

# The Prison Epistles 09 Philemon

by David Clifford

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*The letter to Philemon highlights the importance of Christian courtesy, restitution, and the power of the Holy Spirit in our relationships with others.*

**Duration:** 58:14

**Topics:** "Gospel Power", "Christian Community"

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## Description

The sermon transcript discusses the power and value of the gospel in various aspects of life. It emphasizes that the gospel is a great leveler, bringing people together in Christ. The story of Onesimus, a runaway slave who was reconciled with his master, is used as an analogy to highlight the transformative power of the gospel. The sermon also encourages believers to open their homes and share the gospel with their unsaved neighbors. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the grace of God and its ability to transform lives and bring glory to His name.

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## Transcript

It's been really great to be with you. Jolly good, awfully fine, and terrific. And we shall remember this visit and this fellowship till our dying day, or till the dawn of glory, which is a better way of putting it.

And what a privilege it's been to meet all you junior citizens of glory. Thank God the glory shines before us. And if this glimpse of love is so divinely sweet, what will it be, O Lord, above thy gladdening smile to meet? The glory shines before us.

Now, thank you very much in the Lord's name for your kindness to us. You've taken us foreigners to your hearts as though we were real Americans, and we're not. We're just outsiders, and we're real foreigners.

But I tell you what, you've been so kind to us. We give you all an open invitation to come and visit us in England on the south coast, but please don't come all at once. And we give you a nice cup of English tea, and I'm sure you'll enjoy it there.

So, we look forward to seeing you over there sometime, God willing. And I was reminded of, I forget what it was that reminded me, something that our brother Mr. Willie said today. It reminded me of a certain time in Hyde Park, London, just where the speaker's corner is.

You get all kinds of preachers preaching all kinds of things. One man used to get up and preach down with everything that's up, down with everything that's up. He was a communist.

And then one day he got gloriously converted by listening to somebody else preaching the gospel. And after a week or two he came back again, and his subject was, up with everything that's down, up with everything that's down. Well now, it's just round about speaker's corner where once the two princes, Prince Edward and Prince George, when they were boys, went walking through the park because they wanted to find something out.

Somebody had told them that every London policeman under his helmet was as bald as bald could be. And they wanted to find this out for themselves. They didn't quite know how to go about it.

So eventually, walking through Hyde Park, they came across a little Cockney boy. They're very clever and witty and sharp, you know, these Cockney boys. And they called him.

They said, would you like to earn half a crown? Now, half a crown is about 40 cents, I suppose, or less than that, 30 cents. They haven't got half crowns now, not since last February. Would you like to earn half a crown? So, the little boy said, aye, governor, aye, governor.

How? So they said, well now, see that policeman over there? We want to know whether he's bald, and we can't find that out with his helmet on. If you can find a way of getting that off so that we can see whether he's bald, we'll give you half a crown. So he said, OK, governor.

So this boy went over to the policeman and started talking to him. You know, the London policemen are very kind and sociable. They can be a bit tough from time to time.

But they started talking. He started talking to this little boy, you know, and they had a good time of fellowship together. Then suddenly, the little boy stopped the conversation and stooped down and started rubbing his ankle.

So the policeman leaned down and said, what's the matter, sonny? And just as he said, what's the matter, sonny? The little boy shot up and accidentally, on purpose, knocked off the helmet of the policeman. And lo and behold, the two princes were watching and found out that the policeman was as bald as a pound of lard. So, of course, the policeman was wondering what it was all about.

And he watched what would happen. And this boy came running over to the two princes and held out his hand. So the policeman came up, saw the boy take something, it was half a crown.

So he went up to them with his notebook. Now he says, what is your little game here, eh? What is your little game? You are hindering a policeman in the course of his duty. I shall have to take your names.

Now he said to the first one, what is your name? He said, Edward. He said, what do you mean, Edward? He said, Prince Edward. He looked at him.

He said, where do you live? He said, Buckingham Palace. So he put it down in his notebook. So he said to the other one, what is your name? He said, Prince George.

He said, Prince what? He said, Prince George. He said, where do you live? He said, Buckingham Palace. And this little boy, you know, he was looking like this with his eyes open and his mouth open.

And so the policeman came to him. And he says, and what is your name? So he looked at the two princes from one to the other. And then he looked up at the policeman.

He says, I, Governor, he says, I'm the Archbishop of Canterbury. Well now, it doesn't really matter who we are really, but because our subject tonight will show us that God has put it all on one common platform. And the sooner we recognize this, the better.

