







What was it that got John, the apostle and old man, all excited? Take a look at 3 John, v. 3-4.

- “For I rejoiced *greatly*...”
- “I have *no greater joy*...”

Is that something that excites us? Do we find it a source of the greatest joy possible to see others living out the gospel?

Paul had made his appeal to Philemon in v. 8-16, and now he makes his request in v. 17-22.

- Notice v. 17—Paul is drawing to a conclusion: he has made his appeal, he has laid a foundation, and now he describes what it will look like for Philemon to apply the gospel to this relationship.

Ok—what do we not know about Paul's appeal and request to Philemon?

We don't know how it turned out.

We don't have the *rest* of the story.

- Did Philemon respond the way Paul had requested? We don't know.
- Was Onesimus treated as a full beloved brother in Christ? We don't know.
- Was it maybe too awkward for Onesimus to still be around Philemon and Philemon's other slaves? We don't know.
- I want to think that Philemon went beyond what Paul had requested...but we don't know.

Here's the issue at stake: Does the gospel work?

- Can sinful human hearts *really* be transformed by the gospel?
- Can relationships *really* be changed when the gospel is lived out?
- Is this really possible: "...forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." (Col. 3:13—this is from the letter that was written to Philemon's home church)

Will Philemon think Phil. 2:1-8? That's how the gospel looks in relationships.

Well—we don't know the answer to Philemon's story; all we can do is live out the gospel in *our* story.

Here's the outline of Paul's letter we're using ~

- Paul's introduction to his letter to Philemon ~ 1-3
- Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for Philemon ~ 4-7
- Paul's appeal to Philemon ~ 8-16
- Paul's confidence in the obedience of Philemon ~ 17-22
- Paul's final greetings & prayer for Philemon ~ 23-25

What's in this passage (v. 17-22)...

Notice that the only imperatives (the "do this" words) in the letter are in these verses. There are four:

- Receive him as you would receive me ~ v. 17
- Charge that to my account ~ v. 18
- Refresh my heart in Christ ~ v. 20
- Prepare a guest room for me ~ v. 22

Those words are the core of Paul's letter: this is what he wants Philemon to do with what he has said. So we'll let those four words serve as our outline (of sorts) to help us work our way through the text.

1: Receive him as you would receive me ~ v. 17

What had Paul seen in Onesimus?

- He had seen his response to the gospel—his genuine repentance and faith ~ v. 10.
- He had seen the fruit of repentance—the renewal of heart that takes place in one who has been made alive from the dead ~ v. 11, 13.
- He had seen Onesimus become very dear to him—a beloved brother in Christ ~ v. 12, 16.

Paul knew that the gospel had been effective in Onesimus' life (Rom. 1:16)—so he knew that all the old categories of division (slave—master, poor—rich, etc.) had been removed: all three were one in Christ.

1: Receive him as you would receive me ~ v. 17

“So if you consider me your partner...”

- Paul starts off with an *if-then* argument: if this, then that.
- If we have shared together in the work and blessings and service of the gospel (partner: Gk *koinonos*; see 2 Cor. 8:23), then...

So we don't know all that was in Paul's mind when he wrote this, but Philemon must have taken on some part in the gospel ministry along with Paul.

Question: Could Philemon's role in the gospel ministry have been anywhere near as prominent or significant as Paul's?

1: Receive him as you would receive me ~ v. 17

Answer: No way. Not even close.

- But notice how Paul thought of Philemon: "...our beloved fellow worker..." ~ v. 1

And Paul (who preached where the gospel had never been heard before and suffered and planted churches and agonized over souls for three decades) thought of Onesimus (who got saved and served Paul for a short time while he was imprisoned in Rome) as a "beloved brother" ~ v. 16.

- Paul saw Onesimus as he saw Philemon (and as he saw himself)—a servant of Christ, a fellow worker in the gospel.

1: Receive him as you would receive me ~ v. 17

So—apparently it is not the size or significance of the role, or the public prominence of the role, or even the results that should capture our attention.

What should capture our attention?

- Genuine faith
- Evidence of a transformed heart
- Willingness to serve, especially the willingness to take on a lowly, unnoticed role—no one would ever have known of Onesimus' very small role in the gospel ministry had not Paul mentioned it here.
- Love for Christ that shows itself in concern for souls and obedience to His commands.

1: Receive him as you would receive me ~ v. 17

“So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.”

- This is the primary imperative (“do this”) in the letter—this is what Paul is asking Philemon to do.

What exactly is Paul asking him to do?

This: how would Philemon react if Paul had unexpectedly showed up at the door?

- Philemon would have been thrilled, overjoyed!

How would Philemon react when Onesimus unexpectedly showed up at his door with a little scroll of papyrus in his hand?

1: Receive him as you would receive me ~ v. 17

Probably not quite so thrilled.

“Even the most forgiving of Christian masters would normally find it difficult to exclude a note of disapproval on finding the prodigal servant back again at his door: no, says Paul, give him the same warm welcome as you would give to me...” ~ F. F. Bruce

Notice who Paul presents as the standard:

- Rom. 15:7—and notice also the reason he gives here, that takes all the personality and everything else out of it.
- Col. 3:13

That is the gospel in relationships.

1: Receive him as you would receive me – v. 17

But let's take this one step further...

What would Philemon—as a Christian host in first century Roman culture—do for his beloved friend Paul, had Paul shown up at the door?

