

Today, we finish our journey through Philemon and let me say that Philemon is a book or letter that very few Christians know anything about.

- As a matter of fact, I have had several Christian men and women say, I have never heard of Philemon.
- I have also had several people say, I thought it was called 'Phili-A-Mon.'
- So, this is not a very well-studied or taught letter.
- Not sure why, but maybe it's because it's only 1 Chapter and 25 verses.

Regardless of that being the case, what we have learned over the past 11 years is that every word, every sentence, and paragraph in God's Holy Manuscript has purpose and meaning, as you have heard me say before.

The Jewish Rabbis used to say, even the spaces between God's Word have meaning, and sure enough, I have found all of that to be true.

So, what does that tell us?

- It tells us that all Christians, every believer, man/woman, and child, should desire to become more well-rounded and well-versed in God's Manuscript.

Any why?

- Because inside of "His Words" lies the answer to life, and it pertains to everything you will ever face.
 - From Cancer or Criticism.
 - Car wrecks, Death, or Loss of a job.
 - Divorce or Financial Ruin.
 - You fill in the blanks.
- Whatever this life dishes out, you will find, at a minimum (which is not really a minimum), the comfort and peace it requires to carry you through whatever it is!
- Because, as we know, everything negative in this life finds its origin, as well as its end, inside of God's Word.
 - And the "Origin" BTW, is always the same.
 - We live in a "fallen world."
 - One that the "Prince of the Air" controls.
 - But having said that, his control is temporary and or limited at best.
 - And even at that, it's all because God allows him to be in control.

So, thanks be to God for not only the solutions He provides, but also for the comfort and peace He makes available to us.

- All by letting us know who is truly in control.
- Which, BTW, let me say, this understanding is only made available through the revelation of His Word.
- Which means that we must know it.

Moving on, let's finish the letter to Philemon.

We will do that by expounding on [Philemon 1:21-25](#), where we pick back up with Paul's narrative.

But before I read [Philemon 1:21-25](#), as always, I want to back up and re-read our ending focus verses from last week.

However, before we proceed, I would like first to highlight the context of the letter.

Let me do a real quick recap to bring everyone back up to speed.

- So, Paul wrote the letter of Philemon to a man named Philemon on behalf of Philemon's runaway slave.
 - A man we've come to know as Onesimus.
 - A slave whom Paul met and led to Christ while he was in prison.
 - The problem is that once Paul discovered that Onesimus was a runaway slave, and not just any runaway slave, in fact, he was Philemon's runaway slave, but he knew what he had to do.
 - And what was that?
 - He had to encourage Onesimus to return to his master.

Also, don't forget that Philemon was a recent convert to Christianity, and Paul was the one who led him to Christ.

- He did so while he was preaching and teaching in Ephesus
- Which, BTW, made it an even more difficult decision. Especially, since Paul said that Onesimus had become very "useful" to him while he was in prison.

So, we can see the dilemma, and what does Paul do?

- He sends Onesimus back with a letter.
- A letter that Paul wrote with his own hand.
- A letter that would hopefully help influence Philemon's decision to receive Onesimus back.
- And that letter, of course, is the letter we've been studying. The letter of Philemon

And in this letter, Paul asks Philemon not only to accept Onesimus back, which would have been difficult enough to do, but He asks him to accept Onesimus back as an equal.

- Because Onesimus is now a believer
- That is the crux of the letter.

And so, with that background behind us, let's back up and re-read [Philemon 1:14-20](#), and bring us forward in context.

And here is what Paul wrote:

[Philemon 1:14-20](#)

14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,

16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

17 If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.

18 But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account;

19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).

20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

Now, really quick, I want to highlight something I really didn't touch on in previous teachings, and it shows up in verse 15, where Paul says:

15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,

I am not sure if Paul is saying what he is saying just to try and "smooth over" the situation with Philemon.

- Regardless of what it is, there is a powerful truth that each of us should grab hold of.
- And that is, God is always doing something inside his creation, and we will not always realize what He is doing in the moment!

Paul says:

15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,

In other words, Paul is saying, Hey Philemon, I know it wasn't good that Onesimus ran away, but perhaps God allowed this to happen so that you might have him back forever.

This same type of thinking applies to every believer when bad things happen or when things don't work out for us.

- It could be with a job, or career change, or whatever it is.
- Maybe, perhaps it's because God is
 - A – protecting us from something.
 - B – He has something better in store for us.

