

Message #6**Philemon 1:19-25**

One of the most powerful political speeches ever given in the history of the United States was Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. On November 19, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln dedicated a national cemetery on the battlefield of Gettysburg where just a few months earlier, 7000 men had died. He wanted to unite the nation and his speech began "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

As the speech went on, it became more powerful and the final words were these: "we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people for the people shall not perish from the earth." Those final words brought that speech to a powerful conclusion and conviction.

That is exactly what Paul does in Philemon. This is exactly how he ends this powerful epistle. When Paul wanted to conclude an inspired letter of God, he would always make some final push to motivate people to respond to the Word of God and the grace of God. In these final verses, Paul gives his final push to Philemon to take Onesimus back.

In fact, that is the theme of these verses:

THE FINAL THOUGHTS AND WORDS OF PAUL IN THIS EPISTLE ARE DESIGNED TO PROMPT PHILEMON TO CONSIDER TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY FORGIVING ONESIMUS.

We are now in the basketball college tournament called March madness. Teams are focused on getting to the championship game. Paul wanted God's people focused on being a champion in heaven. That is why he wrote these final verses.

In winding this letter down, there are seven final thoughts Paul wants to give Philemon:

FINAL THOUGHT #1 – Paul will repay anything that is owed by Onesimus. **1:19**

Now we don't know exactly how much Onesimus had stolen, but we must assume that it was quite a large amount. Paul said when I see you I am prepared to pay it for him. In fact, he states I want you to know that I wrote this letter with my own hand. Paul wants Philemon to think about the fact that he has personally written him this letter with his own hand for the purpose of getting Philemon to take Onesimus back.

There are actually two times in these final verses where Paul stresses the fact that he is the one writing the letter—**vs. 19, 21**. So when he says he will pay it back in writing, it is like a legal I.O.U. written document.

It is interesting that in the book of Colossians, which Paul wrote at the same time as Philemon, he actually says that Jesus Christ cancels out our debt to the Law by His cross work (Col. 2:14). So this idea of debt and cancellation and imputation has profound theological ramifications.

Now Paul says at the end of **verse 19** that if we want to strictly deal with a what is owed mindset, that Philemon owes Paul his very life. Most people do not realize how much of a debt is owed to one who has accurately guided them in their understanding of the grace of God. Most people don't have a clue as to how much they owe someone who can accurately communicate God's Word to them so that they may have a relationship with God.

Paul had completely unlocked the truth of the grace Gospel to Philemon and Philemon owed him his very life. So what this spiritually means is that Philemon is actually obligated to Paul with a debt he could never pay back. How much is salvation worth? How much is an eternity in heaven worth? What is the dollar value of one who can open up grace truth and change your eternal destiny forever?

Actually, now Philemon was indebted to Paul in at least two ways:

First, Paul led him to Christ. Second, he has led Onesimus to Christ and is now sending him back to Philemon as a brother who is willing and ready to serve him. Onesimus could have just drifted off into the sunset and remained hidden, but he went back to Philemon to make things right.

Now the contextual point is that Paul is willing to take upon himself the entire debt of Onesimus. Now by virtue of the fact that Philemon owed his very life to Paul, he certainly would be in a position to take the wrong debt upon himself and forgive and restore Onesimus.

As we saw last time, we are in no position before God to take the condemnatory death penalty on ourselves for the incalculable times we have sinned against Him. But our entire sin debt may be laid upon another and that other person is Jesus Christ.

Now it is interesting that Paul does see a connection between the material and the spiritual. God is the one who is connected to each aspect of life. He is sovereign over what one has either spiritually or financially.

FINAL THOUGHT #2 – Paul wants Philemon to forgive Onesimus and refresh him. **1:20**

Now the whole thrust of this epistle is that Onesimus is now in a position to be of use and benefit to Philemon (1:11), but also he wanted Philemon to realize that he could do something that would be of great benefit to Paul. In fact, the Greek text clearly emphasizes that Paul himself would benefit and be refreshed by this action.

