

Paul's Letter to Philemon • The transforming power of Jesus Christ

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It says:

*"¹Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ²and Apphia our sister and
Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:
³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*⁴I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear
of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the
saints, ⁶and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the
full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. ⁷For I
have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the
hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.*

*⁸Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what
is required, ⁹yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man
and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus—¹⁰I appeal to you for my child,
Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹(Formerly he was
useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹²I am sending
him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³I would have been glad to keep him
with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my
imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴but I preferred to do nothing without your
consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your
own accord. ¹⁵For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that
you might have him back forever, ¹⁶no longer as a bondservant but more than a
bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to
you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.*

*¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.
¹⁸If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.
¹⁹I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your
owing me even your own self. ²⁰Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in
the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.*

²¹Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even

more than I say. ²²At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

²³Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

²⁵The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." (ESV)

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you so much for giving us the opportunity today to gather here in this place and to hear your word. And I pray that the ministry of your Holy Spirit would speak volumes. That you administer to each heart here and that you would help us, Lord, to apply this short and very personal letter from the Apostle Paul. Lead us, we pray, Father, and guide us, Lord, in understanding. For we ask it in Jesus' precious name, amen. Amen.

Before I get started, can everybody hear me okay? Way in the back. Is it all right? All right, cool. Well, there are several reasons why I chose to go through the book of Philemon this morning.

The first is I was looking, and it's been 12 years since we last went through Philemon, and I thought it was kind of time to get an update. Secondly, I confess I was looking for something to do in one week because Sue and I are going to be scooting out here right after service and we're heading on our annual trek to Minnesota. We're taking our travel trailer and we've been working to get everything ready and so since I'm going to be going on holiday, as the British say, and no, we're not going to England.

Just going. I didn't know how to say that in Minnesotan, so I just left it at that. But anyway, I was looking for something that I could do in one week. But thirdly, and I think most importantly, I felt that this letter dovetailed very nicely with the last book that we just finished last Sunday, which was the book of Colossians.

Because you see Philemon, the recipient of this letter, was a Colossian. He lived in Colossae. And although we have to kind of piece this story together from what Paul is saying here, what we're able to deduce is that Philemon was a man who had come to know Christ as his savior through Paul's ministry.

And now he was residing there in Colossae. One of his slaves, a man by the name of Onesimus, had run away. And we're not told why Onesimus took to flight, but it isn't necessarily because he was being mistreated. Because you might have noticed in the course of this letter, Paul refers to Onesimus as a bondservant or a bond slave.

And if you remember what that means, a bond slave was someone who chose willingly to be a servant for life. Usually because their master was a good guy, was a good and fair person. And so after serving their time, and usually slaves back in those days were in a position of slavery not because of reasons that you might think.

It was usually because of some financial debt, and they were working off a financial debt. Once that debt was worked off, some slaves would say, 'my master's a good guy. He's a fair guy. I like him, he treats me well. And so I choose to be his servant for life.' And at that point, they would become a bond slave or a bondservant.

And Onesimus was one such individual. So again, we're not really sure why he ran off. But he ran off. And he eventually, as we're piecing this together, made his way to Rome, where Paul at that time was incarcerated. And through what could only be seen as the providence of God, Onesimus ran into Paul in Rome. While he was incarcerated. Figure that one out.

And while he was there, he was brought by Paul, to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. So he got saved too, just like his master. And it's very clear, as we read through this letter, this is a very personal letter. Paul explains the very close relationship that he had forged with this man Onesimus while he was there in Rome.

He talks about how Onesimus became a great help to him, a very close personal friend. But eventually they decided that it was in their best interest, because Onesimus had come to Christ, to send him back to his master Philemon to settle his past. And we'll talk about that in just a minute. But I'll just tell you something right off the get go.

Little spoiler alert: that sort of a thing was not without risk. And we'll talk about that in just a bit. So, Paul sends Onesimus – now, he wrote a letter to the Colossians too, and sent that back with Tychicus, – wrote this letter to Philemon and sent it back to Philemon with Onesimus.