That's one thing I like very much about your wonderful country. Not only the palms at the park and the people there, but the fact that we are all commoners. And we're all on one common platform.

And thank God all God's people are one in Christ. All one in Christ Jesus. Believing Jews and believing Gentiles, believing hot-and-tots and believing Zulus, and believing coloureds and believing whites and yellows, all one in Christ Jesus.

And it's good to recognize that. We shall see that, I trust, in our portion tonight. Philemon is the letter from Paul, from God, through Paul, from Rome, that we are reading tonight.

And this letter was written to this nobleman Philemon at Colossae, at the same time as the letter to Colossae was written. And it was taken at the same time, but not by the same men. Tychicus was taking the letter to the church at Colossae, and Onetimus was taking this letter, this private letter, to Philemon about himself.

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, Timothy, our brother, and to Philemon, our dearly beloved and fellow labourer, and to our beloved Atreia, who was undoubtedly the wife of Philemon, and Archippus, who was probably the son of both of them, our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the church in thy house. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints, that the fellowship of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is among us in Christ Jesus.

For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother, wherefore though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin you that which is convenient or fitting, yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such in one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ, I beseech thee for my son Onetimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds, who in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me. Whom I have sent again, thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own heart, whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel. Without thy mind would I do nothing, that thy benefits should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

For perhaps he therefore departed for a theism, that thou shouldest receive him for ever, not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, especially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him, receive him as myself. If he is wrong to thee, or oweth thee anything, put that on mine account.

I, Paul, have written it with mine own hand, I sign it with mine own hand, I will repay it. Albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. So he evidently led not only Onetimus to Christ, but Philemon as well.

Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord, refresh my heart in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience, I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt do also more than I say. But at the same time prepare me also a lodging, a room that is, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

Therefore I salute thee, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, Marcus Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow labourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

May again the Lord have blessed to us all our reading of Holy Scripture, and now our meditation on the same. And so this personal letter to Philemon, Paul's son in the faith, the nobleman of Colossae, is a masterpiece of persuasive tact and delicacy. It is an enduring model of truest Christian courtesy, and it magnifies the grace of God in the Apostle Paul.

Now Paul was in prison, as you know. He wrote to the Christians at Colossae, as we saw yesterday and today, and he was asking them to pray for him that he might get released from prison, that a door may be opened so that he could preach the gospel as he wanted to preach it. But instead of the Lord opening the prison door, the Lord opened a door for him to preach the gospel while he was in prison.

And many of Caesar's guards and courtiers and soldiers and even slaves heard the word and were really born again of God's Holy Spirit through Paul's ministry. And among this number was a slave called Onesimus. And I suppose at this time Onesimus would not have told the Apostle Paul all his story.

Paul could see he was a slave, and whenever he came anywhere near Paul while he was there chained to that Roman soldier, he would listen to the word that Paul was perhaps dictating or preaching to others who came to see him. Maybe he would make his task, his menial tasks in the prison, last a much longer time while he was in earshot of the Apostle Paul. And he loved to hear about Jesus the Saviour.

One day he returned and said to Paul, Do you think that I could become a Christian? I'm just a poor slave and nothing at all. And Paul said, God is no respecter of persons, and he dies for all men, for all have sin, and you're included in that, so I'm very happy to say that Christ will receive you. I would imagine they knelt together on the stone floor of that prison house, and Paul led this slave, Onesimus, to the Lord Jesus.

Now, Onesimus, it seemed to Paul, grew in grace very, very rapidly. He was a slave, but most intelligent. I've been amazed recently, in some of our visits to the islands of Bermuda and Bahamas, at the tremendous intelligence and depth of spiritual experience and knowledge of the word of some of our coloured brethren.

And I've learned, and my wife has learned, to love these coloured brothers and sisters in Christ for their spiritual knowledge and spiritual ability. And I sometimes listen to some of these men worshipping in the worship meeting, and it puts me to shame, and I have to confess it. They're terrific.

And when we think of the way that Onesimus grew in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, I really think his testimony would put me, and perhaps others of us, to shame this evening. But one day, after some months maybe, I can imagine Onesimus coming back to Paul when there was no one there except perhaps the soldier to whom he was chained, and getting very close to Paul and saying, I would like to whisper something in your ear. Now, of course, he would have to do this.

It was a confession he was going to make. Not that Paul was his father confessor, but he was very anxious to tell him something about his past and what he intended to do in the future. And it was important he should whisper.