The verb “refresh” is an imperative and it has to do with refreshing by giving rest from labor (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 33). So if Philemon would forgive Onesimus, it would refresh Paul because Paul had labored in the spiritual field of Onesimus' life.

The forgiveness of Onesimus meant a lot to Paul. He would actually benefit from this in the Lord and be refreshed in his heart. In other words, it would break Paul's heart if Onesimus were not taken back. Paul had obviously spent a great deal of time with Onesimus, teaching him and praying for him.

What a joy it is to know that someone you have invested time in is truly on fire for God and being used by God and accepted by the great people of God. What a boost to Paul if Onesimus went back to Philemon and Philemon welcomed him back as a "beloved brother."

FINAL THOUGHT #3 – Paul had confidence that Philemon would obey and do more than what He wanted. **1:21**

Even though Philemon was a wealthy man, he had a track record of being an obedient man, who did big things for God. The "obedience" to which Paul was referring is not specifically to any command he is giving in this epistle, because he was careful not to give any command in this epistle demanding Philemon take him back. Philemon had a reputation of being obedient to what God wanted him or led him to do. His reputation was one of obeying the Word of God and the promptings of the Spirit of God. Paul believed that Philemon would even do more than what he suggested, which was to take Onesimus back and receive him as a brother.

Now let's think about this for a moment. Onesimus was one of only a few men who actually spent time being trained by Paul, himself. Paul ministered to many different churches, but Onesimus received one-on-one instruction from Paul. It would be a shame to have a man like Onesimus spending his time working as a slave, running errands for Philemon. If you have a man who has actually been trained by Paul in your presence, you certainly would not want him spending his time picking grapes in the Colossian valley. Paul was convinced that Philemon would think about this and do more than just take him back as a slave.

Now in there was a minister whose name was Ignatius who wrote a series of letters to different churches when he was on his way to Rome to be killed. Ignatius had actually been a student of the Apostle John and he was the pastor of the home church of Paul, Antioch in Syria around A.D. 100. On his journey to Rome, he wrote seven different letters to churches and one of the churches to which he wrote a letter was the church of Ephesus.

In his letter to the Ephesians, he wrote these words: "Since, therefore, I have received in God's name your whole congregation in the person of Onesimus, a man of inexpressible love who is also your earthly bishop I pray that you will love him in accordance with the standard set by Jesus Christ and that all of you will be like him. For blessed is he who has graciously allowed you, worthy as you are, to have such a bishop" (*The Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 86-87).

It is clear that Ignatius recognized that Onesimus was a special man of God, he was the pastor of the church of Ephesus and that the Ephesian church was blessed for having him.

Now since Philemon was a well-respected Christian businessman in this area, we must assume that he played a major role in all of the things that happened to Onesimus. It is clear that Onesimus, who had been a former Colossian robber, was now a much loved Ephesian pastor and this would never have happened without the blessing of Philemon.

So we may conclude in view of **verse 21** that Philemon did do more than just take Onesimus back, he actually became a huge supporter and help to the life and ministry of Onesimus. All Paul really wanted Philemon to do was take him back, but Philemon did more than just do that. He probably was a big reason why Onesimus ended up being the pastor of the church of Ephesus.

FINAL THOUGHT #4 – Paul wanted Philemon to prepare him a place to stay. **1:22**

If I am reading my Greek text right, there are four command imperatives in the book of Philemon:

- 1) **Verse 17** - You yourself Philemon, make a decision, in and of yourself, to **“accept”** him.
A command for Philemon to make up his own mind about acceptance.
- 2) **Verse 18** - **“charge”** that to my account. Make a mental to impute his debt to me.
- 3) **Verse 20** - **“refresh”** my heart.
- 4) **Verse 22** - **“prepare”** me lodging.