So as we get into it here, you'll notice that the letter begins as letters began back in those days with the author at the very beginning. So he starts off "*Paul*," and then he refers to himself as "*a prisoner for Christ Jesus*," and I want to stop there for just a moment because that's significant. Was Paul incarcerated by Christ Jesus? Well, not technically. But Paul did not consider himself a prisoner of Rome. He did not consider himself a victim of bad luck or negative circumstances.

He considered himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ. And what that means is he considered his incarceration as part of his ministry to serve Jesus and to bring glory to the one who had called him into this apostolic ministry. Now, you and I quite likely would look at a negative situation or a negative circumstance in our lives, and we would immediately assume this is going to be just, everything's on hold now.

God's called me to do this, or God wants, whatever. Now this thing happened. And what am I going to do now? Well, I guess we just have to kind of throw our hands up and say, I don't know. Who knows? It's just this, God, why did you let this happen? I mean, think about it. Paul was called by God to go out.

That's what the word apostle means. One who goes out and is sent forth. And he goes out and spends a lot of time behind bars and you're kind of thinking, what in the world? Well, number one, that gave him a lot of opportunities to write letters, and that has become the majority of our New Testament Bible.

Paul wrote elsewhere in one of his epistles and he said, I don't want you to think that my incarceration has created a problem necessarily. In fact, he says, because I'm behind bars, more people are coming to Christ. It's actually, he says, serving the gospel that he was behind bars (2 Timothy 2:8–9).

Paul started, and this is so important guys, I need you to get a hold of this. Paul began to see his circumstances as a gift from God. Negative, though they were. Challenging, though I'm sure they were. He began to see them in such a way as sent from the Lord to the point where he could say, I am a prisoner of Jesus.

That's pretty incredible stuff. Now what else is kind of interesting here, as Paul introduces himself in the letter, you'll notice he doesn't say an apostle. He doesn't say that. He says, I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ. But normally don't you remember on his letters, he always says Paul, an apostle called by God, or Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

He doesn't do that here. And that would be something that would be necessary if Paul were writing a letter of some deep doctrinal importance or some corrective sort of a nature for the people to whom he was writing. But this is a personal letter. And that's what makes the book or the letter to Philemon so important and interesting is that it is personal. And it is one where Paul wants to appeal to his friend, not on the basis of his apostolic authority, but rather as a friend. As a brother in Christ and as a fellow sufferer for Jesus.

He goes on. You'll notice mentioning there in verse 1 that Timothy is with him at his side at the time of this writing. And then he mentions at the end of verse 1, the recipient, *"To Philemon our beloved fellow worker"* he mentions then in verse 2, *"and Apphia our sister"* and most Bible students believe that Apphia was Philemon's wife.

He then mentions, *"Archippus our fellow soldier"* again, many people believe, and I think it's probably so, that this was Philemon's son. And then he goes on to say, *"and the church"* so he writes to Philemon, his wife and his son, *"and the church"* he says *"in your house:"* and we're reminded of a couple of interesting things.

First of all, we're reminded that believers didn't meet in church buildings. Which, we call this the church. This is not the church. This is, we've said many times, this is a glorified onion shed. You are the church.

I remember when my kids were little, we were trying to break them of calling the building the church. And so anytime someone did it, and we usually caught them at dinnertime, somebody talking and they'd make reference to this as the church. And if they did, they'd have to stand up from their seat and they'd have to jump up and down and go "whoopa-whoopa-whoopa," for like 10 seconds. It was just a way to humiliate.

I did it most of the time, and let me tell you something, it's a little weird. Dad's standing up in the dinner table going "whoopa-whoopa-whoopa" jumping up and down and turning in circles. But we were trying to break ourselves of calling it the church. We're the church.

Here's the interesting thing: they met house to house. The church met house to house in the first century. They didn't need church buildings. They had homes. And by the way, we might be reviving that practice sometime soon. We'll see. But anyway, he goes on. He says, *"and to the church"* why does he write also to. . . you said, Pastor Paul, this was a personal letter. Why also write it to the church? Well, Onesimus is coming back home and the whole church is going to need to understand what has happened to this man and also receive him as a brother. So he goes on.

