

“For Love’s Sake”
Philemon 1:8-9
(Preached at Trinity, August 6, 2023)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Thus far we’ve explored Paul’s opening statements to this personal letter that he sent to Philemon. The purpose of the letter was to bring reconciliation between Philemon and his slave, Onesimus. Paul is going to request that Philemon forgive him for his offenses and receive him as a brother. Paul will also request that Philemon allow his servant to be at Paul’s side to help him in his imprisonment.
2. In **Verses 4-7** Paul revealed to Philemon how he had been the object of Paul’s prayers; that his heart had been filled with joy and gratitude at reports of Philemon’s faith and love; how he had been a source of refreshment to the saints at Colossae.
Philemon 1:7 NAU - "the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother."
3. Now, beginning with **Verse 8**, Paul will get to the heart of his letter to Philemon. He begins with “therefore.” Because of the riches of your faith and love I’m appealing to you, Philemon. Paul is about to make his request known. He’s obviously hoping for a positive response from Philemon. Paul was a mature believer and was dealing with this sensitive situation with great care. With great wisdom he speaks to Philemon making his appeal, but he has an expectation of obedience.
Philemon 1:21 NAU - "Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you" From **Verse 8** to **Verse 21** the pronoun “you” is singular. Although it was to be read before the church, this is a personal letter from Paul to Philemon.
4. We’re going to learn much in this passage on the subject of obedience. We learn about obedience from an early age. This is because we are born under authority. Parents make demands of their children with the expectation of obedience. A failure to obey brings swift consequences. This is the model of Biblical parenting ordained by God and parents have the duty to obey.
Proverbs 13:24 NAU - "He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently."
5. God makes demands upon men and expects obedience. We have the Ten Commandments and failure to render obedience has consequences. Transgression is called sin. God’s wrath is kindled upon those who do not obey.
Romans 1:18 NAU - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"
6. There are many possible motivations for obedience which is what I want us to explore from this passage.

- I. First, there is obedience rendered for the sake of authority.
- A. God has ordained various realms or spheres of authority upon the earth.
1. We have seen this many times. Authority is divided among these various spheres upon the earth—familial, civil, ecclesiastical, etc.
 2. Children are commanded to obey their parents.
We are commanded to submit to civil authorities.
We are under the authority of our local church and submit to the authority of the elders or pastors of the church.
- B. Paul was an Apostle. The office of Apostle carried apostolic authority.
1. Paul began almost all of his letters with an affirmation of this office.
1 Corinthians 1:1 NAU - "Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God"
This is repeated in various forms in Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus.
 2. Paul could have commanded Philemon's response claiming his apostolic authority. But he did not. Paul did not begin this letter stating his apostolic office.
 3. Paul could have just given the order. Notice, Paul's confidence was "in Christ." An Apostle was one chosen by Christ. But he was also "in Christ" as a Christian, a designation also shared by Philemon.
Philemon 1:8 NAU - "Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do* what is proper,"
 - A. Notice, Paul's confidence was "in Christ." An Apostle was one chosen by Christ.
 - B. But he was also "in Christ" as a Christian. Both Paul and Philemon shared the "fellowship of faith."
 4. It is interesting, although Paul did not appeal to his apostolic authority, this is the only time in his epistles when he actually draws attention to the power of his apostolic authority. He could have ordered compliance.
- C. God's Divine existence is sufficient to demand submission to His authority.
1. As God He has the right to command and we have the duty to obey. The phrase, "thou shalt" occurs over 1000 times in the Bible almost always referring to God's authority.
 2. It is a fearful thing to disregard the commands of God.
Hebrews 10:31 NAU - "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."
 3. But this is not our highest motivation for obedience. There are many who render obedience to God from a motivation of fear. We call this servile obedience—the obedience a servant renders to his master out of fear of retribution. Paul alludes to the fear of violating the laws of civil authority.
Romans 13:3-4 NAU - "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; ⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."

II. Obedience for the sake of age.

A. Paul makes reference to his advanced age.

Philemon 1:9 NAU - "I rather appeal *to you*-- since I am such a person as Paul, the aged."

1. We can't be certain of Paul's age at this point. He was probably between 55 & 60 years old.
2. Hippocrates, the great medical writer, designated when a man was considered an old man: "A man is *πρεσβύτερος* from the age of forty-nine to the age of fifty-six. Between these years, he is what we might call *senior*; only after that does he become a *γέρων*, the Greek for an old man."¹

B. Over and over the Bible expresses the importance of respecting those who are our elders.

Leviticus 19:32 NAU - "You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD."