Now, I realize this can kind of sound cliché, or at a minimum, it might sound like a way to make us feel better when things don't work out in our favor, but to be honest, Paul's words are 100 percent true.

- Which means that it's not a cliché thing to say when things go south or don't work out, so don't feel bad about saying it!
- Even if you don't completely know whether things will work out the way you hope they will. It makes no difference!
- As a matter of fact, I would tell you that you shouldn't feel bad, even if you don't necessarily completely believe that things will work out.

You see, trusting God doesn't mean that you are 100 percent convinced in your heart that everything is

going to work out!

Placing your faith and trust in God doesn't require you to be completely convinced in your mind about a particular situation.

- It simply means that you move and or act on that trust in faith, even when and if you still have doubts.
- Honestly, I would tell you that your faith in God is never more displayed than when you trust God blindly.
- When you choose to move forward in faith, despite your worry and fear.

As I think of stories in the Bible that best model this type of trust and faith (and there are many), I thought about the woman who had been hemorrhaging blood for 12 years.

That story is also known as "The woman with an issue of blood."

You may or may not remember the story, but I would like to read it to you and it shows up in [Mark 5:25-34](#)

And here is what John Mark wrote -

[Mark 5:25-34](#)

25 A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years,

26 and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but instead had become worse—

27 after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak.

28 For she had been saying to herself, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well."

29 And immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

30 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that power from Him had gone out, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?"

31 And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'"

32 And He looked around to see the woman who had done this.

33 But the woman, fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.

34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be cured of your disease."

You see, this woman heard about Jesus and the miracles He had been performing, and she believed that if she touched the hem of His garment, she would be healed!

- I would tell you that she did not know for a fact that this would happen, but upon hearing about the miracles Jesus had been performing, it created in her a belief or a hope that it was true!
- Just hearing about Him gave her a spark, and so, when she came to the end of her rope, when all else had failed, despite all attempts to be healed in her most desperate time of need, it was in that moment when someone told her about Jesus, He became her last hope and or option.

- And so, she took her desperation, coupled with her belief, and put it into action.
 - And that, my friends, epitomizes what true faith looks like.
- She believed, but there is no way she knew for sure what the outcome would be, but still she fought the crowd and barely managed to brush up against him.
 - And her actions are what yielded the result.
- Once again, let's not be fooled into thinking she didn't have doubts.
- She is human, so I would say that she had doubts, but regardless, she acted and put legs to her belief.

You see, the reality is we have no clue what God is doing, or for that matter, what He will do.

All I know is that when we place our trust in Him, even when we have doubts, God will take it from there.

Hence, why Paul said, and paraphrasing here, perhaps Onesimus ran away so that you might have Him back forever, Philemon

- In other words, perhaps God planned to allow Onesimus to run away so that he might be saved.
- And then return to you as an equal, so that both of you might serve God together for the rest of your life.

What an odd way for God to accomplish His will, but to be honest with you, more times than not, that is how He works.

- Very rarely is it in the way we think He should work.
- It's almost always through trial & tribulation.

So moving on, and we will close out Philemon by reading the final verses of this letter

[Philemon 1:21-25](#)

21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I

know that you will do even more than what I say.

22 At the same time also prepare me a guest room, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

23 Epaphras (Epp-a-phras), my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

24 as do Mark, Aristarchus (eh-ruh-staar-kus), Demas (Da-ma), and Luke, my fellow workers.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul says that I have confidence in your obedience.

Once again, this is a subtle hint or urging, if you will, by Paul to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. For him to do the right thing!

Once again, you can feel a little manipulation going on with his words!

Which means, Paul is not sure that Philemon will respond correctly, which is why he gives him a little

nudge.

- Nothing wrong with that BTW.
- Nothing wrong with Paul making Philemon think about his next move as it relates to Onesimus.

Remember, Philemon is human, which means that he will be fighting his human instincts (his flesh).

- And the range of his emotions will be all over the place.
 - From shock – to disbelief – to rationalization – to justification – and then, of course, hopefully, to his eventual acceptance of Paul's request.
- And this is exactly what you and I would do as well.

So, it helps when a brother or sister has a word for us, especially if that word lines up with God's Will!

- It helps because it acts as a counterbalance of sorts to all the other noise rattling around in our heads.
 - Noise from other people who are not thinking in Godly terms.
 - It helps in combating our fleshly emotions and desires, such as anger, stress, or rationalization in the situation.