Now look with me in your Bible. In verse 3, he says, *"³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."* Fairly typical greeting for Paul's letters. But then he goes on to saying verse 4, *"⁴I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints,"* Philemon was

the kind of a man who was living out his faith in Jesus, serving the Lord, encouraging the saints.

And so Paul acknowledges that as he goes into this letter. In fact, he says in verse 6, *"and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ."* In other words, Paul is saying that as he prays for Philemon and his ministry. Remember the church met in his home.

He says, I'm praying that as you share the word, that people would gain a full knowledge of all of the blessings and all of the promises that we have in Christ Jesus. And I thought about this, and this is a really lovely prayer. I mean, it's a lovely thing to say for anyone who's involved in a Bible study or teaching or whatever. May your Bible study be effective, to really awaken people to a full understanding of all of the blessings that we have in Christ. Our full inheritance. So it's a great thing to pray. You can think about that as you're praying for people who are teaching and ministering in Bible studies and so forth.

And then he says in verse 7, *"For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you."* And so he acknowledges here that Philemon was a man who refreshed the saints. And that was a big deal back in those days. That means that as the saints traveled from church to church to minister like Paul did from time to time, or Timothy or any of the others who came along, there wasn't a hotel. They stayed in homes. There wasn't a Super 8. You put them up and you fed them and you took care of them.

And in some cases there was something to that. I mean, it was a significant output of your resources. But it refreshed people. So he says, you're a man who refreshes people. When was the last time you refreshed somebody in their faith? Think about that for a moment. When was the last time you personally refreshed someone in their faith?

Now you'll notice that verse 8, if you look in your Bible, begins with the word *"Accordingly"* at least it does in the ESV. If you have a different translation than mine, other bibles use the word "therefore" instead of "accordingly" but they mean the same thing. It means that what Paul is about to say is predicated upon what he just got done saying. And the reason he's doing that is because what he's about to say is going to be potentially hard for Philemon to hear. But he wants it known that it is because of Philemon's past, it is because of his faithfulness, that now he can speak truth to this individual in love, being

confident of how it's going to be received. So here it goes. You ready? Here's where it gets hard.

Verse 8: *"⁸Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required,"* and then look at verse 9, *"⁹yet for love's sake"* (take note of that) *"I prefer"* (he says) *"to appeal to you – I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus –"* and it's very important. Stop there for just a moment. It's very important that we hear what Paul is saying in these two verses.

Because what he's saying, you and I would say something like: although I'm bold enough to pull rank on you, and I'm bold enough to tell you, 'Hey dude, you need to do this. You need to do this.' I'm bold enough to tell you that. But I don't want to do it because I want your response to be motivated not by obligation, but by love. And that's what he's saying.

And anybody here today who has ever been a parent who's raised children knows what Paul is saying in these couple of verses. Because as we raise kids, they get to a certain age where you want to see them beginning to make good decisions. Not because they have to, but because they understand that it's a good idea and they want to. I mean, if your kids aren't doing that, if they get to the age where they're not making good decisions, we parents become very distressed because we want them to grow up. We want them to mature. We want them to do things from the heart.

That's what God wants from us too. He wants us to do things from the heart because of love. Do you guys know that love is always the best reason to do something? Now, don't get me wrong. There's a time and a place for just plowing ahead and doing what you need to do because it's the right thing to do. I get that.

I mean, there's a time when that is definitely necessary. But the best reason for doing what is right, the best reason for obeying is love, the best reason. Let me remind you of something. Jesus said . . . if you're taking notes, you can write down John 14:15. It says, now listen to this: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

You remember Jesus saying that? He literally said, if you love Me, if you have love in your heart, I'm not going to have to tell you what to do. You're going to want to do it. It will spring out of a heart of love. He said, you'll keep My commandments. And people, sometimes they get messed up on this. Well, what are the commandments of Jesus?

Well, they're encompassed in all of the stories, all of the parables that He told, during His ministry on this earth. Stories like The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) where you and I learned that we're to love our enemies, maybe even those who don't love us back. Parables, like The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) where we're told to get out and use what we've been given for the glory of God.

