

Runaway Grace – A Series in Philemon

The Priorities of Grace

Philemon 1:1-25

We are in a series from the book of Philemon that is all about GRACE! Our working definition: **GRACE: God's Riches At Christ's Expense.**

"My grace is sufficient for you..." **2 Corinthians 12:9b**

"That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." **2 Cor 5:19, 21**

"Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and all the saints, 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. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you. Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you – I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus – I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. 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, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 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. So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it – to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." **Philemon 1:1-25**

Main Idea: Grace Rearranges our Priorities to Line Up with God

I. Grace Puts God First

- **Paul:** His living situation proves that his 1st priority was God!

"Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus...now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus... my imprisonment for the gospel." **Philemon 1:1, 9 & 13**

- **Philemon:** He was commended for his love and devotion to God.

"I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, 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." **Philemon 1:5-6**

- **Onesimus:** Free from his slavery, enjoying what he had stolen, but..

"I am sending him back to you..." **Philemon 1:12a**

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." **Matthew 6:33**

"I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other..." **Isaiah 42:8a**

The entire world and God Himself exist to glorify God. This places God squarely at the top of every single wise person's priority list. Amen?

II. Grace Puts Others Next

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **Matthew 22:36-39**

- **Paul:** Remembered, prayed for & rejoiced with others! Other's success in the faith was his own success in the faith!

"I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, 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. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you." **Philemon 1:4-7**

"I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart." **Philemon 1:12**

"If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it – to say nothing of your owing me even your own self." **Philemon 1:18-19**

- **Philemon:** He gave up his legal right to be comfortable & financially stable in order to embrace God's priorities of others!

"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. So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me." **Philemon 1:16**

- **Onesimus:** Formerly a runaway, thieving servant. Yet now, he has proven himself useful in ministry on multiple fronts!

"Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me." **Philemon 1:11**

It is one thing to claim to love God and love people, it's another thing to show evidence of it in daily life! Priorities of Grace should control us!

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." **Philippians 2:3**

III. Grace Puts Self Last

- **Paul:** Denied himself the support and fellowship of Onesimus.

"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!" **Philemon 1:13**

- **Philemon:** Did he do what Paul asked? Yes! Otherwise, how did the private & personal letter make it into the canon?

"Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say." **Philemon 1:21**

- **Onesimus:** HE WENT BACK!!! Accepted the consequences, shame and potential embarrassment typically associated with his crime.

“But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.” Romans 2:8

Onesimus was a runaway slave and thief who became a leader in the church in Ephesus (Ignatius references him). Philemon was using others to build his own kingdom yet became a radically generous man dedicated to building God’s kingdom at great sacrifice to himself. Their priorities changed!

What Happened to Philemon & Onesimus: Grace!

To the Unbeliever: What changed Onesimus? He became a recipient of Grace. That can happen for you as you receive God’s grace made possible in Christ!

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

John 1:17

To the Believer: The Church needs more Philemons, people ready to stop building their own kingdoms and begin leveraging sacrificial generosity to build God’s kingdom. The pathway forward is not a guilt trip or a capital campaign...but a renewed appreciation for God’s grace!

Main Idea: Grace Rearranges our Priorities to Line Up with God

Sources and Further Reading Opportunities

- *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations* – P.L. Tan (1996)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* – Craig Keener (1993)
- *Faithlife Study Bible* – J.D. Barry (2016)
- *Word Pictures in the New Testament* – A.T. Robertson (1933)
- *Saint Crystostom: Homilies* – P. Shaff (1889)
- *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon (Vol. 32)* – Richard R. Melick (1991)
- *Philemon* – John MacArthur (1992)
- *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* – P.W. Comfort & B.B Barton (1995)
- *1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* – K. Larson (2000)
- *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* – J.B. Lightfoot (1886)
- *Fullness & Freedom* – R.C. Lucas (1980)
- *An Exposition of the New Testament* – J. Gill (1809)
- *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations* – Tony Evans (2009)
- *From Ruthless to Generous and Enslaved to Empowered* – J.D. Greear (2015)