Never forget there is always a battle raging in our heads.

- Especially when it comes to the choices we should make in life
- And all that noise can only be calmed when we line up what we feel with what God wants and desires.
- And the only way we can know what God wants and desires is by knowing Him more intimately.
 - Which (one more time) comes by way of knowing His Word, because His Word is Him in word form.

So, Paul urges Philemon (once again) to do the right thing, and he takes it a step further by saying, I believe you will do more than you're supposed to.

Now,

I don't know how he could do any more than simply follow through with what Paul requested him to do, and so, I studied it a little bit more in depth, and the sense of what Paul was saying is that he wanted Philemon to be excited about receiving Onesimus back as an equal and not just a slave.

- Basically, what Paul was saying was, Hey Philemon, I trust you will accept Onesimus back as an equal, since now he is one of us, since now He is a believer.
- But I believe you will do more.
 - You will be excited and enthusiastic about the entire situation!

That's what most commentators believe he is saying, and that makes sense to me because what more could he possibly do than simply accept him back?

- And this is interesting because not only was it not good enough to simply accept Onesimus back, but Paul would like Philemon to be happy and enthusiastic about it.

You talk about assuming the sale!

Paul models that assumption quite well in this story.

Speaking of "assuming the sale", and when I say, "assume the sale." Let me be clear about what I mean.

- I mean, anticipating and or expecting the best out of Philemon, which is why Paul says this in verse 22:

22 At the same time also prepare me a guest room, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

Interesting concept here, and one that we need to talk about for a minute.

Paul says to go ahead and prepare me a guest room.

Once again, notice he is assuming he will be released.

And he ties Philemon's prayers to the results.

So, what does that tell us?

- It tells us that we should pray for people and or situations.
- And when we pray, we should pray believing.

At our old church, which we attended for almost 20 years. The church adopted a tag line which was – "Expecting a miracle."

And that is the attitude we should have.

You see,

There is zero guarantee that God is going to rule the way we pray.

- He may or may not, but I will tell you this, regardless of how He rules, our obedience in prayer is a requirement.
- It's not that our prayers will change God's mind, because ultimately, His Will will be done!
- But many times, He works through our prayers!

Let me also say that if the only reason you pray is that you believe that without your prayers, a person may or may not be healed, or because that is the only way you may get what you want or desire.

- If that is your thought process, then you do not understand the purpose of prayer.
- Prayer is simply one of the mechanisms good gives us so that we can commune with Him.
- And we are commanded to pray, but not in the way we all have become accustomed to praying, where we pray to Jesus, like He is "Santa Claus," or a "Genie" in a bottle.
- Our prayers are not to be a wish list comprised of what we want.
- On the contrary, our prayers should be all about God. His wants and desires.

And there is no better proof of this than in

[Matt. 6:7-15](#)

Where Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray

Listen to what Jesus has to say about his topic

[Matt. 6:7-15](#)

7 "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

8 "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Let me pause here. Jesus says don't be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Well, if that's the case, then why do we have to ask?

And why do we have to pray?

That's the question I have, because once again, it's all about being a part of what He is doing.

- And once again, it's of the mechanism's God gives us so we can commune with him.

It's kind of like one of your children, when they were little, how you would let them help with whatever you might have been doing, even though you could do it faster alone.

- And of course, you also wanted to teach them something in the process.
- Well, it's the same with us. Jesus said, The Father already knows what you need before you ask, but you should pray anyway.
- But when you pray, you shouldn't do it with fancy repetitive words, all so that the people can be amazed by your super spiritual prayers.
- No, when you pray, you should pray like this.

Now, before I recite the Lord's prayer, let me say this:

The Lord's prayer is not a prescription for the exact words we should pray, but rather it provides the framework for how we should pray.

Listen to it and see if you can pick up on what I am saying.

[Matt. 6:9-15](#)

9 "Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

Very important words here, when we enter prayer, we should do so in reverence.

- We should enter prayer, realizing who it is we are praying to, which is "The Creator" of the universe.
- So, we are commanded to recognize this as we begin our prayer and not simply enter a prayer just as a sidebar, or as if we are praying haphazardly, or simply as if we are talking to a buddy.

Throughout my career in ministry, I have often heard preachers say, just talk to God as if He is your buddy. That is not what Jesus just told us in verse 9. He said that we should enter prayer knowing that we are praying to a Holy and Righteous God.