Parables like the ungrateful steward (Matthew 18:21-35) who refused to forgive his fellow servant when he had been forgiven so much. Those are the commandments that He wants you and I to keep. And He says, if you'll love Me, you'll do it out of love.

And we can take a more judicial kind of a stance with God. And a lot of people do. Their relationship with God is very judicial. And what I mean by that, it's very legalistic. They think a lot about obedience, but only because, well, He told me to do it. I got to do it, and if I don't do it, I'm in trouble.

Is that the kind of relationship that you want to have ultimately with your own kids? I mean, sure, when they're children, there has to be a sense of this is right, this is wrong, and there's a punishment that goes along with it, when you mess up. But when they grow, when they mature, you don't want that to be the same relationship that you had before.

So everything that Jesus said in His earthly ministry that is recorded for us in the gospels is all about how we're supposed to live our lives. And that is keeping His commandments and so forth.

So Paul goes on, look at verse 10 in your Bible. *"I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment."* You know what's interesting about this is in the Greek, the name Onesimus is at the very end of the sentence. So it kind of goes like this: I appeal to you concerning a son of mine who became my son while I was in chains, Onesimus.

It's kinda like he's laying this groundwork, right? For Philemon to think about this person who Paul wants him to receive. But then at the very end of the sentence, he reveals who the person is. It's your runaway slave, and I want you to receive him. Notice he's speaking here in such a very tender and personal way about Onesimus.

Now, can you imagine what's going through Philemon's mind as he reads this letter? Can you imagine what he's kind of thinking? I mean, the same man who brought him to the Lord is now writing him a letter saying that he met up with

his runaway slave in Rome and brought him to the Lord, and now is sending him back. Not as a slave, but as a brother. Oh, this is too weird. I mean, it really is. There's no way this can happen by chance. This is too weird to be a coincidence. This has got to be the Lord.

And so Paul says, look what he says in verse 11 concerning Onesimus. He says, *"¹¹(Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.)"* And what you may not know is that is actually a play on Onesimus' name. Because his name means helpful or profitable. And he's saying, before this time he wasn't helpful or profitable to you or me. But now he is true to his name. He is helpful, he is profitable to both of us.

And then he says in verse 12, look in your Bible: *"¹²I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³I would have been glad to keep him with me. in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord."*

Notice that Paul refers to Onesimus as his own, his very heart. And you might wonder why is, he seems like he's kind of laying it on a little thick. Well, this is where we need to talk about something under Roman law. Philemon was well within his rights to put Onesimus to death, and it happened a lot in the Roman Empire.

You see, at this time in history, there were as many as 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. And honestly, the Romans were fearful of a potential uprising among disgruntled servants and slaves. And so if a slave ran off, it was a very serious matter, and they gave them the full force of the law to deal with it.

Many runaway slaves were crucified. If a master was a little more gracious and benevolent, he might choose to brand that servant with a hot iron. Either way, this was a nasty business and Paul knew, and Onesimus knew that going home could be deadly. They both knew that. But they also knew they had to do the right thing because Onesimus was now a believer and as they say, you eventually have to pay the piper.

You have to deal with your past even though you're forgiven. Even though Jesus has forgiven all of your sins. That does not mean that there isn't some element of consequence that is connected to your actions here on earth that the Lord may want you to deal with as it relates to the thing that you have done.

In this case, Paul could have said to Onesimus, you just stay here with me, buddy, and I'll protect you. You are now my brother. You are now free. You're out from under the yoke of slavery and now you are just fine. You stay here. He loved this man. I'm sure there was even a temptation at some level. And yet he said, Onesimus, you need to go back home. And I'm sure Onesimus agreed with that because it was the right thing to do.

But guys, the right thing to do is not always the safe thing to do. In this case, it was a downright dangerous thing to do. And coming to Christ and dealing with our past can be very painful, very challenging. I got an email from a gal just like yesterday, I think it was. And she was telling me about the way she lived before she came to Christ, and she built this life of just dysfunction and sinful behavior.

