

Series Series: Letter to Philemon
Sermon title: The Gospel Changes Everything
Scripture reading: Philemon 1-25
Clearwater Bay International Baptist Church
November 21, 2021
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Opening Scripture reading:

[Psalm 103:8-22](#)

Opening Illustration:

Steve Saint's dad, Nate Saint was killed in Ecuador in 1956 by a group of warriors from a stone age tribe. His dad was trying to make contact with them to reach them with the gospel.

One of the men who killed Steve's dad was a warrior named Mincaye. Mincaye, although he killed Steve's dad, ended up becoming a dear friend and mentor of Steve and the grandfather of Steve's children.

How does a man who murdered your Father become your friend and mentor?

It happened because Jesus Christ saved Mincaye and changed his heart and changed Steve's heart enabling him to forgive him and see Mincaye as a brother.

You see, barriers come down in Christ.
The gospel changes relationships.
It turns murderers into mentors.

As we will see today in the book of Philemon, the
gospel turns slaves into brothers and fellow workers.

Let's pray.

Today we want to ask 2 questions:

Why is this letter to Philemon in the Bible?

What does God want us to see in it?

I. Introduction

1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved fellow worker **2** and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: **3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, **5** because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, **6** and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. **7** For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my

brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Who is this man that this letter is written to, this Philemon? What do we know about him?

He's a believer. A 'beloved fellow worker' and he has 'love and faith toward Jesus Christ and all the saints'. And Paul has 'derived much joy and comfort from [his] love' and 'the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through [him]'.

He has a church in his house.

He has a wife named Apphia and a son named Archippus.

They live in Colossae. We know this from the book of Colossians.

Philemon has a slave named Onesimus who used to work for him.

Now, in the Roman Empire there are 2 categories of people. There are people who are slaves and people who are free.

Slavery was not so much based on race or ethnicity but anyone could be a slave for various reasons;

debts that needed to be paid was one way...and almost anyone could get into slavery or out of slavery through various means.

Two common ways to become a slave were:

- As a prisoner of war
- Being born to a slave.

Now Onesimus is slave of Philemon. We don't know how he became a slave, how he was treated or anything like that.

But there are some things we know about Onesimus.

8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, **9** yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— **10** I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. **11** (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) **12** I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. **13** I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, **14** but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. **15** For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back

forever, **16** no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. **17** So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. **18** If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. **19** I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. **20** Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. **21** Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

- Onesimus was called 'useless' in **Verse 11**
- Onesimus left Philemon. He ran away. **Verse 12** says Paul is 'sending him back'. **Verse 15** says, 'he was parted from you'.
- Onesimus wronged Philemon in some way, maybe theft. **18** If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

Onesimus found Paul in jail in Rome. Did Onesimus get thrown in jail? How did he find Paul? We don't know.

What we DO know is....

- Onesimus is now a believer but was not before.
- Paul calls him 'my child' and he says he is his 'Father' in **Verse 10**, Spiritually not literally.

- **Verse 11** Paul calls him 'useful' which is what Onesimus means.
- **Verse 15** Paul says that Philemon may 'have him [Onesimus] back forever'.
- **Verse 16** Paul calls Onesimus a 'beloved brother'.
- **Verse 16** Paul also says Philemon can have Onesimus back, 'In the Lord'.
- Onesimus became a Christian while Paul is in jail.
Verse 10 'in my imprisonment'

So, Onesimus has traveled a long way and has either purposefully gone to see Paul or ran into him accidentally. We aren't sure.

That's the introduction and background.

So, why is Paul writing this personal letter to Philemon and the church in his house? What does he want?

II. Intercession

8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, **9** yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— **10** I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.

Paul implies 2 things in this 'appeal'.

1. He wants Philemon to think differently about Onesimus now that he's a believer.

Paul says that Onesimus was a bond-servant but he's now a beloved brother. **Verse 16**

He's no longer a slave but now a saint.

2. He implies that he wants Philemon to release Onesimus to serve in ministry with Paul.

Verses 12-14

12 I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. **13** I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, **14** but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.

Verse 21

21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

How has the gospel changed our relationships?

Do we see every person as either Christian brother or sister who is family or a person in need of Christ?

No matter what they've done?

Do we forgive easily?

The gospel changes everything.

It changes our relationships for sure.

Why should we welcome or receive someone as a brother or sister who has wronged us and hurt us?

Because we are all Onesimus.

III. Illustration (Gospel)

Onesimus is a slave who has wronged and ran from his master, Philemon. Paul intercedes and offers to pay the debt of Onesimus and wants him to be set free for service. Paul says, 'receive him as you receive me'.

Philemon forgives. (*Historically*)

We are slaves to sin who have wronged and ran from our true Master and Creator, the Lord God Almighty. Jesus intercedes for us and pays our debt to God and sets us free for service.

Through Christ, God receives us as he receives Christ. God forgives.

We are useless without Christ. In Christ our status is changed. We become useful for God.

Ephesians 2:8-10

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Non-Christian, are you running from God? Are you a slave to your own passions and desires? Christ Jesus can set you free! Run to him as your mediator, believe in him and he will plead your case to God and God will accept you as he accepts Jesus.

Christian...let me encourage you by closing with
2 Corinthians 5:16-21

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

Are you struggling to forgive someone?
Do you struggle to see your brothers and sisters
rightly?

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Well, one final question...

What did Philemon do?

Did he forgive and forget and reconcile and release Onesimus?

We don't know for sure. But **Ignatius of Antioch**, who lived in the 1st century and known as an Apostolic Father (one of those who knew some of the 12 Apostles) said that Onesimus became the Bishop of Ephesus.

From Bond-servant to Brother to Bishop.
From Slave to Saint to Shepherd.

Such is the work of Christ.