- So, as I said, enter prayer with reverence

Next, he says this in verse 10,

10 'Your kingdom come.

 Your will be done,

 On earth as it is in heaven.

Once again, our prayers are not about our wants and desires. They are about God and His Will!

- It's all about Him, and we should want what He wants because what He wants is ultimately what's best!

And then in keeping with this theme, Jesus says:

11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

In other words, give us today the things we need. What you determine we need

- And do it one day at a time!

And why is this?

- Because that is all we are promised.
- So, it's just one day at a time.
- There is no 401K when it comes to God and His wants and desires for our lives, no banking of favor in our lives.
- We get one day at a time, and that's it!

Which makes sense, since He already knows what we need before we ask.

And then, in verse 12 He says,

12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

What He's saying here is that we are to pray for forgiveness.

- Our debts are just another way of saying our offenses against Him, and what we owe Him is a result of our sin!

And in turn, we are to forgive those who have offended us.

So not only are we to ask for forgiveness when we pray, we are to forgive others who have offended us.

- And I want you to notice that the forgiveness we give is not "predicated" on someone asking us for forgiveness.
- It's all based on the fact that God forgave us, which means that it's automatic, without condition.

And why?

- Because that is the way He forgave us!

And from there, He finishes up the framework of prayer with verse 13, where He says:

13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

The sense here is not that God is going to tempt us.

Dr. Thomas Constable of DTS said it this way: "Temptation" translates the Greek *peirasmos* (pear-

rass-mos), and in this case it means "testing."

- It refers not so much to the solicitation of evil, here, as to trials that test the character.
- God does not test (peirasmos- "pear-rass-mos") anyone (i.e.,
- Meaning, He does not seduce people to sin.
- And [James 1:13-14](#) tells us exactly that.

So, if that's the case, then why do we need to pray that He will not lead us into testing?

- Well, even though God is not the instrumental cause of our testing, He does permit us to experience temptation from the world, the flesh, and the devil (cf. 4:1; [Gen. 22:1](#); [Deut. 8:2](#)).
- Therefore, this petition is a request that He would minimize the occasions of our testing that could result in our sinning (cf. 26:41).
- It expresses the humble disciple's felt weakness to stand up under severe trials, in view of his or her weakness and sinfulness (cf. [Prov. 30:7-9](#))

And so, as I said earlier, the Lord's Prayer is not a prescription of the words we should say, but rather the framework of our prayer!

And then finally, Paul ends Philemon by saying the following in verses 23-25

Philemon: 23-25

23 Epaphras (Epp-a-phras), my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

24 as do Mark, Aristarchus (eh-ruh-staar-kus), Demas (Da-ma), and Luke, my fellow workers.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Now, last week, I was asked the question: How did Paul lead Onesimus to Christ, if he was in prison?

The answer is that on this occasion, Paul's imprisonment was house arrest.

- Which may not seem like prison, but I assure you, it was because he couldn't go anywhere.
- And he was being held by guards against his will.

Having said that, we know that he was allowed visitors, and apparently, he isn't the only one being held by the Roman authorities.

- It appears there are some others with him, or at least, it appears the others mentioned are experiencing the same type of imprisonment.
- Regardless, he is obviously not alone.

And from there, he ends this letter with a familiar final benediction in typical Pauline fashion.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Now, before we close, we must ask ourselves the question: What happened with Philemon and Onesimus?

Did Philemon ever forgive him and receive Him back as an equal?

- The answer is that we are never told.
- But, based on the fact that Philemon preserved this letter and allowed it to circulate to other

churches, coupled with what Paul said in [Colossians 4:9](#), where Onesimus is referred to as “Our faithful and beloved brother”, and then finally, based on some beliefs of church historians who say that Onesimus may have become the Bishop of Ephesus.

- Which cannot be confirmed 100 percent for sure.
- Some say that it may have been a different Onesimus who became the bishop.
- Regardless, based on what the Bible says about this man, I tend to believe it was in fact the Onesimus we have been studying about.

So, there it is, another letter or book of the Bible expounded, and rightly divided into God’s Word of Truth.

And so, the next question you should be asking is, where do we go next?

Well, how about I do something I don’t normally do?

How about I tell you where we are going next!

Come back next week, as we venture into our 18th Book of the Bible.

The Book of Thessalonians!

Amen- Amen!