And she openly admitted it in her note to me and she said, I did all these things. She got pregnant out of wedlock, she this and that and the other. And so now she was writing and saying, how do I deal with this stuff? That is one of the most challenging letters that I can ever receive from people, because honestly, I don't even know the answer most of the time.

Because what people are doing is they're saying, I've created this situation in my life that is awful. And she said this in her note, 'I know that I am forgiven.' And I wrote her back, 'yeah, you're forgiven.' But all I can say is do what's right. Get into the Word, open your heart to the Word and do what's right. And let God deal with the fallout.

You see, sometimes we get saved, we know that we're forgiven, and then we kind of think, well, if I just ignore it, it's all going to go away. And we're afraid to go back and do what we know in our heart deep down to be right, because of all of the potential junk that can come out because of it. And who wants to go back and relive that junk?

I mean, good grief. The Bible says I'm a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Who wants to go back and do all that? I'm tired of it. I'm done with it. I just want to move on and grow in Jesus. I'm sure Onesimus wanted to just get on with his life. Paul says, no, this needs to be dealt with.

Verse 15, he says, *"¹⁵For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother – "* and he says he is *"especially to me,"* I consider him my brother *"but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord."*

He goes on to say, and this is perhaps his most compelling statement, *"¹⁷So if you considered me your partner, receive him as you would receive me."* How do you think Philemon would have received Paul? Had Paul gotten out of prison and made his way back to Colossae, how do you think Philemon . . . if you wrote him a letter and said, Philemon, I'm coming to your home. They released me. I'm on my way. I should be there in about 30 days. Prepare a place for me. What do you think Philemon would do?

I imagine he would probably, just really put on the dog. I mean, in that sense of getting ready to prepare a place that would honor the kind of a man who had led him to Christ and now had done such work for the gospel. Look what Paul says here. Receive back Onesimus the way you would receive me. Wow.

Then in verse 18, he says, *"¹⁸If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account."* And essentially here, this is a powerful statement. Paul is standing beside this guilty man. Did you catch it? He's not denying that Onesimus is a guilty man. But he's willing to stand beside him nonetheless. Onesimus, I know you did wrong. You messed up, buddy. But I'm going to stand with you. And that's what he . . . now he appeals to Philemon. If he owes you anything, I'll pay for it. Do you understand why that's such a powerful thing for Paul to do?

Guys, it's exactly what Jesus did for you and me. He stood beside a guilty person and said, I'll pay it. I'll pay whatever this person owes. I'll pay it. And don't think for a moment that whole concept is being lost on Philemon. I believe Paul knows exactly what he's doing.

He is speaking to Philemon in such a way as to help him to understand that this is what Jesus did for you, my brother. Now, how are you going to respond to this man? Jesus forgave all of your guilt. Now what will you do concerning him? I found a quote, actually. I wish I had a screen to put it up on. You'll just have to listen. Martin Luther, the great reformer back in the 15 hundreds wrote this about Philemon, and Onesimus, and Paul, he wrote this quote:

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"Here we see how Paul lays himself out for poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleads his cause with his master: and so sets himself as if he were Onesimus, and had HIMSELF done wrong to Philemon. Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also Paul does for Onesimus with Philemon." –Martin Luther

Isn't that amazing? You know what it comes down to? We're all Onesimus. We're all like this guy, right? We've all done wrong, and we had to stand before the master. But Jesus comes and says, I'll pay it. I'll pay their debt. I'll pay it for them.

And then Paul puts this exclamation point on it in verse 19. He says, *"¹⁹I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it – to say nothing of you owing me even your own self."* I like that. Doesn't Paul have a great way of wording. He says, by the way, I'll pay it, but just want to remind you, you owe me your life. Isn't that great? Now that might sound like Paul is using a little twist my arm, sort of guilt to motivate Philemon. But that's not what he's doing.

What Paul is doing is he wants Philemon to lay hold of the true nature of debt and the forgiveness of debt in the Kingdom of God. What is that true nature? Paul wrote about it to the Ephesians. Listen to his words. This is important guys.