So he got very close to the apostle Paul and said something like this, I presume, Listen, Paul, there's something I haven't told you. You know I'm a slave, but you don't know that I'm a runaway slave. I left my master some months ago.

And, of course, in saying so, he knew that Roman law provided for terrific penalties and fines and imprisonments and very often death for runaway slaves. But he said, I'd like you to know that I've asked God's forgiveness for my unfaithfulness, but I would like to go back. I must leave you, Paul.

I must go back to my old master and make restitution and put the past wrong right. And Paul said, well, now, I would be very, very sorry to see you go. Your presence here has been a great comfort to me.

Indeed, you know I haven't got it very comfortable here in the prison, but you've made it much more comfortable to me. You've helped me such a lot. I would like you to stay here.

But if that's the right thing to do, and I'm sure it is, then I'd be pleased to see you go back to your old boss and put the past wrong right. And Paul was very encouraged. He now knew that this man was born again by the Holy Spirit because restitution is a sure sign of the working of the Holy Ghost in the human heart.

And, of course, if you say the Holy Spirit of Jesus is in your heart, you are born again by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit indwells you and you're not putting the past wrong right, then I have every cause to doubt your profession of faith in Christ. Is there something between you and your brother? Between you and your sister? For the Lord's sake and for your own testimony's sake, else we will not believe your testimony that you are a Christian. Put it right for the glory of God's name and put it right tonight.

You go round tonight and say, Brother, Sister, I'm sorry. And have a weep together on one another's shoulders and do it tonight. You go across to that brother before you leave tonight and shake him by the hand.

Say, Brother, I love you in the Lord just as much as ever. And the Lord expects us to do this as Christian people, show Christian grace. What do you think he gives us the all-sufficient grace of Christ for? To prove sufficient in these occasions when we are expected to make restitution, but to put the wrong right and to cover everything by his grace so that our fellowship is not hindered.

To show that the Holy Spirit is not hindered. Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are feared until the day of redemption. The Holy Spirit is in your heart, and listen, the same Holy Spirit is in that brother's heart and that sister's heart as well.

Make quite sure that Holy Spirit is not grieved through your disobedience when he calls you to put things absolutely correctly right in his sight. Well now a listener says, that's what I'm going to do, Paul. And he whispered this in his ear because there was this soldier trying to listen, you know.

And Paul said to him, well now, I'm very pleased you're going to make restitution and put the wrong right, and I'm in favour of that. But he said, how did you come to run away from your boss? Well he said, it happened some time ago, I worked for a nobleman in Phrygia, and one day, he had about 36 of us slaves, and one day he departed to a city called Ephesus on business. And we always had an easier time when he was away, but when he came back, he made things a bit stricter for us.

But not only so, he seemed to be different. He was changed, he was a different kind of man. He seemed to be very religious, suddenly turned religious.

We thought he'd gone mad. And as a matter of fact, we all agreed he had gone mad when he opened the great hall of his home for other people in the district to come in and have some religious services in the home. And I didn't care for this much, and he meant more work for me, so he said, I decided to run away.

And of course he said, I took something for the journey, so I stole something from him. And he said, I came here as far as Rome, and got this job in the prison. Well now, Paul said, well that's quite right, you should go back and put the wrong right, and the Lord will give you the grace to do that.

But he said, you didn't tell me your boss's name. Now he said, where are you going back to anyway? He said, I'm going back to Colossae. Well Paul said, I've never been there.

But he said, you didn't tell me your boss's name. He said, my boss's name is Philemon, the nobleman of Colossae. Oh, says Paul, I know Philemon.

I led him to Christ the same way as I led you to Christ. You is slave. He says, I was preaching in the square at Ephesus, and there was a crowd gathered, and I saw him drawing near in his flowing robes.

He stood all the time at the edge of the crowd, and afterwards he came to me and inquired about the way of salvation, and we knelt together upon the side wall, and I led him to the Lord Jesus. And that was the time you said he'd become religious. No, he received Christ just as you have recently.

Well, he said, if it's Philemon you're going back to, he said, I'll give you a letter. And he said, I'll write the letter about you, and I'll ask him to receive you. This is what I'll say in the letter, receive him, receive him, receive him, receive him, receive him, receive him.

And that's all that this little letter is about. And that is the key phrase, receive him. He's Onesimus coming with this letter to you Philemon.

