

The Treasure Which is the Church, p. 1

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Bible Text: Philemon 1:4-6
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Philemon. We will look at verses 4 through 6 this morning as Paul is writing from a prison hut, as such, that surrounds the Imperial Palace of Rome. Nero is the Emperor and Paul has been arrested for preaching the Gospel and as the apostle has already made very clear, "Rome may have put me here but it's really Christ who has imprisoned me. My Lord is behind everything that is happening in my life," is what Paul is saying. He has a purpose for this and from that hovel, that little prison shack, he is chained to a praetorian guardsman, he dictates, he is no longer able to write due to his health but he dictates to his faithful companion, Luke, the beloved physician, and Luke is writing these words that later become the letter to Philemon. And we look today at verses 4 through 6 and I have entitled this "The Treasure that is the Church." The treasure that is the church.

Paul continues to write, beginning in verse 4,

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.

Let me just say up front that, my, did I wrestle with this text this week. It literally got me into a headlock and threw me on the floor. It was just difficult to wrestle through but I believe I have what God would have us to know and understand this morning, just two main points.

Now before I get to those, let me say this: God is about a stupendous work. God is doing a wonderful wonderful thing in the earth. It's a treasure and you and I get to be a part of it and we get to enjoy it. This great wonder, this great stupendous work, this great treasure, is his church and for us in time and space history, it's the local church. It's a great great treasure. God has ordained that he will save his church.

He calls us the called out ones, ekklesia, the word we translate in the English as "church" literally means "called out." You are called out of other sections of other groups of other belongings and now your primary, the foundational entity you belong to now is your local church.

He not only saves his church, he is in the business of structuring his church. He didn't just say, "I'm going to throw you all together now and in all your local churches, just kind of what feels best, that's what I want y'all to do together." No, he doesn't. He has elders he has ordained to oversee and lead the church, feed, protect the church. He has men in the office of deacon who take care of special physical needs or everyday needs. We have good deacons who take care of those things that may sometimes get too big for the small group to care for. He has given every member of the church spiritual gifts so that you can be organized according to your giftedness and then you can minister one to another. The Old Testament and the New Testament gives us the concept of small groups. We call it every member ministry through small groups, where you can get in a small enough unit, if you will, where everybody can use their gifts and be a part of evangelizing the lost, encouraging one another, and meeting one another's needs. I've been so thankful for that ministry in the last few weeks. It seems like every day my phone lights up or the office gets another call of another heartache, another crisis, another difficult situation, but I can sit back knowing that though the staff is limited, the body is caring for each other.

He has given us clear ideas that we are to be going to the end of the earth. He has given the church the principles from the word of God that we are to be a personalized, strategic, or to have a personalized strategic involvement in world missions. Then he gives us the hub of the wheel of the structure, congregational worship centered on, founded on the preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit. So we've developed these biblical strategy statements to live out the strategy, the structure God gives his church. Every member ministry through small groups, personalized strategic world missions, and congregational worship centered on the preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit, all to the end that we might fulfill the overall biblical purpose that we might be to the glory of God, making and equipping disciples of all the peoples powered by his Spirit.

So we have all this structure. We don't have the right to structure the church our way. It's his church. He saves his church, he gives the structure for his church to function by, and then he sanctifies his church, and that's part of what Paul is doing here as he writes to Philemon. He's using this experience of Paul welcoming Onesimus, rather Philemon welcoming Onesimus back no longer as a runaway slave that needs to be punished, but as a brother, a joint heir of Jesus Christ. So they are being sanctified. They are growing to learn what all of this means. And hopefully Grace Life Church, I know certainly I can say in the last decade or two, my, how God has had to grow me and mature me and hopefully sanctify me, and hopefully we can all say that as a body. We get what God is about, we get what the church is about, we get what the Gospel is about better today than we did 20 years ago. He is sanctifying the church. He saves his church. He's got a structure for us to function by. He continually is growing us or sanctifying us. And also he has promised and, by the way, he cannot fail, that he will sustain his church. He will keep us all the way home to glorification. What he saves, he sanctifies and he keeps. Amen?