1. Parents must demand respect from their children and teach the importance of respecting other adults.
Southerners in the Bible belt have traditionally taught this well. Adults are addressed with the prefix, Mr. or Mrs. or Miss. They are taught to answer with Yes sir, or Yes ma'am. These are expressions of respect.
2. This too, however, is not our highest motivation for obedience. Children don't ultimately honor their parents because of their duty to honor their elders.
3. Paul here is not speaking from the authority of age but from the weakness of age. He is seeking the help of Onesimus.

Philemon 1:12-14 NAU - "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"

III. Obedience for the sake of social prudence

A. Social mores or values are powerful checks to the sinfulness of the human heart.

1. We see a lot of what we call "virtue signaling."
Many corporations, politicians, and institutions promote cultural evils in order to express their apparent virtue.
2. Social righteousness is often inconsistent. We condemn polygamy by consenting adults while embracing two men getting married. We convict a person for causing a woman to miscarry her baby while allowing others to kill millions in the womb.

B. One might claim that Paul was appealing to social pressure.

1. This was a private letter sent to appeal to Philemon and yet it was to be read publicly in the church.
2. Paul was expressing the unity and fellowship of the Christian community. He was not seeking to shame Philemon or coerce him to obedience.

¹ William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 3rd ed. fully rev. and updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 316.

IV. Obedience for the sake of righteousness

- A. Paul is writing to Philemon as a brother.
1. Philemon bore the marks of God's saving grace.
Philemon 1:5 NAU - "I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints"
 2. Paul had confidence that Philemon would do the right thing because he was a Christian.
Matthew 5:6 NAU - "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."
 3. Paul refrains from commanding Philemon, telling him what he had to do. Instead, he told him what was the proper thing to do.
As a Christian Philemon would want to do the right thing.
Philemon 1:8 NAU - "*to do* what is proper,"
- B. Righteousness is a high motivation.
1. We wear it as a breast plate.
 2. But even this is not our highest motivation.
 3. There is a higher motivation that outshines all others.

V. Obedience for the sake of love

Philemon 1:9 NAU - "yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*"

- A. Love is the driving force in the life of a believer
1. Love is the chief evidence of saving faith.
Galatians 5:6 NAU - "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love."
1 Corinthians 13:2 NAU - "If I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."
 2. Paul wrote of the "fellowship of faith." Those share in this fellowship share in this love. In **verses 5 & 7** Paul wrote of Philemon's reputation for sharing this love with all the saints. Paul is saying, "I could command you, but because of love, I'd rather trust you will do what is proper."
 3. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he expresses the importance of submission. But he puts love as our highest motivation with Jesus as our high example.
Ephesians 5:21-25 NAU - "and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. ²² Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,"
 4. Here Paul is appealing to love as that which would drive Philemon to forgive and receive Onesimus.

- B. Our highest motivation for obedience to Christ is our love for Him.
1. This is called evangelical or Gospel obedience in contrast to servile obedience.
John 14:15 NAU - "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."
John 14:23-24 NAU - "Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. ²⁴ "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me."
 2. We need to comprehend the intensity of Christ's love for us and then reflect it back to Him.
Ephesians 3:14-19 NAU - "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."
 3. The knowledge of such love drives us to obedience.
2 Corinthians 5:14 NAU - "For the love of Christ controls us"
- C. Parents must seek to win the hearts of their children.
1. Yes, they have God-given authority over their children. But their children need to have confidence in the love of their parents. If a child questions the motivation of his parents he'll resist.
 2. Tedd Tripp authored a book called "Shepherding a Child's Heart."
 "As a parent, you must exercise authority. You must require obedience of your children because they are called by God to obey and honor you. You must exercise authority, not as a cruel taskmaster, but as one who truly loves them. Parents who are benevolent despots do not usually find their children racing to leave home. Who would want to walk out on a relationship in which he feels loved and respected."²

Conclusion:

1. Paul is saying, Philemon, I have heard testimony from many of the refreshment of your love. May you by this same love hear what I have to say regarding Onesimus.
2. Love changes everything. It reforms relationships.
 More than all, it reforms our relationship with Christ.

² Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, (Wapwallopen: Shepherd Press, 1995), xviii.