He ran away from you, now you receive him back again. And it's a wonderful little letter. We see something of the heart of Paul, something of the sincerity of Onesimus, something of the Christian nobility of the noble men of Philemon, and Appiah his wife, and so on.

And as I say, it's a masterpiece of delicacy and persuasive tact. It's an enduring model of truest Christian courtesy. As a matter of fact, there are seven important sides to this letter.

The letter to Philemon has seven special values, and I'm going to tell you them very quickly, else we'll never get through to the receive him part, which is the most important part tonight. Perhaps we'll see how the Lord leads. It, first of all, has a personal value, as I said.

Much light is thrown upon the character of the Apostle Paul. We saw yesterday, I think it was, yes, yesterday, we saw how very tactful and diplomatic Paul was when he heard of the error at Colossae, and was writing, to put it right, how he graciously and diplomatically approached the subject, speaking of the glories and of the firstness, the preeminence, of the Lord Jesus. And in so doing, he was answering the problem at Colossae.

And hear how diplomatic he is. How kind he is. How persuasive.

And indeed, not only did Onesimus grow in grace rapidly, but Paul evidently, the once arrogant Saul of Tarsus, has developed in grace tremendously too. And thank God the grace of God is still flowing to you and to me. Still it flows as fresh as ever from the Saviour's wounded side, none may perish or may live for Christ's day, and as grace sufficient for every vicissitude of our earthly life.

Not only has it a personal value, but it has an ethical value as well. There is great sensitiveness seen here as to what is right and what is wrong. You notice how they are seen, all of them, to be determined to do

the right thing, whatever the cost.

For instance, Paul wanted the comfort that Onesimus could give him in prison, but he said, I'm going to forego that so that you can do the right thing. You remember, Onesimus wanted to stay and learn more of the Word and of the Saviour from Paul, but he must return and do the right thing and make restitution. And similarly, Philemon was called upon to do the ethical thing.

So, it has an ethical value and a providential value, thirdly, too, because God is seen over and above and behind all the events as they are happening. Everything seems to be dust-tailing together for good and the blessing of people and the glory of God's name. You see, when Paul is at Ephesus, Philemon comes there on business and gets saved and goes back to Colossae.

And then Paul is locked up in prison in Rome, and Philemon, slave, leaves Colossae and comes as far as Rome, gets a job in the prison, hears the Word, and gets saved through the same ministry of the Apostle Paul in that distant part in Rome. Then Paul is dictating a letter to Tychicus to take to the saints at Colossae. And Philemon wants to go back to Colossae.

You couldn't take that long journey on your own. But Tychicus is going. He couldn't have gone on his own.

So, together they go back to Colossae. And everything's planning together marvellously by God in his providential care and overruling grace. All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to Christ Jesus.

I'm glad to see you here tonight. And you are here in the providential goodness of God. And so am I, of course.

And God has blessed me and us tremendously during this week of fellowship together. And I trust God has blessed you. I don't know what blessing God has for you in particular.

It may be along the line of my exhortation at the beginning about showing that we've got the grace of Christ and the spirit of Christ in our hearts by putting everything right to the praise and glory of his name. I'm sure you've decided to go home and write that letter. And make it a beautiful letter.

Send your Christian love. No matter what he's done to you, what she's done to you, write the letter tonight and show a forgiving spirit by the grace of Christ. And you'll find that God will overrule all things for his glory if you're willing to trust and obey as all these people were at this time.

It has a great providential value. It has a practical value as well, fourthly. We see here the application of the highest principles to the ordinary and common affairs of life.

You'll notice that there is exhortation to masters like Philemon and servants and slaves like Onesimus. And the general idea is bearing one another's burdens. And they all seem to be willing in a practical way to fulfil the law of Christ and to love one another, not just with words but in deed and in truth, as John says in the third chapter of his first epistle.

Not only a practical but an evangelistic value this little letter has as well. There is an encouragement here to seek the highest and the lowest for the Lord Jesus Christ. It has a good evangelistic value.

I used to be with a pilgrim preacher some years ago with a man called Moral Sabine was in the team. And when we used to go visiting around the roads and the homes in the morning after our morning prayer

meeting we often used to make our way to the terraced and the smaller houses where he would say to us goodbye. He said, I'm going to the bigger homes, to the richer people, to the upper class.

He said, nobody cares for their souls. And although often he was bit by a dog he often had the joy of appointing some of these people to the Lord Jesus. Here is an encouragement to seek the highest for Christ as well as the lowest.