Well, the church is a treasure. It's a treasure. Listen, it's a treasure of God's wisdom. Man didn't think this up. I remember back as a young man and young in the ministry, how many amazing ideas for ministry that I had, and they weren't necessarily all bad, but I had

other men in my life who were older that kept saying, "It's about the local church. It's about the local church. It's about the local church." Then finally one day it clicked and I thought, "It's about the local church." The other things are okay but they are secondary, at best. It's about the church.

Other things come and go but the church remains forever. Do you understand that? The church is the centerpiece of God's purposes and God's glory for time and even for eternity. Ephesians 3:21, "to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." In one sense, you realize people say, "Well, it's all about the Gospel." No, it's not. In one sense there will be no Gospel preaching in heaven but there will be the church in heaven. Are you hearing me? You miss the church, you miss it all. If you miss the church, you've missed everything. It's like you go into a guy's house and he's got a transmission sitting there and four wheels and some other little odd pieces of an automobile and he says, "That's the finest transmission. Those are the finest wheels and tires." You look at it and you say, "Yeah, but it's just sitting there." "Yeah, but they are the finest. They're good." It doesn't matter if it's not a part of the whole, it makes an automobile. You don't want to miss the forest for the trees.

So as the apostle is writing to a single man, Philemon, he throws in there, verse 2, "Philemon, I'm not only writing to you but to the church, the called out ones, who are assembling and meeting in your house because what we're about here, Philemon, is more," now I'm adding on, okay, to amplify what Paul is about, "what we're about here is not just showing the forgiveness you as a Christian can have of a runaway slave, Onesimus, not just that Christianity overcomes the problem of masters and slaves in a culture, not just that, but that this is what churches are and this is what churches do." Churches have this kind of love. Churches have this kind of forgiveness. Churches have this kind of reconciliation and the world doesn't get it because we are part of a treasure. It's a treasure of God's wisdom, of God's power, and of God's beauty.

So as Paul begins in verse 4 here, I., we see him commending Philemon for his, and I think we have to broaden it out to the whole church because he's addressing the whole church, for his faith in Christ and love for the saints, or love for the church. He says in verse 4, "I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers," having heard of your love, that's evidently to the saints, it certainly includes Christ, but "your love and the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus Christ and toward all the saints." Sort of a parallelism going on there. Your love is mostly directed to the saints; your faith, of course, is directed to Jesus Christ.

Now, there are a lot of things here I want to bring out. First of all, let's go back to verse 4. He says, "I thank my God always." Now this phrase, two little words, "my God," is a powerful statement. It's a powerful statement as to the personal relationship or the personality of God. It can be, in other words, thanks can be rendered to a person only. He says, "I thank my God." You do not extend gratitude to an abstraction. You do not extend gratitude to some blind force or to some dumb law or any other lifeless object. It requires some one if you have gratitude, not some thing. You see, there is no religion without a personal God. Religion requires worship. Worship requires thanksgiving. And

thanksgiving requires that there is a true living God that we can be personal and intimate with.

When we had the situation with my grandson in the last week and you run to the emergency room and you see all of this medical equipment and you're just kind of amazed about it, then he gets on an air ambulance and you see these nurses on the ambulance and the pilots and just the sophistication and the ability and the medical technology, and you get to the Children's Hospital in Birmingham, an amazing place, just the advancement in the technology and the skill and the professionalism, and you know, as I was thankful, I wasn't thankful for the technology, I was thankful for the people and the God of grace who gave us these people. There is a God behind all of this, someone. I wasn't just thankful for the machine that did the x-ray and found the block in the lungs, I was thankful for the God who let us have the machines and the men and the women who had the ability to find the blockage and remove it like it was just another day at the office. To them it was, just another procedure. It wasn't to me. But I was thankful for some one. These are all gifts of grace, folks. There is a God, a personal God behind all of this.

