in one sense is because of the Apostle Paul. And so Philemon was most likely saved through Paul's ministry, and most likely his ministry at Ephesus there nearby. Because we know that Paul never goes to Colossae. Anyways, moving forward.

We also can infer that Philemon was most likely wealthy. We see that in regards to the fact that, one, in verse two, he has the church in his house. So he most likely has probably a bigger home to host the church. But not only that, but he owned a slave. In order to own a slave, you had to be somewhat wealthy. And we know he owned the slave because of verse 11. It says, *“which in time past,”* speaking of Onesimus, *“was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.”* And then in verse 16, *“not now as a servant,”* speaking of Onesimus, *“but above a servant, a brother beloved.”* And so those are two indicators of... Philemon's wealth.

Okay, so Philemon is most likely a wealthy guy, but a very gracious man who has been impacted through believing the gospel through Paul's ministry. But it hasn't just stopped by just believing the gospel and that's it. No, he, Paul can hear of his faith and his love for Jesus Christ and for the saints. So he opens his home, and um,

the, the bowels of the saints there at Colossae are refreshed by him. So this is the picture of this individual, all due to the gospel. And I already made mention of this, but he's known for his love and faith in Christ. And such love and faith that has produced every good thing in him, which comes from Jesus Christ.

BACKGROUND: ONESIMUS

Onesimus. Just a little background regarding Onesimus. Anisimus, the name means useful. It was a common name for a slave. Something of this effect. But he was an unbeliever when he escaped. Look at verse 15.

For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever, not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved.

Indicating that now when you receive him, he's more than just a servant, he's a brother. Indicating that when he departed, he wasn't a brother beloved. And so that plays into it all. And again, he flees to Rome, which I already made mention of. Anisimus gets saved through Paul's prison ministry, just as Philemon gets saved through Paul's ministry in general. Look at verse 10.

I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.

So again, he gets saved through Paul's prison ministry. Again, Paul intercedes and mediates for Onesimus and to have him return, and that upon his return, he would

be received with forgiving arms of his master Philemon, as he sends them back with this letter.

AN OUTLINE OF THE LETTER

Now, in the time we have remaining, I want to just explain. Well, first of all, let me just give you a quick outline here. And I didn't type this up yet, so let me write it down. I broke this up into four sections. Again, I don't know if the outline is helpful to you or not. I find it helpful.

But you're going to have Philemon... 1 through 3 be the general greeting. The second part is going to be verses 4 through 7, and I just kind of titled it Philemon. And what I mean by that is you have a whole bunch of description about who Philemon is. And some of that stuff we've already looked at. And then the next major section, Philemon 8-21, the bulk of the letter, and you're going to have information about Onesimus, but you're going to have what I'm just calling Paul's intercession, intervention, you know, he's coming in between them, and he's saying the tone for how things should go. And then finally, verses 22 through 25 is just his conclusion of the letter.

Okay, so that is the, some themes, an outline, some background and setting, the overall gist and flow of what this letter is. Hopefully you could go home and know what this epistle is dealing with.

SLAVERY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Now again, just in some of our time remaining, I want to talk about this issue of slavery in the New Testament and under the New Testament. Just some facts. Slavery was widespread in the Roman Empire. Some guess that a third of the population of the entire Roman Empire, which is massive, huge, covers lands and territories and nations, right? That a third of the population were slaves. It was at this time an accepted part of life. It was an accepted part of life, almost in the sense of like how we would think about the accepted way of life as a employer, employee right now. There is a difference. I'm not trying to say that it's the same. It's, it was, it's not the same, but in one sense of the acceptance of it, right? That's kind of the gist of the acceptance of slavery at this time.

During the writing of the period of what we commonly call the New Testament, slavery really eclipsed just free labor. There was a lot going on in regards to slavery. Many of the masters began to realize that if we don't threaten our slaves, we actually get more production out of them, and started to treat slaves much better and those kind of things. Yet at the same time, you still had the authority of the master who could punish the, the servant, the slave, essentially for any cause, a complete authority over them, just like the, like the father did over his children, the master did over the slave. They could buy slaves, they could sell them, they could exchange them, they could seize them, whatever it might be.

The New Testament does not attack slavery. It just doesn't do that. That's why many Bible unbelievers or mockers and scoffers will come along and utilize this and say, see, God is for slavery. Okay, I will suggest to you in line with Scripture is that

the Bible doesn't suggest slavery, it's working in the acceptance of slavery. There's a big difference, okay?

And the reality is, is what's taught in the New Testament undermines the status quo of the master and servant. So it doesn't seek to attack slavery and seek mere social reform by insurrection and rioting, which would confuse the gospel, but rather with the gospel, it would undermine the whole system in having still masters and servants, but changing the hearts of both master and servant. So you could still have the situation of slavery amongst Christians, but it looked vastly, vastly different. Philemon being probably the best case example that we have, is that here is a man who could have killed his slave because he fled from him, and instead now he's going to embrace him, and they're going to have a relationship unlike any other master and slave, if you will.