There was the nobleman Hylemon and there was his slave, his unfaithful runaway slave both led to the Lord by the same evangelist, the apostle Paul. Not only so but you'll notice that Hylemon had the spirit of evangelism too for after being saved he went home and opened his home. Now I mustn't start on that again tonight, must I? I don't know why this has come in so much during this week.

Certainly not premeditated. But here it is again, something for somebody once more. He opened his home for the preaching of the evangelist.

Think of that. Thank God for the thousands of homes in America which are being opened by Christian people to get their unsaved neighbours under the sound of the glorious gospel. It's a great and mighty work.

Pray for this work. And this man, Hylemon, this woman Athia and this young fellow Archippus served the Lord in their own home and got their neighbours in under the sound of the gospel. Not only so but Paul was preaching the gospel in prison, you see.

It has a great evangelistic value, has this. Not only reaching the highest and the lowest but reaching them in every way in the home and in the prison and wherever we might find ourselves. And then of course there's the idea of follow-up and after-care work in evangelism seen in this letter as well.

The apostle is only too willing to teach Onesimus more of the word. He's only too willing to let Onesimus go back and make restitution and do the right thing. And of course only too willing to write to Hylemon and ask him to do some follow-up work after this evangelistic success and blessing as well.

It has a great evangelistic value but it has a social value as well. There is a relationship seen here between Christianity and slavery. You see, in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither master nor slave, bondman or free.

All are one on one common platform in Christ Jesus. The gospel is a great leveller and Christ is the common, not ordinary, but common in the best sense of the word, saviour to all who will believe. And you remember the word to Hylemon was receive him not as a servant, as a slave, but receive him now as a brother.

And in sending his greetings to the church at Colossae from Onesimus, this is Onesimus a beloved brother. So it has a great social value. What an uplifting thing the gospel is, off with everything that's down, is our motto always.

And then of course it has a spiritual value Because there is an analogy here between this story and the gospel story. Just as Onesimus was unfaithful and ran away, and then was found and believed and put things right, so we, running away from God, found by God, gloriously saved, and received by God for another's sake. You see the apostle is asking Hylemon to receive him for his own sake, for Paul's sake.

And I think perhaps there was another word, we have no scriptural authority for this, it might have been there was another word from the saviour to the father when on the cross he hung. Because when the dying thief said to him, took a second look, and said to the Lord Jesus, Lord remember me, it's always good to take a second look, because at first this man cast the same in his teeth as the people around and reviled him, but he made a second look, and he saw in Christ the King, and he owned him as Lord, and he said, Lord remember me. Well now it may be that the saviour immediately turned to the father and said, father receive him for my sake.

Because immediately he turned to the man and said, today shalt thou be with me in paradise. So the father was going to receive him for the saviour's sake. And this is exactly what Paul is saying to Hylemon, receive this man Onesimus for my sake.

So Onesimus was unfaithful, he was a slave, and he was hiding, and yet he was sought and found by God. So there is an analogy here between this story and the gospel story. It has, seventhly, a spiritual value.

But of course the great message in this letter is the message that God will receive us for Christ's sake, and will receive us in a wonderful way. And I want us to look at the scriptures together now very quickly and notice that when God receives us for Christ's sake, he receives us willingly. As Hylemon was requested so to do Onesimus.

See in verse 14, Thy benefits should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. First of all then, God receives us willingly. I was down in New Zealand some little while ago and there was a brother who received me into his home.

And he didn't receive me for his own sake really, but for his son's sake. His son had been one of our first students at Moreland. He'd come over to England and he'd taken the course and although he was not at home when I was down in New Zealand, his father received me into the home.

I sat at his table, I partook of his bounty for the sake of his son. Now God receives us for the sake of another, for the sake of his son who died our salvation to gain. And he receives us willingly for the sake of another.

Well now, Onesimus of course was willingly returning. Of his own volition he was going back to his old master to put things right. And so Hylemon was being asked in verse 4 to receive him likewise willingly.

You know God will not save us against our will. You remember the prodigal son said, I will arise and go back to my father and home. And you remember the Lord Jesus said to someone, I would have saved you, this is the people of the city of Jerusalem, I would have saved you, in other words it was my will that you should be saved.

But you're not saved, and he spoke of destruction and judgment coming, because you would not be saved. It was not your will to be saved, but my will to save you. Even the Almighty Christ could not save them against their will.