When Paul says, "I thank my God for you, Philemon, and for the church," he's saying, "He's my God because I am his and he is mine." And when Paul says "my God," this presupposes that he has broken with the spirit of self and self-serving and he has embraced the service of another. Paul says, "I am one of those true Christians who not perfectly but there has been a definitive time when I broke with self-idolatry and loving the world to a new Lord and I have someone else I serve and someone else I honor and someone else I worship. He is my God."

You see, true Bible spirituality is intentionally personal. He is personal, our God. Personally, rather, our God. He is my God and yet he is not contained by me. He's certainly not exhausted by me. He's certainly not limited to me. Boy, if I could just run around and scream this for about 100 hours all over the earth: he is not defined by me. We get on our knees and open this book and say, "You are who you say you are, and all preconceived notions or ideas I have about you, they go crucified on an altar and I'll embrace who you say you are." Amen. Now I know it's hard for some people. Do you know what happens? You bring your subjective experiences to the Bible and you decide God has got to be this way because that's what I need him to be. I'm sorry, you don't get to do that no matter how bad you're hurting. He's who he is. When Paul said, "my God," he meant, "I'm yielded to view him as who is." Thank God one of the things he is is he is personal to us. He is close to us.

So he is not contained by me, exhausted by me, or limited to me. He's certainly not defined by me, and he is not only good for me anymore than the sunshine can be embraced by one person to the neglect of others, but he is personally good to me. So here Paul writes to Philemon and Paul says, "I thank my God. I am thankful for Philemon." Because here is what he's saying, "Philemon, I've evidenced in you the same transference I've experienced. I've been around you, Philemon, and I see that you are another one who has said no to self, no to idols, have turned from the service of what you think is best, right and true, and you are yielded to serve another now. You are devoted to this God, the

one I know as my God. And Philemon, I know by watching your life, he is also your God."

An insight. Paul's fervent devotion to the churches and the leaders of the churches, teaches us something. We find that the more we possess God and the more we are possessed by God, the more upward will be our gratitude and the more outward will be our service to those who are his. The closer you get to God, the more you care about God's people. Are you hearing me? I've said it to you many many many many times: the one clear biblical criterion for testing the authenticity of a man's faith is his long-term devotion to a true church. You can fake a lot of stuff. You can know the Bible front and back, upside down, you can marvel over the great doctrines of the Bible, but you can't love a true church long-term if God hasn't changed your heart. You can do a lot of things. I've seen folks who can cry crocodile tears over their great mercy and compassion and love for people, but somehow they didn't really love the church. Listen to me: you are not right spiritually because you love Jesus but because you love Jesus and you love what Jesus loves. Now, you are learning something if you are listening this morning. A lot of people love Jesus because they love their subjective idea of what they want Jesus to be like, but when you really love Jesus, you love what Jesus loves and he laid down his life for the brethren, the church.

Paul's fervent devotion shows that the more he is possessed of God, the more he possesses God, the more his gratitude toward God in his outward service to others. So he writes to Philemon with a deep deep compassion for Philemon, a deep concern for Philemon, but bigger than that, verse 2, and to the church in Philemon's house. He says, "I am always thankful for you guys, Philemon, and your church, and I always lift you up in prayer."

Now, we go to verse 5 and he begins to get specific. We are going to elaborate on what we are already talking about where he says, "because I hear of your love," and again, you parallel that with saints, "and the faith," and you parallel that with the Lord Jesus Christ in the last half of the verse. So he's thankful for them.