1 CORINTHIANS 7: ABIDE IN YOUR CALLING

Come with me to some texts here regarding this, and I've gone to these before, so it might be a review, but look at 1 Corinthians chapter 7. 1 Corinthians chapter 7. If you want more on this, when we went through Masters and Servants in Ephesians 6, at the start of that chapter, I dove into this topic a little bit as well. We went back even to the Old Testament and saw, again, the norm and the standard, the acceptance of it, but God's graciousness under the law that actually provided and protected the slave.

First Corinthians chapter seven, look at, come down, if you will, to verse twenty. He's talking about marriage and divorce and reconciliation and he's addressing some things and he takes a pause because the question basically comes up, I became a

Christian, my spouse isn't a Christian, should I divorce them because I'm a Christian and they're not? And Paul steps in and says no, and then he brings up some other things in which states that you can be in, and he says just abide in it, you can stay in it. Just because you're Christian doesn't mean you have to change it, okay? And in this context, he brings up the issue of slavery, being a servant. Verse 20,

Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant?

And look what he says. He says, *"care not for it."*

The ultimate goal of the gospel isn't your freedom in this world, it's your freedom from the bondage of sin. It's man's perspective that elevates slavery in this life as greater than being a slave to sin. That's what Paul deals with in Romans 6. Now we're no longer servants to sin, we're servants of righteousness. We belong to God and we have been made free in Jesus Christ, and that freedom makes us, even if one is in bondage in this life, some of the most freest people in all the world.

But he's not against it. He's not against freedom either, right? Look what he says. He says, *"but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather."* So you can be a slave and waste it, and you can be free and waste it. If you're a slave and all your care and attention and Christian pursuit is freedom in this life, you're missing the call. And if you are free and you don't use that freedom, you miss the call. So it's not the estate of the believer in this life that is the goal of Christianity. It's the goal of Christianity to change you no matter what estate you're in.

God doesn't need to change your situation and circumstance to get His purpose done with you. In fact, He can utilize your situation and circumstance for the purpose of making you more like Jesus Christ and for saving people in your immediate environment. So I don't need to be free in order to evangelize and I don't need to be a slave in order to be evangelized. I'm just called to evangelize whether I'm free or whether I'm a slave.

How do we know that's true? Well, look at the Apostle Paul. When he's free, he's evangelizing. When he's in prison, he's got a prison ministry. How do we know? Philemon, when he's free, Onesimus, when he's a slave. Right? Or when Paul's in prison, I should say, rather. Okay? So, the issue isn't your estate. When you begin to cross over into that, that, that God must have more for me, that this must be it over here, or this must be it over here, you are entering into the health, wealth, and prosperity perspective of things, which is not biblical. It's not Pauline. It's not Christ's teaching during His earthly ministry. It's not Petrine. It's not Peter's theology either. It's nothing to New Testament writers' theology as health, wealth, and prosperity. None of it.

In fact, the Lord says, because I suffered, you're going to suffer. And Paul says that too, and Peter says that too. So whoever taught it in the New Testament recognized that there's no guaranteed that God is going to maneuver life, situation, and circumstance to give you your best life now. The way you view the best life, or the world views the best life. Rather, God says, whatever your life is, I can get my purpose accomplished with you, and you can be an ambassador for Jesus Christ. Oh, that's liberation. That's true freedom.

Now again, our flesh doesn't always view it that way, but that's a different thing. That's just renewing the mind and faithfulness and obedience. But in regards to the thought of it, the perspective, the doctrine, the teaching of it, that's liberty, that's freedom.

EPHESIANS 6: BOND OR FREE

Look at Ephesians 6. Ephesians chapter 6. As Paul writes to these believers at Ephesus, there are going to be some that are servants and some that are masters. And again, you did have a situation where there was like bond servants and they would be the ones that were a little bit more, uh, their masters didn't really treat him that well. It was a, it was a more dire situation, circumstance. Ephesians 6, verse 5,

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling and singleness of your heart, as in the Christ, not with eye service as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or what?

There it is. Whether you be bond or free, whatsoever you do, do to the glory of God. Do good will doing service, not to men, to the Lord, but you're going to do it to men. You're going to do it to your Master. And this is pleasing in God's sight. Now we know, of course, this is what the Lord did, this is what Paul did, and so we find patterns with them. And then the masters in verse 90,

Masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him.

So again, believing masters, believing servants, how are they called? This is the undermining of slavery that was accepted at the time, the undermining that comes through God's grace in the gospel. Act lovingly, graciously, gospel-like, Christ-like, God-like in your situation and circumstance so that that scenario would look vastly different than the same scenario that's in the world. That's how it undermined it. So it didn't just seek to be free and then people waste their freedom. It sought freedom within the context and the situation that existed at the time to change it, that it looked different than how the world did it.

COLOSSIANS 3: MASTERS AND SERVANTS

Come with me to Colossians, I believe it's chapter 4. Colossians chapter 4. Pick it up in chapter 3, verse 22. Colossians 3, verse 22. So again, remember, Philemon is not only a Colossian, but he is a master at Colossae. And Onesimus is a servant. So Paul writes these things to the whole church. And now you have a case scenario, case example between Philemon and Onesimus. Verse 22,

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to flesh, not with eye service as men pleasers, but in the singleness of your heart, fearing God. And whatsoever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done,

and there is no respect of persons. Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a master in heaven.

