

*From: Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ
To: Philemon and the Church at Collosae
Regarding: Onesimus*

APPEALING TO LOVE

PHILEMON 1:8-9

Special Music: “More Than I Could Be” Danny Gokey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhTKDvZYX0M>

Philemon 1:8-10

(Look at 2 Timothy 1:16–18 and 2 Timothy 4:19) - This note it for me, Verna, thanks

8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do,

9 yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

10 That I appeal to you for my son, Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

I AWAIT YOUR COMMAND

You, oh Lord

Are the source of all that is me.

I am your soldier.

I await your command.

You have brought me into your fold

Out of your abundant love for me.

I await your command.

You care for me

As the shepherd for his sheep.

You bring me to water

And nourish me with your mercy.

I await your command.

You strengthen

And protect me.

You bring honor to me

By allowing me in your presence.

I await your command.

You bring the sun

To give light and warmth to my day.

You bring the moon

And the stars to guide my way.

**I await your command.
You grant me salvation
Through the gracious sacrifice of your son.
You grant me peace and joy
Through your ever-present spirit.
I await your command.
I lift my eyes to the heavens in awe.
I await your command.
Can't you hear me Lord?
I await your command!
Why will you not command me?
I beg for your command
So that I may be your hands and feet.
Why can't I hear your command?
And God replied,
"Because, my child,
As you have grown in faith
You have also grown in spirit.
You know what needs doing.
You know what is right.
You should not do it because I command you,
But because you love me as I love you."**

As I was growing up, one of my mother's favorite responses when I asked why I had to do something was, "Because, I said so!" like that would somehow make sense. I know, I know, I used it a few times myself when my kids were growing up. Not that it is acceptable, but there are times when a parent just gets tired of feeling a lack of control and they just spit out "Because, I said so!" It sounds so commanding and definitive, so much so a child knows that it is time to stop asking and get to doing. There are better ways to handle those situations but, like most parents, I found it hard to think of those other solutions when I had a hundred irons in the fire and my time was dwindling away due to repeated questions. And yes, to this day I regret my lack of patience, now realizing that they were teaching moments that I let slip by.

When those moments come up, don't most of us at think, "Well, if my kids loved me, they would see that I'm having a hard time and cooperate a little bit." We forget that they are children and mostly selfish by nature. It isn't that they choose to be that way on purpose. They just need to have the instructions and patience from their parents that will help them to grow into responsible, respectable adults. For many children, the attitude hangs around through the teenage years. Chores seem to be a much bigger burden than they actually are, and they will put off doing them until they can't put them off any longer without losing privileges.

Christians go through much the same process, no matter what age they come to a relationship with Jesus Christ. At first, they are eager and excited, but then it starts to be a burden and more of a chore to take time to read the Bible

every day, help out at church, attend special services. It takes them a while to see that all of those things are necessary if they want to capture the joy of having Jesus work through them. I hate to say it, but it is a process that requires patience and understanding from congregations, ministers, and mentors. It takes a while for the light bulb to go off, that coming into a relationship with Jesus Christ is just the beginning of a long process to make them the tools that God needs them to be in an ever-changing world. Changing one's life doesn't happen overnight.

Just like we have to eventually let our children start making their own decisions, hoping that they will accept our council but knowing that they may often not listen to a word we say. God expects us to mature to the point where we can see the needs in this world and know what He expects of us. When we are walking with Jesus, we can't help but to begin to see the world through His eyes, seeing all the opportunities for service that surround us. The closer we are to Him, the more we see.

That is one of the greatest things about fellowship with Jesus and with our brothers and sisters. Spending time with Jesus and each other opens our eyes and ears to the world, bringing clarity to our vision of God's intention for us as His children.

The writer of Hebrews tells us this:

“11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.

12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.

14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

This is what is happening to Onesimus. As a slave or servant of Philemon, he has come to Rome with the intention of finding Paul. But he doesn't understand that he is in for an amazing transformation as he serves Paul and also allows Paul to teach Him.

When it is time for Onesimus to return to Colossae, Paul sends the letter with Onesimus that includes an admonition to Philemon that we really haven't heard up until this point. In our passage of scripture from the letter we read:

8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do,

9 yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

10 That I appeal to you for my son, Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

Just what is Paul telling Philemon? There is an assumption in the letter that there will be consequences for whatever it is that Onesimus has done. It doesn't really matter what he did, but Paul is anticipating that Philemon will punish him. And when he is punished, it will be based on his class (slave, servant, apprentice), some kind of a position in which Philemon is above him (boss, master, slaveholder). Paul turns this argument back to Philemon before the argument is even presented. He says,

“Philemon, I could order you to do this. I could be bold. After all, you owe me a lot. You know who I am and where I stand in the church. You know the respect I garner as a missionary and teacher. So yes, I could force you to do the right thing and humiliate you if you don't, even from this jail cell.