First, he mentions, now this is interesting, why doesn't he mention faith first? Why didn't he say, "Man, I am thankful for your faith in Jesus which has changed you and given you a love for the church. You, Philemon, you're just like every other pagan Gentile, you love the pagan Gentile world." Just like you and I did and then he was changed by faith in Christ and he began to love a different people chiefly. Christians love all people but they especially love other brothers and sisters in Christ. That's a biblical truth. That's what he's saying here. "Philemon, your love has changed. You love different people than you used to love because Jesus has changed you." But why didn't he mention the faith that changed him first and the love that's the product second? Why did he mention love first? Here's why: Paul is sneaky. He's up to something. Here's what he was saying, "Philemon, I'm so thankful that I see the authenticity of your faith in this special love for your brothers and sisters in Christ and your church." Here's what he's not saying, that I am convinced he is saying, "because when Onesimus comes back, he's going to be a new part of your church and I expect that Christian love to be toward him too." So Paul wants to emphasize love

of the brethren because Philemon is going to have a big dose of that to welcome Onesimus back. Crafty fellow, but pure in his motives, absolutely.

Now, when he mentions these two aspects, what I want you to get here is that faith in Christ, love for the brethren, are inseparable. They are two things but they are inseparable. It's just like the heart is one thing and the lungs is another but they have to have each other. These guys that you don't see a devoted passion in their ministries for the health of the local church, they seem to be always working to build their conference speaking popularity or the popularity of their social ministry outreach. None of that is wrong and a lot of these guys are helpful, but I am very curious as to why the passion for God's church is seemingly missing from their ministries, and you should ask that question too, because the apostle says they don't exist apart. A love and a faith in Jesus, and a love for the saints of God always go together.

You see, faith is that which takes Christian truth and makes it personal convictions. Let me say that again: faith takes Christian truth and makes it personal. "This is my conviction as I learn this truth. It's personally mine." Love takes Christian truth and makes it into personal activity. Love for the saints, you might say, is the daughter of faith but the mother of good works. Did you hear that? Love for the saints or love for the church is the daughter of faith but the mother of good works. We cast our faith toward Jesus Christ and we cast our love for Jesus to his children, his saints, which are his body.

1 John 4:20, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar." Well, John, why don't you just throw it out there? I mean, why don't you just get real plain about it? If someone says, in effect, "Christ has changed me and the true God, the God of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is now my God, but I don't really like a lot of God's children. I don't really love the church. I don't want to attend it. I don't want to serve at it. I don't want to give money through it. I've got my own thing to do." John says, "Well, you're a liar." It could be possible that this person is immature, doesn't grasp it all yet. It could be that he has been ill taught and that's why he doesn't get it. I suppose I would hold that out there, but he is at least living a lie if he's not a liar himself. If someone says, 1 John 4:20, "I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."

Remember when Paul was struck down, in fact it was Saul of Tarsus at this time, he was struck down on the road to Damascus and Jesus appeared to him and Jesus said to Saul laying there on the ground, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? You understand, Saul, as you attack my children, you attack me." You just can't separate the two. The church is his body. You sever the head from the body, death occurs. They go together. As a stream of water always flows downhill, so love for Jesus always flows to the brethren. There are no exceptions unless, as I've said, for a momentary time when somebody is just young and immature and they don't grasp it yet, or maybe they have been so poorly taught they don't grasp it as they need to yet.

Now, a word about faith. Faith in Christian understanding is believing and resting in what the Scripture says of Christ. It's believing, if you will, what God says of Christ. That's not

believing just many things the Scripture says about Jesus, but it's faith toward Jesus personally. Believing as true what the Bible says of Jesus is not in itself saving faith. I remember that's sort of what my faith was like as a highschooler as I began to be taught some things of Jesus, and I generally intellectually said, "Okay, I'll accept that. I see that." But it was just in my head. It hadn't gone any further than that. I didn't have it from my heart. I had not cast my hope and my trust in him as Lord and Savior.