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Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

By the way, that's Ephesians 4:32

So you see in this letter what Paul's doing is he's painting a picture of Jesus on the cross. He's painting a picture of the sacrifice of Christ. And he is identifying himself with Onesimus, who is clearly guilty of wrongdoing, but identifying in such a way as to project a picture of what Jesus did for all of us.

People wonder, I get questions all the time, 'why did Jesus submit to water baptism?' Have you ever wondered that? Remember that John's baptism was all about repentance? Why did Jesus get in the waters of the Jordan to be baptized by a man who was calling people to repentance? Jesus had nothing to repent for.

He was identifying with you and me. He was identifying with sinful people. That's who was getting into the Jordan. And Jesus said, I'm going to hop in and be one of them. I'm going to identify with them. Why do we get baptized in water? We don't do the baptism of John. What's our water baptism all about? It's about identifying with Christ.

He identified with us in the waters of repentance. We identify with him in water baptism, in his death, burial and resurrection. It's all about identification. And it's such a powerful identification. Paul is doing it here with Onesimus. I am identifying with this man who is guilty, but I want you to treat him like a new creation in Christ. Amen. That's so important.

He ends this letter verse 25 to say, "²⁵*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*" And the book of Philemon is so, so good. It's all about reconciliation.

And can I just tell you we're hearing a lot about reconciliation today. Social reconciliation, between this people group and this people group. And can I just say something about the need for reconciliation? The reason we need to be reconciled is because of distinctions that sinful man has made. These are not God's distinctions.

There are distinctions. Right. Whether it's the distinctiveness of someone's skin color or their ethnicity or whatever, those are all manmade, you guys. God didn't come up with those distinctions. We did. And I believe they're an abomination to the Lord. And yet we have the need for reconciliation because of sin.

Can I just tell you that the only way that reconciliation is ever going to happen is through Jesus Christ. Sue and I have been watching for a couple of months now, testimonies online from . . . you might want to look it up. There's a site, a YouTube channel called One for Israel. Some of you may have been aware of it.

We've been watching the videos on there because there are testimonies on there of Jews and Arabs who met Jesus Christ. Met the Messiah. And they will talk about their bitter hatred for one another that could not be reconciled through political or social change or whatever. And then they met Jesus Christ and suddenly they didn't just get reconciled. They started loving each other.

There are testimonies in there of Palestinian Arabs who will talk about, 'I love Israel, I love the people of Israel.' And you're thinking to yourself, wait a minute, that sounds really crazy. How does that happen? Jesus makes it happen. Jesus is the one who enables that kind of reconciliation.

That is why Paul is speaking here about his confidence in Philemon to actually bring about this kind of reconciliation. Because this is what Jesus does. He reconciles. One individual to another, whether it's extended family, whether it's

marital, whether it's racial. All reconciliation begins with our being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and then to one another.

Don't ever get that horse and cart backwards because it doesn't work backwards. It only works by being reconciled first to God. If there's any reconciliation that you have need of right now in your home, in your marriage, in your business, workplace, whatever, and you've been working hard to try and make sure that both parties are first reconciled to God, and then go forth with reconciliation of that more human type.

I want you to hear, again, something that the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians in his second letter. Now listen to this. Listen to this. This is very important, especially with all of this stuff we're hearing on the news about social reconciliation, racial reconciliation. Here's Reconciliation 101 for Christians. You ready? This is 2 Corinthians 5:16:

(slide)

2 Corinthians 5:16a (ESV)

From now on...we regard no one according to the flesh.

Boom. That's it right there, guys. From now on. And that means because we are now in Jesus Christ, we look at no one according to the flesh.

I actually like how this is rendered in the New Living Translation. Listen to this. He says:

(slide)

2 Corinthians 5:16 (NLT2)

...we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view.

That gets it said, doesn't it? Philemon used to evaluate Onesimus from a human standpoint. He's my bondservant, my bond slave. But Paul's letter was a gentle reminder that when somebody comes to Jesus Christ, they are remade, reborn, and you can't look at them from that human standpoint any longer.

Those human standpoints are gone. They're ridiculously outmoded in Christ because He is the one who breaks down all barriers. All the barriers that man puts up, Jesus breaks down. So question is, are we willing to let those barriers come down?