1 TIMOTHY 6: GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT

And then finally come with me to 1 Timothy 6. 1 Timothy chapter 6. Timothy. Timothy is with Paul when he writes Philemon. At least that's the indication in the opening verses there. And so he understands what's going on and he's writing to Timothy. Timothy there, when he receives this he's, he's, the, I think he's an evangelist there at Ephesus, but he's a leader there at Ephesus leading the church at Ephesus. And look what he writes here. First Timothy 6, verse 1,

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren. Rather, do them service because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

If any man teach otherwise, to that of verse 1 and 2, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is what? Proud, knowing what? Wow. You believe the gospel, and yet if you don't do these things... You don't know anything because the gospel comes in and changes the relationship between the master and servant, especially between the believing ones. Radically changes it. It's not that it did always happen, but he's saying if it didn't, he's proud and he knows nothing but doting

about questions and strives of words whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness. From such withdraw thyself.

And that's oftentimes why a master owned a slave, is for their own profit. They were wealthy and they were looking to get more wealthy. And they were looking at his gain. And that's why part of what Onesimus owed Philemon was with the escape, the loss of labor, whatever it was, along with whatever, if he did steal, what he stole, it's a huge detriment to Philemon. And Paul comes along and says, hey, whatever he owes, put it on my account. Oh yeah, and don't forget, you were saved through my ministry. The greater riches. Let the greater riches come to bear upon the temporary riches and forgive the debt. This is huge stuff, right?

And so he goes on and he talks about that those that are believers, but they're not doing these things, he says, withdraw yourself from them. Verse 6, and then he gets into this famous passage, but it's in the context of the masters and servants, particularly the masters who are looking for the profit, for the money. He says,

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

You can have that whether you're a master or a servant.

For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be there with content.

That would hit home for the servant.

But they that will be rich fall in temptation and snare into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some covet it after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

“But thou, O man of God,” again, still in the context, really, with masters and servants, *“flee these things and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love,”* the two things mentioned of Philemon. Your faith and love to the Lord Jesus Christ and to all the saints. *“Patience and meekness. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life whereunto thou art also called and has professed a good profession before many witnesses.”*

So, again, he comes along and he is telling them here what to follow and what to lay hold on to the eternal stuff instead of the temporary stuff.

BACK TO PHILEMON

I'll come back to Philemon as we end here. Hopefully that gives you a scope of slavery at the time, the view of the Scriptures in regards to it, Paul's major texts concerning it, and how it would undermine the norms and standards of the day and produce an environment that is going to be reflective of what we read in Philemon.

Let's just end with these wonderful words that again Paul writes, when he says, let's pick it up here in verse 15. Philemon 15. *“For perhaps he therefore,”* Onesimus, *“departed for a season that thou,”* Philemon, *“shouldest receive him,”* Onesimus, *“forever. Not now as a servant.”* You know what he just says there? Like this guy is

going to live under your household, but no longer. I'm telling you, what he's saying is just, it is just radical. Not now as a servant. Wait, he was a servant. My servant left, stole. Now you're telling, come back, and I provide for him, forgive the debt, and now he's not a servant? *"Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, especially 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," receive Onesimus, "as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account. My Paul have written it with mine own hand. I will repay it. Albeit, I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord. Refresh my bowels in the Lord."

Refresh, you refresh the bowels of the saints. Do this thing so I can have joy of thee in the Lord and refresh my bowels. This, if you did this, oh, what a sweet savor of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And then notice how he leaves them off. I mean, if Philemon is struggling in his flesh about this, he's going to struggle all the more. When Paul writes this in verse 21, *"having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say."* Oh man.

Now the reality of that is not a twisting of Philemon's arm. The reality is of Christ working in Philemon, that Paul knows this, he's still going to write, and he actually does have confidence in Philemon that he's going to do this. And now that he's going to do this, he's actually going to do more. So, if you struggle with forgiveness, and you struggle with reconciliation, ... Philemon. And that's what we're going to look at. Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we're thankful for this time to introduce this wonderful, short, yet so profound and such an impactful letter that Paul writes to his fellow laborer in Christ, Philemon, for a son that he had begotten in his bonds, Onesimus, to restore a relationship that was hindered not by Philemon but by Onesimus. But that is going to be reconciled because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because of the reconciliation that they all have in Christ, and therefore they can have one with another, and to put on display a heavenly conversation that although might bear in this time and on this earth master and servant is truly one above it all, brothers beloved in Jesus Christ, where there is neither bond nor free, master or servant, but one in Jesus Christ.

And so, Father, I pray that we would read and reread and read and reread this wonderful letter and give You all the thanks and praise for Your wonderful work in Christ. And that the communication of this faith that we're learning might become effectual in the acknowledging of every good thing in us in Christ Jesus. It's in His name we pray. Amen.