Let me read this to you from Drysdale. "Faith in the Lord Jesus is, no doubt, faith in his sacrifice, but it goes further in receiving the divine testimony until it be faith in him sacrificed." So faith in Jesus isn't believing in his sacrifice, it's faith in him who was sacrificed. Do you get that? Faith in Jesus is not believing the truth the Bible teaches of righteousness, but putting my hope in Jesus, the righteous. Do you get that? It's faith in someone and the truths about that someone, and I can tell you that resonates with my heart. My faith is not in Bible facts, it's in the God who embodies those facts and his Savior, his Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, still talking about faith in Christ and love for the saints and how Paul is writing to Philemon and telling him, "Philemon, this really excites me about you. I see this in you." And again, I think we have to broaden it out, the whole church is being addressed to a degree. "I see this in the congregation in your house." And we know the Apostle Paul's experience was that he was converted and he quickly was taken into the fellowship of the local church in Acts 9, and Paul's passion and love for the church had literally eaten him up. He was just consumed with it. 2 Corinthians 11:28, he talks about his intense concern for all the churches. Paul was a true churchman and every Christian should be the same. Paul's apostleship was for the establishment and building up of churches across the known world. Paul literally knew nothing of ministry separate from local church life and fellowship. The ministries many of you are involved in, I'm not suggesting they are wrong but they should be feeding out of your local church and under the oversight of your local church because this is the foundation stone, not me but the church. It should be fueled by your local church, an extension of your local church, never competing with your local church.

So here the Apostle Paul is sending this runaway slave, Onesimus, back to his master, Philemon, and he's doing this and I believe primarily, primarily not to have a beautiful restoration between two people, but to make this a beautiful experience for the whole local church family. Are you hearing me? Through the years we've had a number of people who were dismissed from church membership to come to repentance and request to be restored back into membership, and has that not been one of the sweetest and most wonderful times we've ever had together as they stand before the body in sweet humility and say, "I love the body of Christ and I've asked the Lord to forgive me. Would y'all take me back?" And we immediately take them back as if it never happened. That's what Christians do. We have a capacity for that kind of forgiveness and reconciliation the world doesn't know about, and that's what Paul is orchestrating here. He wants to see this restoration to be bigger than just Philemon and his runaway slave, Onesimus, being restored. He wants to see the whole church embrace the treasurer of this wonderful forgiveness and reconciliation only Christ enables us to enjoy. So he's sending Onesimus

back, yes, to be restored to Philemon, but more than that, to be a teaching experience for the local church, and it just reminds us that we need each other.

Now let me make a side note here about conflict resolution and restoration in the church. The great majority of the time, if you and Sister Sally have a falling out, we are going to do everything we can to make sure nobody knows about it but you and Sister Sally. Can I get an amen there? You ought to say, "Pastor, if I'm acting like a complete idiot, don't put it on the screen. Please let us work it out before it gets to that level." By the way, we'll do everything possible. The only way it would become public is if you are just so obstinate and hard-necked you won't even try. But now this was already public. It was very public. Onesimus had run away. It was very public. Onesimus had stolen from Philemon, I mean, so it was already out there so that's why Paul can use it before the whole church because it was out there from the very beginning. If you go and rob a bank next week, we're going to bring it to the whole church immediately. Amen? It's already out there. People know about it. But the point behind all of this is how God has made us to need each other. Philemon needs the church. Philemon needs Paul. Paul needs the church. It's just an intertwining connectivity of local churches, here a particular local church, and their apostle/pastor, the Apostle Paul at this time.

You know, we had an ice storm a few years ago. I forget how many years ago, and I had planted some pine trees and these pine trees, they were pitiful. I mean, they had collected so much ice and weight, the road going into my place was just, the pine trees were literally bowed over. It was like they were bowing before the Lord, and they were because the Lord sent the ice. And it was like I'm going to lose every pine tree I planted. Some of them had broken. But then I talked to a forester and he said, "Do you know what? Those pine trees planted all together out there, they will just lean on each other." And do you know what? It got warm, the ice melted, and I have not found one broken pine tree except those that were on the road that didn't have trees around them. That's what the local church is. We have to have each other. God has ordained it. He didn't just ordain it, he designed it to be that way.

Now, you listen to your pastor this morning: you just get full of yourself, proud and independent, slack off faithfulness to your small group, don't be there for the brothers and sisters when they need you, be your true independent self, and do you know what's going to happen? An ice storm is going to come and you're going to break because you don't have the support God meant for you to have. You'll come back in here broken. Do you know what we're going to do if you come back in here broken? We are going to say we love you, forget it, you're back in. That's what churches do because we've got something different in us the world doesn't have. We have a treasure. A faith in Christ and love for each other that is special.