Paul anticipated a time when he would get out of prison and then could travel to the Colossian area and visit Philemon, so he asked him to prepare a place for him. Philemon was a very spiritually-minded man who obviously prayed for Paul and refreshed him many times. He wanted to spend some time with someone known for ministering to the saints.

Now why would Paul write this to Philemon? It would seem reasonable that if Paul showed up, he would always have a place to stay and be welcomed. The reason is because Paul did not typically travel alone. It was very rare when Paul went some place alone.

It is true that by virtue of the fact that Paul might show up one more time in person would certainly motivate Philemon to want to do what he requested.

J. Vernon McGee said that he believed Paul was released for a time and did end up visiting Philemon (*Philemon*, p. 501). Although there is no record of this Biblically, there is a good possibility that it did happen.

FINAL THOUGHT #5 – Paul wanted Philemon to know that Epaphras, Paul’s fellow prisoner, greeted him. **1:23**

All the people listed here show up in the book of Colossians (Col. 4:10-14). This shows us the strong connection between the two. All of the men mentioned at the end of this epistle were known in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Epaphras was probably converted through the ministry of Paul and was probably the one who started those churches in Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. He was a bond servant of Christ and a faithful Grace Age minister (Col. 1:7). He was originally from Colossae and he was a tremendous prayer warrior and he had a deep pastoral concern for all three churches (Col. 4:12-13).

So the name Ephaphras did mean something to Philemon.

FINAL THOUGHT #6 – Paul wanted Philemon to know that all of Paul’s fellow workers greeted him. **1:24**

The fellow workers included Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke. Mark was the John Mark who defected from Paul at Perga (Acts 13:13), but he was a changed man and apparently was known by the people of this area. He may have backtracked through those areas from which he ran. Aristarchus was originally from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4; 27:2), was with Paul during the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). Demas was at this point on fire for God, but we know he ultimately defected (II Tim. 4:10). Luke was a beloved medical doctor (Col. 4:14), which is rare. Typically you do not find medical doctors who love Jesus Christ and the Word of God; but Luke was one. He was a faithful and loyal friend to Paul (II Tim. 4:11). All of these men were known by Philemon and Paul classified all of them as “fellow workers.”

One commentator made a very interesting observation about the names listed in Philemon. He said in this book we get a list of names that runs the gamut from wealth to poverty, from educated to uneducated, from young to old, from all ethnic backgrounds. This list of names proves that faith in Jesus Christ is able to bridge all social, political, moral and spiritual chasms. God’s grace is able to form a church out of people from all kinds of backgrounds.

FINAL THOUGHT #7 – Paul informed him that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ could be with your spirit. **1:25**

Paul’s whole apostolic ministry was focused on the grace of God. He began most of his epistles stressing the grace theme (1:3) and he ended most of his epistles stressing the grace theme (**1:25**).

Now notice that Paul specifically says or prays that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ “be with your spirit.”

Man is tripartite, that is he is comprised of three parts: 1) Body; 2) Soul; 3) Spirit. The body is our world-consciousness; the soul is our God-consciousness and our spirit is our self-consciousness.

Now the moment one believes on Jesus Christ, the soul is forever saved by the grace of God. The specific aspect to which Paul is referring here is that our spirit, that is our lives that we are living here, would experience the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is one thing to have your soul saved by grace, it is another thing to have the grace of God impact and change your life personally.

One of the realities of the grace of God impacting our lives is that we “will do even more than what I say.” That is what grace does. People want to do more. They realize how generous God has been to them and they want to be generous to others.

So what would the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ do? The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would forgive someone who came and said they were sorry. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would forgive one who would face his sin.

Have you received the full forgiveness of God? Do you know what it is like to experience the grace of God in your spirit? Are you holding grudges? When you get before God, who is willing to forgive us all of our sins in Jesus Christ, do you dare to refuse to forgive someone who says I am sorry?

May God help us all to act as godly and as gracious as Philemon.