Now this is not only New Testament doctrine, but it's Old Testament doctrine as well. In the Old Testament it read, if my people will, I will. So you see God in his sovereignty has given to us a free will.

And God expects us to exercise this, and turn to him and return to him of our own volition in answer to the call and the promptings of his gracious Holy Spirit, because no man can come except the Father draw him. And our salvation is all of the grace of God. We're shut up to the grace of God, it's true.

But as Bengel says, our grace is inoperative without our will, but our wills are useless without grace. So thank God for his matchless grace, the fact that he willingly receives all those who willingly return to him as Onesimus was returning to Philemon. Now in verse 15 it is not only willingly, but eternally.

He receives us eternally. Perhaps he departed for a season that thou shouldest receive him forever. Thank God that all those who are received by God for Christ's sake are received forever, and he gives to them the gift of eternal life.

Thank God we're not going to fall away. Now the Galatians, we read, had fallen from grace. They'd not fallen out of grace, just simply from the blessings of grace, because they were not continuing in faith in Christ, and they'd all their need day by day, although they had started through faith in Christ.

They were bewitched and bewildered because they were not continuing in the Spirit, and so in the blessings of God's grace. Thank God for the eternal security of the believer eternally. Maybe you've been away from the Lord for a little season, so that tonight God should receive you forever to himself.

Not only willingly and eternally, but in verse 16, fraternally. Notice, don't receive him now as a servant, but above a servant, receive him as a brother beloved. He's certainly that to me, says the Apostle Paul, and I'm quite sure if you receive him, that's what he will be to you, a beloved brother.

Now you see, Onesimus was a slave. He said, I don't want you to receive him as a slave, I want you to receive him willingly, eternally, and fraternally, as a brother. Receive him into the family.

And this is what God does for Christ's sake. For all those who come to him, he makes them children of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To all those that receive him, to them gives he the authority to become the children of God.

They are born of God, and born into his family. Just like Mephibosheth was brought from the place of Lodibah, the place of no pasture, into the king's palace to sit at the king's table. And he was lame on both his seats, yet he became a member of the family of the king, unworthy though he was.

So he said to Philemon, receive him fraternally, into the family as a brother. And then verse 17, receive him by proxy, if you want to continue the alliteration, or receive him as myself, which gives the sense better. Because the apostle was saying, he is my son now, he is begotten in my bonds, in prison here in Rome, and I want you to receive him as though you were receiving me.

As a matter of fact, he said, a little later in the letter, I'm hoping to come, if they let me out of this place, and I'll come over and see you, and I would like you to get a room ready for me. Just like the dear friends here at Park of the Palms got a room for us when they heard that we were coming. Now he said, you get a room ready for me.

But he said, in between times, I'm quite sure he's saying this, in between times, give him my room. Receive him as you would receive myself. And when God receives us, it is for the sake of another.

In the person of his Son, we are as near to God as the Son is himself. Indeed, he not only receives us in Christ, and makes us his own child, that Christ should be the firstborn of many a brethren, but he makes us co-heirs with our Lord Jesus Christ. There's just no end to our blessing in God through Christ.

It is eternal. Inasmuch, said the Lord Jesus, as ye did it unto the least of one of these my little ones, ye did it unto me. And here the Apostle is saying something similar to Philemon.

You receive him as unto me, as you would receive myself, and for my sake. And then the next verse, in verse 18, he says, receive him forgivingly. These are the words.

If he's wronged you, or owes you anything, put that on my account. Receive him with forgiveness. Now, of course, Paul was quite sure that the slave Onesimus had stolen something when he left for Rome.

Now, all slaves, when they were about to run away, used to look around, see what they could take with them, to help them on their journey wherever they were going. Similarly, in this case, it's quite evident that Onesimus had stolen something. Now, Paul said to Philemon, I want you to receive him with absolute forgiveness.

And if he's taken anything, don't demand it of him. I will pay it back again to you myself. Here is my signature.

I, Paul, signed with my own hand, I will pay the bill. And so he was to receive him forgivingly, for another was to pay the bill. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus said to the father about you.

That's why you are supposed to forgive others, you see, because he forgave you. God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you. You see, the Lord Jesus said to the father about you, he said, if this lady, this gentleman here, has done anything wrong, father, if they have sinned in any way through their lives, if they have told any lies, or borne false witness, or spread any scandal, or done anything that's wrong, if they've stolen anything, taken anything that's not theirs, got something in the home now that doesn't belong to them, if they've done anything wrong, father, I want you, if you will, to forgive them for my sake.

