

Philemon: Come Home Part 2

An Appeal For Reconciliation

Philemon 1:8-14

Memory Verses: Philemon 1:9

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Last week we began our journey through one of the most heartfelt and personal letters of Paul. Unlike Paul's other New Testament letters, which are either to a local church body, for instruction on Christian living, or to one of his disciples, preparing them for ministry, this letter is a desperate plea of mercy and reconciliation to an old friend on behalf of another brother in the faith. Paul is writing to Philemon concerning his former slave, and now Paul's adopted son in the faith, Onesimus. And Paul's plea is simple... let Onesimus come home! Let him come home. Receive him home and be reconciled to one another.

Reconciliation. It's a big word. A word for us as believers that should hold prominence as it relates to community and grace. We cannot, we must not, forsake the ministry of reconciliation. Paul says this in; **2 Cor. 5:18-19**. And so last week we gave reconciliation this definition. **Reconciliation happens when broken relationships are put back together and made right.** Reconciliation is about mending relationships that have been torn apart by sin, pride, anger, greed, covetousness, or misunderstanding. It's about the gospel doing what only it can do; bringing people back together under the lordship of Christ.

Last week in **verses 1-7** we saw Paul commending Philemon on having a heart that God can use. A heart ready for reconciliation. Reconciliation doesn't begin with an accusation, but rather a connection. Once the heart is softened and prepared for reconciliation, then one can begin the process of reconciliation. That is the work of the Gospel; turning separation into restoration and brokenness into wholeness. And with that said, this week we will be looking at Paul's actual appeal to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. Let's look at that together in **verses 8-14**.

This is where it gets real. Paul knows what Onesimus did was wrong. Philemon knows what Onesimus did was wrong. They both recognize that this issue is messy. But Paul is the 13th apostle of Christ. He is one of the last remaining fathers of the Church, the Elder of elders, the prophet to the Gentiles and the missionary to the nations. In every conceivable way possible... Paul outranks Philemon. Spiritually, authoritatively, in power, in presence, in reputation, and in admiration Paul clearly has the right of way here! If Paul wanted to have things go his way he could demand it. Look again at **vs.8**. Accordingly, I could command you to do what is right. Paul has every right to demand that

Philemon receive Onesimus back home without retribution, without consequence, as a brother, and as Paul's spiritual son. But Paul doesn't do that. Look at **vs.9**. Instead Paul says that because of the love he has for Philemon, he will not command him, but rather simply appeal to him. Ask him. Invite him. And that's the theme of today's message; the posture of reconciliation.

As believers we all struggle when it comes to getting our way, especially in relationships. We demand things, we try to control things. We throw around our weight and command one another to get in line. And if we were honest we simply want to be right more than we want to be reconciled. But Paul shows us another way. When we approach broken relationships, we should do it with humility and love, not pride and pressure. Reconciliation isn't about winning an argument; it's about winning a person.

Just recently this issue became a reality to me in a personal way. I had a good friend who was going through a hard time and in my carelessness I said some things that were just rude. When my friend approached me about it, I became defensive and tried to justify my remarks. My desire to be right outweighed my desire to be reconciled and it almost caused the conversation to spiral out of control. That's when the Holy Spirit convicted me and I realized the pain I had caused my friend and all I could do was beg him for forgiveness and apologize for my words and actions. I had to let go of my pride and humble myself. And guess what, he forgave me.

God's word reminds us time and time again that reconciliation begins with humility. Look at **Philippians 2:3** and **Matthew 5:9**. The posture of a reconciled heart is **humility**; It values **people over power, love over leverage, and unity over being right**. The main point this morning is this... **Reconciliation happens when we appeal to the relationship instead of demanding our rights.**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

So the first thing we need to grasp this morning is this... **Humility Leads, Pride Pushes**. Look at **Philemon 1:8-9** again. We've already covered most of this. Paul has the authority and could command Philemon to reconcile his relationship with Onesimus. But instead he appeals to his friend for his friend out of love. **Paul is saying, I could force your hand, but I'd rather win your heart**. Notice that Paul lays down his authority. Authority isn't so you can tell people what to do. Authority is so people respect you and want to go where you lead them. Anyone who uses their authority to boss others around will ultimately lose that authority in their eyes.

