

I. Intro

A. Text: **Philemon 1 (NASB)**

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

Philemon's Love and Faith

⁴ I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; ⁶ and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. ⁷ For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. ⁸ Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, ⁹ yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

Plea for Onesimus, a Free Man

¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, ¹¹ who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. ¹² I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, ¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴ but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. ¹⁵ For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ¹⁷ If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. ¹⁸ But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). ²⁰ Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Having

confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.²² At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,²⁴ as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Phil. 1:1-25 - NASB)

B. Recap

1. **Week 1:** The Root of Offense
 - a. Offense toward others is a misdirected offense toward God.
2. **Week 2:** The Dangers of Offense
 - a. Agenda of Enemy: Destruction
 - b. Strategy: Division
 - c. Tactic: Offense
 - d. Solution: Let It Go!
3. **Week 3:** What to do when Offense Appears.
 - a. Forgive (Let It Go) on the front end.
 - b. Reconciliation requires Relentless Pursuit.
 - i. Pursue
 - ii. Pursue Some More
 - iii. Pursue Even More
4. **Week 4:** What To Do When The Offended Involves You (3rd party)?

II. Philemon: The letter the Apostle Paul wrote to a man named Philemon about a man named Onesimus.

- A. Onesimus (along with Paul and Philemon) was the major character in the letter. Onesimus was probably offended at Philemon.
 1. Philemon had a great reputation in the community.
 - a. He was a believer who had a reputation for serving the body of Christ.
 - b. He was probably wealthy, so he had the resources to be a financial blessing.
 - c. He hosted a church that was operating out of his house.
 2. But Philemon had a lifestyle that was completely unacceptable, although common in his time.

- a. Philemon was the proud title/deed owner of another man named Onesimus.
- b. That's enough to cause anyone to stumble and trip (Photo).
- c. The text doesn't say that Onesimus was offended, but it's easy to see the implications.

3. Onesimus ran away from Philemon and encountered Paul while Paul was in a Roman prison.

- a. He came to the Lord under the discipling of Paul.
- b. And in the course of telling Paul his story, Paul realized that his new disciple (and son in the gospel) was in a dangerous place that the enemy could possibly use to trip him up:
 - i. Onesimus was now a believer who was offended at another believer and he didn't quite know how to handle it.

4. Remember: The enemy's strategy for destruction is division.

- a. If he can get multiple people offended, then he can divide the house and destroy all.
- b. **Prov. 6:16-19: These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:** ¹⁷ A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, ¹⁹ A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

B. Family Dynamics

- 1. I wonder if Onesimus really appreciated the fact that when he talked about his master to Paul, he was talking about family.
 - a. Difficult to talk bad about my family
- 2. As you come to me about my brother or sister, I'm filtering what you're saying by what Jesus instructed us to do.

- a. **Matt. 18:15-18**: *If you have an ought against your brother, go to him alone.*
 - i. Fix it.
 - ii. Pursue Him/ Her... alone.
 - iii. Win your brother/ sister
- 3. Paul ministered to Onesimus. He listened. Paul prayed with him, instructed him, imparted into him.
 - a. But ultimately, Paul sent Onesimus back to get the relationship right.

- C. If someone comes to you with an offense against a brother/ sister...
No matter how uncomfortable it is, send them back.
 - 1. Not only did Paul send Onesimus back, but Paul sent him back with a template for a successful reconciliation.
 - 2. Paul getting involved might have been a little risky, but God called us to risky business.
 - a. **Matt. 5:9**: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.*
 - i. Peace making is risky business.
 - ii. It takes incredible courage and tenacity to make peace where there was none.
 - b. **Matt. 11:12**: *... From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violence take it by force.*

D. Help Set an Atmosphere of Grace and Love (**Philemon 1:1-9**)

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

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the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. ⁷ For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. ⁸ Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, ⁹ yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— (Phil. 1:1-9)

1. To the brothers and sisters: The church that meets in your home.
 - a. Grace and peace to you (v.1-3)
2. I hear of your faith toward Jesus and your love for the people. (v. 4-5)
 - a. The hearts of the saints are refreshed by you. (v. 7)
3. Instead of a tone based on authority with commands and rebukes, I appeal to you for the sake of love (v. 8)
 - a. You are my beloved.
4. You are my beloved, but this one is too.

¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, (Philemon 1:10)

- a. This is family
 - i. I walked him into the Kingdom.
 - ii. I discipled him with the word of God.

¹² I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, ¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴ but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. (Philemon 1:12-14)

- b. He was growing in the things of God.
 - i. He was beginning to minister to me (v. 13)

- ii. It'd be convenient not to ruffle any feathers, but I didn't want to exclude you from the blessing wrapped in his ministry (**v. 14**)
- c. Because of offense, I'm sending him back.
 - i. But be gentle with my folks.

E. Consider that The Offense Might Be Mutual

¹⁷ If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. ¹⁸ But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). (Philem. 1:17-19)

- 1. Philemon was probably just as offended as Onesimus.
 - a. Philemon probably paid good money for Onesimus.
 - b. He expected a certain amount of labor for his investment.
- 2. Paul was wise enough to see that in Philemon's eyes, he was probably the one who was wronged.
- 3. Paul's Loving Instruction: Just let it go!
 - a. Paul is saying the same thing that Jesus said in the parable of the unforgiving servant. (Matt. 18:21-35)

III. Conclusion: God wants to change the game!

- A. Book contains a huge play on words that was prophetic.
 - 1. Philemon was being called to a higher place than what he was currently occupying.

Philemon: *one who kisses, lover of the brothers. Derived from the root word "Phileo" (which means brotherly love).*

- a. You are operating on a carnal level of lovelessness, but I call you to a higher level of love.
- 2. Onesimus was also being called to a higher place than what he had occupied in the past.

¹⁰ *I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,* ¹¹ *who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.*

- a. Onesimus used to be viewed as useless, good for nothing.
- b. But God used Paul to highlight who God called him to be in the first place.
 - i. I'm sending back the one who was once useless, to be useful and bless your life.

Onesimus: profitable or useful

B. **Question:** How can we see a relationship of love and profitableness if you're sending Onesimus back?

- 1. Onesimus was a slave. You're sending him back to bondage, slavery, oppression?
 - a. Legally, as a runaway slave, Onesimus faced the possible penalty of severe beatings, imprisonment or death.
- 2. Sending a slave back for the sake of "right" was cruel.

¹⁵ *"You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you.* ¹⁶ *He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him.* (**Duet. 23:15-16**)

- 3. Paul's purpose for sending wasn't for legalistic bondage. When Jesus steps in, he tends to change everything!

¹⁵ *For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,* ¹⁶ *no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.* (**Philemon 1:15-16 - NASB**)

- a. I'm not trying to send you back into slavery.
 - i. I'm trying to free you from the bondage the enemy has trapped you in.