

Onesimus and Philemon

Series: The God of Second Chances

Bible Text(s) Used: Philemon 1:8–21; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7ⁱ; Romans 3:23–25ⁱⁱ; Romans 6:11, 23ⁱⁱⁱ; Ephesians 1:3^{iv}; Ephesians 2:6^v; 1 Peter 2:9^{vi}

Love Is the Foundation of Second Chances

Pastor Bo reminded us that God is a God of second, third, and even fourth chances because His love never runs out. In Paul's letter to Philemon, Paul could have commanded Philemon to forgive Onesimus, but instead he chose to appeal to him on the basis of love (Philemon 1:8–9). True reconciliation is never forced—it flows from love. Love, as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, keeps no record of wrongs. God does not consult our past to determine our future, and He calls us to treat others the same way.

Reflection Question: Who is someone God may be asking you to see through the lens of love rather than their past mistakes?

The Gospel Brings a Radical Upgrade

Paul urges Philemon to welcome Onesimus back not as a slave, but as a beloved brother in Christ (Philemon 1:15–16). This reflects what happens to us through the gospel. When we place our faith in Jesus, we are no longer defined by who we were. We are justified (1 Corinthians 1:30), blessed (Ephesians 1:3), seated with Christ (Ephesians 2:6), and

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called a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). God doesn't just clean us up—He makes us new. Like Onesimus, we receive a radical upgrade in Christ.

Reflection

What old label do you need to release so you can fully live in who God says you are?

Question:

Grace Pays the Debt and Restores Relationships

Paul goes even further by offering to personally repay whatever Onesimus owes Philemon (Philemon 1:18–19). This is a beautiful picture of the gospel. Our sin placed us in debt we could never repay, but Jesus paid it all for us through His sacrifice on the cross (Romans 3:23–25; Romans 6:23). God's forgiveness is not cheap—it is costly grace. Because Jesus paid our debt, we are free to extend forgiveness to others. Grace doesn't just cancel debt; it creates space for restoration.

Reflection Question: Is there someone God is asking you to forgive so restoration can begin?

Closing Thought

Pastor Bo closed with a powerful reminder: in God's kingdom, no one is too far gone. History tells us Onesimus went on to become a leader in the early church—a living testimony to God's redeeming power. May we be a church of second chances, where people are not defined by their past but welcomed into a future shaped by grace. Because of Jesus, what was once broken can be made whole again.

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ⁱ ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[a] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

ⁱⁱ ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

ⁱⁱⁱ ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

^{iv} ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

^v ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

^{vi} ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.