Jesus himself did this. Look at **Philippians 2:5-8**. Jesus had all the authority... but laid it down for the sake of love. Jesus doesn't demand that you follow him, he simply draws you to himself because of his love.

It's what we do sometimes with parenting. Sometimes we have to

make strict demands of our kids. We say No! But sometimes we encourage them and let them figure it out on their own. The goal isn't control, its connection.

Bottom line is this.. if we are going to pursue reconciliation, we must first let go of our need to be the alpha or the one in the right. We need to humble ourselves and let love win over. **Reconciliation happens when we appeal to the relationship instead of demanding our rights.**

The next thing we need to grasp is this... **Humility Stands In The Gap**. Look at **Philemon 1:10-12** again. Paul is humbling himself to intercede for his friend and spiritual son, Onesimus. Imagine what Paul is putting on the line here. He is literally risking his friendship with Philemon so that he can be an advocate for Onesimus. He enters into the messiness of a situation, not to make it more messy, but to try to clean up the mess. And he knows that Onesimus was in the wrong... He's not excusing the sin, he is advocating for restoration.

Paul clearly loves both of these men, but he has developed a special relationship with Onesimus. Since Onesimus abandoned Philemon, he has befriended Paul and been discipled by Paul. Paul now considers Onesimus his son in the faith. It is his love for his spiritual son that causes him to stand in the gap for him.

Again, this is exactly what Jesus did and does for us on a daily basis. He is our mediator. He is the one who said to his Father, I know they messed up. I know there is a disconnect... let me try to bring you back together. **The cross is the greatest place of reconciliation of all time.** There Jesus stepped in the gap for us because he loved us.

Love for one another is what draws us to reconciliation. There are people in your life who need someone to step into the tension. Not to take sides but to bring healing. Who do you need to humble yourself for, enter into the messiness of life for, and step in the gap for?

Reconciliation happens when we appeal to the relationship instead of demanding our rights.

Lastly, we need to grasp this... **Humility Doesn't Force Peace**. Look at **Philemon 1:13-14** again. Paul honors Philemon's right for retribution or even dissolution of his relationship with Onesimus. Paul knows that Philemon has been a good master and friend to Onesimus. Paul knows that when Onesimus abandoned him it hurt Philemon greatly. Paul says... Philemon... you can do what you want in this situation. But I'd prefer it if you forgave him and welcomed him home. So I won't keep him without your consent and I won't send him home until you consent to receive him. The ball is in your court brother.

Paul would love to keep Onesimus with him. He's a good minister

and servant. He helps Paul and his ministry. But Paul knows that it would be better for him to go and make right with Philemon. So Paul says, let's do the right thing here. Let's make peace.

Look at **Romans 12:18**. We must live for peace. We must make peace. But this verse also implies that peace doesn't always depend entirely on us either. We do what we can and God does the rest.

It's like trying to force two magnets together when they are flipped the wrong way. The harder you push, the more they resist. You can't push people into peace, you can only invite them into it.

In your life maybe reconciliation hasn't happened because you've tried to force it. Paul models peace and patience and a trust in the Lord to do the rest. Sometimes the godliest thing you can do is release control and let God move. **You can't force people into peace, you can only invite them into it.**

Application

Paul's letter teaches us that reconciliation isn't a formula but a posture. It's the posture of humility and patience. It's the willingness to love when you could command. It's the ability to refrain from pushing too hard. It's the ability to step in the gap and also trust in the Lord's working. That's the heart of Christ. That's the posture of reconciliation. So, we need to do three things here. We need to check our posture. Are we leading with love or pride? We need to identify gaps in relationships. Is there a relationship where you could stand in and help bring peace. We need to release control. Let God do his thing and change hearts the only way he can.

Conclusion

There's a story of a father and son in Spain who had a deep falling out. The son ran away, and the father searched for him for months. Finally, in desperation, the father took out an ad in the newspaper. It read, "Dear Paco, met me in front of the newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. - Your Father. That Saturday, over 800 men named Paco showed up, hoping to be reconciled with their fathers.

There's a hunger for reconciliation. In our homes, friendships, and in our churches. And that's what the Gospel offers. Jesus humbled himself and let down his authority for love. Jesus stood in the gap for us on the cross. He didn't force us into a peace with God... he invited us into it through love. So let's be the same! Let's carry on the ministry of reconciliation with hearts that God can use and postures of humility.