Receive them forgivingly. And he said, Lord, father, I will pay the bill for that lady and that gentleman. And you know the father took the son at his word.

And he received it for Christ's sake, and Christ paid the bill. And do you know what it cost him to pay the bill so that you might be forgiven by God? It cost him his life. He paid in his own most precious blood.

And it's shedding at the place called Calvary. Blessed be his name. Doesn't it make you bow your head in worship when you think of the fact that the Lord Jesus said, I'll pay the bill, and it cost him so much that God should receive us to himself with absolute forgiveness? Doesn't it make you want to make everything right in your life by the grace of God so that you should glorify his name in your body and in your spirit, which are his? Well then, verse 21, he says, Receive him abundantly.

At the end of verse 21, he says, I know that you will do more than I say. So he's giving to him a very broad hint here to receive him and even do more than Paul is asking of him, receive him abundantly. And when God receives us, for Christ's sake, he receives us abundantly.

He does more for us than we've ever conceived. And he's able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. I wonder if we look upon God like that.

In Christ, we have a full salvation. The blessing is abundant. Your God is too small.

Ask, and it shall be given unto you. Speak, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be given, opened unto you.

Let us remember that God is able and God is almighty. God has all that we need. Let us come to him for an abundant answer for his glory.

And for the final idea, we come back to verse 11. He says, I know that in time past this man called profitable, because onesimus means profitable, this man who is called profitable was unprofitable to you. When he was with you, he didn't live up to the meaning of his name.

I know that, but I want you to know that since his conversion, he's been very profitable to me here in prison at Rome, and I know now that he's coming back to you, you receive him, it will be with profit. He will live up to the meaning of his name, onesimus, profitable, and he'll be a blessing to you. When God receives us for Christ's sake, it is for profit all around.

You remember Portia in The Merchant of Venice is appealing for the showing of mercy, and she says in the showing of mercy it is twice blessed, blessed him that gives and him that takes. But you know, in coming to God through Christ, there's loads of blessing, abundant blessing, there's profit to everybody. God is glorified.

The savour is exalted. You're blessed in your own soul, and it's a good testimony too. Many shall fear, and shall fear, and trust in the Lord.

So you see, onesimus means profitable. He hadn't been profitable. Now it is you receive him for my sake, and he'll be profitable to you, as he has been to me, and live up to the meaning of his name.

I was preaching at Cape and Ray Conference Centre. It's an English castle, which has now turned into a Christian conference centre and Bible school in the north of England some few years ago, and there were a lot of people there from different countries, and I found that I had to preach to an English audience, but in the room through that door there was a German audience, and in the room through that door there was a French audience, and in the room through that door there was an Italian audience, and in the room through that door there was a Polish audience, you see, and at the door, at each door, there was an interpreter for that language, you see, so I only just had to say the sentence once, and then it was interpreted to the people beyond the doors by the interpreters into the various languages. That's certainly much better than giving a sentence and waiting for it to be translated into one language, then in another, then, this is what happened to me once in Nigeria, and by the time the thing had come back to me I didn't know what I was talking about.

I'd forgotten completely. So this was a very good idea. But one of those German girls out of that room there came to me afterwards.

She said, I'd like to tell you that I haven't been living up to the meaning of my name and God has convicted me about that today. She spoke English in a broken way, and I said, well, what's your name? And she told me some German name which I couldn't remember, and she said, the meaning of it is entering into another's victory, and I said, haven't you been doing that? She said, no, I'm afraid I've been yielding to temptation. But she said, by God's grace I will enter into His victory on the cross as my victory today.

And I wonder if I can ask you, I'm not going to ask you, what is the meaning of your name? You probably know. Well, look it up if you don't know and see if you're living up to the meaning of your name. Because Onesimus was not until he met the Lord, and that made such a difference.

So it should. Meeting the Lord, having the Spirit of Christ in your heart should make all the difference in the world. You shouldn't be like an ordinary person.

You should be an extraordinary person. A Christian with the living Spirit of Christ in your heart. All the grace of God at your disposal.

He who receives abundance of grace shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ. How extraordinary, how profitable we should be because we have the spiritual enabling so to be. And when God receives us for Christ's sake, then He receives us with profit, and there's profit and blessing to all.

Now let me close by saying this. This letter written to Philemon by the Apostle Paul about Onesimus was given to Onesimus and he put it in his pocket. And Onesimus said to Titicus, Titicus, have you got that letter for the church at Colossae? He said, yes, I'm ready.