Now, a biblical local church is not the wellspring of life, Jesus is, but a biblical local church is the region where the wellspring flows. The local church is the seat and the center of witnessing for Christ and working for Christ. All other Christian activities outside the church must be secondary to our churches.

I've told you before, when you join a church, you have taken a wife, in a figure of speech. You don't get to look for another one. You have an obligation and a burden and a responsibility already, and I can almost guarantee, now look, I know these kids have Bible study groups at church and some of y'all have that in your work, and I think that's wonderful. You've got to go to work, you've got to go to school, so I think that's wonderful, but for a person just to fill their life with things outside of the local church and give their church a token of their interest, they are upside down. They are upside down. That's not the way it's designed and when these people give themselves wholesale to this ministry out there somewhere and kind of, if not stated, at least by their actions, they have diminished their obligation to their local church, here's what I want to say: who are the elders who are overseeing your ministry out there? God ordained elders to oversee and guard sound doctrine. Who is doing that for you out there? "Oh, I'm just doing it on my own because, you know, I'm smarter than God." I used to be smarter than God and God has had to humble me and let me know, "No, you're not smarter than me. You'd better get back to the way I designed it to work or I'm going to kill you." I mean that literally. I believe it would kill me. He would have put me in such a state I couldn't have functioned and maybe no longer in ministry.

A few more insights on love here. I hear of your love. "Love" is the word "agape." You've heard that many many times and agape, the Greek word agape is a pure New Testament original. As a matter of fact, this Greek word translated "love" here, the reason the word "agape" is not used in any ancient Greek literature until after Paul coined it in the New Testament. So he just created a new word. Do you know why the apostles created a brand-new word for love for the New Testament believers? Because our love is different. It's unique. It's superior. It's got more wisdom and power and beauty in it than anything the world knows about love. The Greeks had a word for sexual love, that's a beautiful thing, it is God-given, it is for marriage and marriage only, and marriage between a man and a woman. Period. That's God given but that's not fitting for here. God has a love for brotherly love. It has to do with all that sentimental stuff. You ladies can help me here, you ladies are more sentimental and emotional than us men, and we're thankful. I don't want to be married to somebody like me. I like the sweetness and the gentleness and the, "Ohhh." I like that. That's feminine. That's beautiful. It's a power that men don't have. What am I saying? But there is a word in the old Greek for this kind of sentimental emotional brotherly love, if you will, and the world has that kind of love. A lot of you feel an enormous amount of that for your football team, but it's not agape.

Paul said, "But there is something we share. Philemon, there is something I've see that you have for the saints of God that meet in your house and it is far above what the world knows about love." It's divinely bestowed through the new birth and nobody else has it but Christians, and it is especially pointed toward other Christians, and that's how you know the real deal, because if that has happened in you, you never get over it. It just keeps staying there. You might linger, and you might wonder, you might get weak, you might get strong, but you'll never get over it. You always come back. You can take a goat and you can put him outside the sheep pen, do you know what that goat is going to do if you put him outside the sheep pen? He'll just wander off and never come back. But if you take a sheep and put him outside the sheep pen, he'll enjoy his freedom and his

independence for a little while, and before long you'll see, "You know, I was just made to be with sheep." So he turns around and he comes right back to the sheep gate and says, "Baa. I'm baack." Because it's in him. That's just the way sheep are. They have to have each other and we have to have each other.

Here's the beautiful thing about it. I don't have to beat this into you, I just want to stir it up because it is in you. If I have to get it into you, you ain't got anything at all. But if as I'm preaching the Spirit of God stirring your hearts, that means God has put it in you and I'm doing for you what Paul is doing for Philemon where he is saying, "Stir it up, Philemon. Get that kind of love going strong because I'm about to throw something on you that's going to test you." You do understand Philemon could have had Onesimus put to death for robbing him and running away, but he's going say, "Now, you receive Onesimus back." He's going to say, "All the money he owes you, I'll pay it." Then Paul snickers and says, "But Philemon, you owe me your life. So he's going to come back no longer a slave but as a brother, a full part of the church. So you'd better get that love God put in there for brothers and sisters in Christ stirred up and going good because you're going to need it next when you read the rest of my letter." Y'all about to preach me to death this morning.