- Give him the warmest of greetings
- Take him in and have his feet washed
- Provide him with the best food in the home
- Give him the room specially set aside for guests
- Give him every possible comfort available
- Provide him with any clothing he needed, or supplies for the remainder of his journey
- Give him gifts and entertainment

Paul's request: Receive him as you would receive me.

2: Charge that to my account ~ v. 18-19

It appears that Onesimus may have grabbed some of Philemon's cash as he slipped out the back door.

- It would have been hard enough for Philemon to welcome his former slave back even if he *hadn't* stolen any money on his way out...

Are Christians supposed to make restitution?

- We see the concept required of God's people in the OT—Ex. 22:1, 3-6, 14; Lev. 6:2-5
- And then there's the example of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10—in v. 9 Jesus says this is evidence that Zacchaeus' repentance and faith are genuine.

2: Charge that to my account ~ v. 18-19

Yes—we know we should make restitution for past wrongs...

- ...but what if it is simply not possible? What then?

The desire to make restitution whenever possible is evidence of genuine repentance. But if it is not possible, is my sin forgiven?

- Is restitution a requirement for salvation?

No—restitution is not a requirement for salvation.

- The desire to make restitution whenever possible is evidence of repentance and salvation.

- If Christ has forgiven my sins, they are forgiven whether I can make restitution or not ~ 1 John 1:9

2: Charge that to my account ~ v. 18-19

When Paul says "...charge that to my account..."
what does it make you think of?

It is a beautiful—and graphic—illustration of our salvation: "Philemon, like God, had been wronged. Onesimus, like the sinner, stood in need of reconciliation. Paul offered to pay the price to being about that reconciliation. That is the same role Jesus plays in the relationship between the sinner and God. Paul, like Christ, was willing to pay the price of reconciliation." ~ John MacArthur

Would Philemon make Paul pay what Onesimus owed? No—he would have cancelled it: Col. 2:13-14

3: Refresh my heart in Christ ~ v. 20-21

This is the same word that Jesus used in Matt. 11:28—“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

- Paul had seen this refreshment before: from the believers in Corinth ~ 1 Cor. 16:17-18; and in Titus ~ 2 Cor. 7:13.
- And now Paul, the old man and the prisoner, feels the need for refreshment again.

What would have brought Paul refreshment, joy, and rest in his imprisonment?

- “...receive him as you would receive me.”

3: Refresh my heart in Christ ~ v. 20-21

One writer pictures it like this at Philemon's house:

"The church at Colossae met in Philemon & Apphia's home, and it's not hard to imagine what life must have been like for the household... There was a guest room for visitors (v. 22) which was probably well used.

Apphia must surely have cooked many meals for guests.

When you arrived at Philemon's home you were always sure of a warm welcome ~ you never felt like you were intruding ~ they were the sort of people who were always pleased to see you and who were genuinely delighted to have people stay. Can't you just picture Philemon and Apphia sitting with people far into the night, giving comfort and counsel, praying with them,

3: Refresh my heart in Christ ~ v. 20-21

One writer pictures it like this at Philemon's house: "refreshing them in the depths of their souls. This word 'refresh' is used elsewhere in Greek of soldiers resting. What a beautiful image of Philemon's ministry: to battle-weary believers worn out from fighting against temptation or persecution or false teaching or mockery and rejection, he brought relief. A word in season to encourage or advise or exhort or cheer up. You know the sort of person, don't you? You feel better after being with them. You seek them out when you're feeling low. When people were discouraged and run down, they went to find Philemon." ~ Warren Peel

3: Refresh my heart in Christ ~ v. 20-21

Paul says, "I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ." ~ v. 20. What are the implications of Philemon's forgiveness of Onesimus? What would have happened?

- It would have brought joy to Paul (Phil. 2:2).
- It would have brought joy to Onesimus.
- It would have brought joy to Philemon.
- It would have brought joy to the Colossian church—a unique unity: John 17:11, 20-23.
- It would have been a beautiful testimony to the watching world of the transforming love of Christ: John 13:35.

4: Prepare a guest room for me – v. 22

A little subtle pressure maybe? Do you think Philemon would have been all that excited for Paul to come visit if he—Philemon—had been unwilling to forgive Onesimus and receive him as a beloved brother in Christ?

Not likely.

At any rate, Paul sounds confident that he may be released from house imprisonment fairly soon...

...he is trusting that God will do His sovereign work in the hearts of Roman authorities through the prayers of Philemon.

4: Prepare a guest room for me – v. 22

How long did Paul wait for the prayers of Philemon (and likely many others—see Phil. 1:19) to be answered?

We don't know exactly—he was under house arrest for two years in Rome, but at what point in that two years he wrote these letters is unclear.

- So Paul waited—see Phil. 4:10-13.

Paul was content in prison and out of prison because he was content with Christ—he had rested everything on Him, and had found Him to be enough. And so he was content to wait and trust.

“But at the same time prepare for me a lodging”—
‘This confidence must have powerfully excited and moved Philemon; and next, he holds out to him the hope of being gratified by his own arrival. Although we do not know whether or not Paul was afterwards released from prison, yet there is no absurdity in this statement, even though he was disappointed of the hope which he cherished about God’s temporal kindness. He had no confident hope of his release, further than if it pleased God. Accordingly, he always kept his mind in suspense, till the will of God was made known by the result.’ ~ John Calvin