He said, right, we'll go together. He said goodbye to the Apostle Paul and together they started on this long, long trek of about nine hundred miles with a letter each in their respective pockets. And sometime afterwards, many weeks afterwards, there was a certain family in a big house in Colossae and it was a big home where they had meetings in the home and there was the lady of the home sitting in the window one afternoon and as she suddenly looked out through the window she saw two men turning the corner at the end of the road and coming towards their house and she shouted out, Philemon, dear, are you there? There's somebody coming.

And she said, Philemon, I think I know who one of them is. They're coming straight towards our house. Philemon, won't you come and see? And she said, yes, Philemon, I think I know And Philemon drew to the window himself.

Yes, he said, do you know who that is? That's Tychicus. And Philemon said to his wife, Athea, you're quite right, my dear, that's our dear brother Tychicus. I'm quite sure he's come all the way from Rome.

I wonder if he's met our beloved brother, Paul, and whether he's got a letter for the church that meets in this home. We must go to the door, to the front gate, and welcome him. Who's the other man with him, said Athea.

I can't see yet, said Philemon. And as they drew closer and Philemon went to the front door to open it, she started looking through the window again. She said, I think I know who the other man is.

She says, it's that terrible runaway slave. It's that unfaithful servant of ours called Onesimus. I'm sure it is.

Fancy, he's coming back and he's coming back with Tychicus too. What in all world has he got? Well, he said, I have a letter, a personal letter from the Apostle Paul. What? You've seen the Apostle Paul? Yes, he said.

I met him in prison at Rome. I was a servant there in the prison and just as he led you to Christ, I remember the time when you came back from Ephesus and you were a different man. So he led me to Christ and I'm a different man too.

Now, he said, I've come back to put the past wrong right and Philemon calls his wife, Apphia, come here my dear, this man has something to say to us and something to show us. He says, let me see that letter and they read it together on the side. Onesimus, profitable.

Unprofitable to you in the past but now profitable to me. If he owes you anything, if he's wronged you, I will pay the bill, put it on my account. Paul, the apostle, he's my son in the faith, begotten in my bones, just as you are my son in the faith.

Now receive him as you will receive myself. Prepare a room for me when I get out of prison, I'm coming, but in between times give him my room. And they look at one another, they don't say a word to one another.

They know what it's all about and the grace of God softens their hearts and makes them do the right thing. And they walk up together to this one-time slave of theirs and they give him a warm welcome. Brother, oh, come into the house.

Don't go round the back, come into the front door. Don't act as a slave now, you are our brother in Christ. We are waiting when the apostles come.

But in between times we'll have fellowship with you and hear your story and all you have to tell us about him. Come right inside, sit at the table, let us bathe your feet too. Take a drink now and be refreshed.

And they loved him for the sake of another. They received him just as they would receive the apostle Paul and grace had triumphed in every case. And I think that's our message tonight, you know.

The grace of Christ will always triumph. In Romans chapter 5 you find this, the grace of God triumphed at the cross, in verse 8. The grace of God in Christ triumphs in the life, verse 17. And the grace of God in Christ shall triumph for all eternity, the last birth, verse 25.

My message to you tonight is this, just as Onesimus grew in grace, just as Saul of Tarsus was changed by the grace of God into the dearly beloved brother, the apostle Paul, just as Philemon in grace received this unfaithful slave and accepted him as a brother, so the grace of God, if we give it a chance, will work in our lives for the glory of God's name and our blessing and the blessing of others around us. Let us pray. Work on, Lord, in our hearts by thy spirit.

Teach us what thine all-sufficient grace really means. Make the exercise in our hearts and in our lives We thank thee for the great love which abounds in the park of the palms, which is an outward manifestation of thy grace, and we pray thee for it. We pray that in every case, in every sense, in every circumstance, in every family, in every relationship, the grace of God in Christ shall triumph and reign in our lives.

So we commend one another to thee, thanking thee for this week of wonderful fellowship together. We thank thee for one another. We commend one another to thee.

We thank thee we're going to meet in the glory, around the throne of God in heaven, with our blessed Saviour, to cast our crowns at his feet, to glorify his name, to be taken up with him for all eternity. What a day of rejoicing that will be when we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory, but until that day, keep us faithful to thee, cleaving to Christ with purpose of heart, determined to know nothing among men, say Jesus Christ and him crucified. And may the all-sufficient grace of Christ be with us all.

Amen.

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