But you have grown in Christ, and I am an old man and a prisoner of Jesus Christ. You are the new generation of believers, the ones the church will look to when they seek truth. You are the ones that are the new leaders. You are the ones that carry the torch of the message of Jesus Christ. So, I ask you to listen one last time and understand what I am trying to tell you.

I look for you to make your decision regarding Onesimus based on love and no other consideration. The love that Jesus has for you should also be the love that you have for Onesimus, no matter the wrongs he may have committed in the past. I don't even want you consider the fact that he is a changed man, except by the fact that he has been changed by the Holy Spirit in his time here with me.”

We do not know if Onesimus ever knew what was in the letter. We do not know how Philemon responded. What we do know, is that Paul was praying that those who might hear the letter would have grown in the spirit to the point of understanding what he was saying.

Martin Luther King said this:

“The time is always right to do right.”

And we can all agree that he was true. But within that statement is the very struggle we have each and every day. Who gets to decide right or wrong in our world. Is it the government? The military? Maybe the moral police? The priest minister, or denominational leaders? In order for it to be effective, that authority has to be agreed upon or there will be dissention, arguments, war, and destruction. There are just too many people who believe that they have the right answers and everyone else is wrong. There is little tolerance for differences of opinion in the world as we know it. Every day some new wickedness enters our lives. It can be here or half-way around the world. There are many among us who do not believe in God or Jesus Christ, and while we can know that they are wrong in our hearts, we have to give them the space that they need for God to work in there lives while still being a beacon of hope to them. That can be extremely hard for us. It can be painful for us. We often suffer knowing that they are suffering.

But we are not God. We are merely His hands and feet. It is our job to bind the peoples wounds, give them water, give them food, make sure they are clothed and have a place to rest. God uses us to create an environment where a person will have the personal space to deal with the living Creator of the Universe. It is through our ministrations that people see God in such a way that they realize that He is not the Hell-Fire, damning, vengeful, destructive God that they have been shown throughout their lives. It is through our ministrations that we, with the power God working through us, lift people out of the dark mire of depression and ugliness into the welcoming, loving light and warmth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the kind of believer that Paul sees in Onesimus. Onesimus puts himself on the line every day to minister to Paul's needs. I realize that one might argue that Paul was a highly recognized servant of God and the most prolific missionary of his time. He deserved to be nurtured to.

But I challenge us all to think of it this way. God did not send Onesimus to nurture Paul because Paul deserved it. He sent Onesimus to Paul simply because Paul was in need. And because Onesimus was in need spiritually. They needed each other and by taking care of each other's needs, the Kingdom of Christ was furthered.

When Onesimus returns to Colossae with this letter to Philemon, he has such a great story to tell. Philemon might not have believed all that Onesimus has to tell him if it were not for this letter where Paul is asking Philemon to read the letter from the standpoint of a mature Christian.

Sometimes, we don't want to grow up. We begin to realize that our youth is fading, and those around us are not quite as understanding when it comes to our missteps. As we mature, our responsibilities increase, and we may find ourselves working without a net. It can be scary as we suddenly realize that we are responsible for the well-being of a spouse. It becomes even more scary as children are born and we realize that we have been given the awesome responsibility and privilege of teaching them how to "Do the right thing." And we realize that that we are human ourselves and make mistakes. Sometimes, we are going to get it wrong and say, "Because, I said so."

We need to understand that it is also our responsibility to not only deliver the Good News of Jesus Christ, but to also take responsibility for teaching and nurturing these young Christians, discipling them, no matter their physical age. Discipleship is not "Catch & Release." We don't expect our children to thrive under such conditions and that is exactly what a new Christian is like, a newborn child in Christ. They are not going to know everything out of the box. It isn't a kit that we order online. It isn't "pray with them, baptize them, give them a Bible, and send them on their way."

When we read about Paul, he always has someone with him that he is teaching and discipling. In the case of the letter to Philemon, that person is Onesimus. And both were the better for it. Onesimus the Christian that arrives back at Colossae is no longer the same Onesimus the Christian that went to Rome to find Paul.

This week, I would like us all to think about how we are taking on our responsibilities as Christians to nurture those that are new to the faith. The blessings abound on both sides of that relationship. It is like a mentor/mentee arrangement. But it is something that all of us are called to do, both as Christians and bodies of believers. I ask that you continue to grow in Christ so that you are able and encourage those newer to the faith.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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