In the construction of this verse, this verse 5, faith in Jesus, love for the saints, always together, just can't separate them, in the construction of this verse, Paul is asserting that love for the saints is the test of true faith. You know, a compass always points to invisible north. Did you know that? But a compass also points at everyone that's between you and north. And when you were saved, God put a love compass in your heart and no matter which way you turn, that love compass, bing, points to Jesus. It just keeps pointing to Jesus no matter where you turn. It points back to Jesus. But it points to every child of God who belongs to Jesus. It's just something, you can't explain it. It is mystic in a way. We do love all people and I think Christians are the best lovers in the world but there is a unique, more powerful, deeper love for the body because we have a love compass in us that always points to Jesus and to anyone and everyone who belongs to Jesus.

When we love each other, there are three components I want you to think about. I look at brothers and sisters in Christ as I hope they look at me, and doggone if I don't begin to see in some of the sorriest people the excellencies of Jesus Christ. And doggone if they don't look at me and see in one of the sorriest people some of the excellencies of Jesus Christ. And I love it. I want to mention names so bad. So bad I want to mention names and I want to talk about what naturally they are and how rotten they are. How irritating they are to me but at the same time as I walk with them in fellowship with them, I see the sweetness of Jesus, the love of the truth, a broken humility, and I see the excellencies of Christ that only Jesus could put there and I love them. Are you with me, church? That's why that knucklehead is in your small group. That's why that person is in your small group that grates on your nerves so that God is testing you, "Will you let the love I put in you, the love of Jesus that you are starting to see in them, even though there is other stuff there that you don't like?" Because only the church can do that. You see, we are unique. This is a treasure we have.

So we love others because we see the excellencies of Christ coming out of them. Secondly, we love them benevolently. There is a part of us that just wants to take care of them. We just want to care for them. We just want to be there for them. We just want to serve them in a way unique than we would for the rest of the world. Yes, we do good to all men, the Bible says, but the Bible doesn't stop there. The Bible says don't do good for all men and just stop, but it says especially for those of the household of faith. I just want to do things for them. I just want to care for them if they are hurting.

And a third aspect of the way we love, not because we just see the excellencies of Christ coming out of them, not just because we have this benevolent concern for the church like we have not for others, but also because we glory in God's wisdom and power as he puts the whole thing together and makes it one. You and I are part of one whole called the body of Christ and we marvel over God's wisdom. He put it together. He saved them. He gave a structure for them to function by. He gave overseers to run it. He gave deacons to serve it. He gave us all gifts to take care of each other. It's just beautiful. So we love God's wisdom in doing this. All this is behind what Paul is getting to when he says, "Philemon, I've seen this love. I've seen it."

So Paul is slowly walking to the next step of saying, "Now, Philemon, let's take forgiving Onesimus, receiving him as a brother now not a slave, and a full part of the local church that meets in your house," listen to me, "as another jewel in the treasury which is the church." You see, you might have a problem with your brother in Christ and you need to settle it. There are two of you over here. And y'all humble yourselves and you get together and you get over it and you get it settled. Nobody else knew about it but listen to me: had you not settled it because we have that unique love and capacity to forgive that nobody else has, had you not settled it, even though nobody else knew about it, you put out a spirit of bitterness, unforgiveness, and a lack of reconciliation that would poison the whole body. Instead of making us a treasure of jewels, it would have been a black mark.

So Paul is writing to Philemon and saying, "Let's make sure that this next event we are dealing with, Onesimus coming back home, is another jewel, another gem in the treasury which is the local church." Church, are you getting this? Who else but God can write that? Who else but God could write that?