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Fall 2024
Navigating Family Conflict

Sermon Title Possibilities: Restoring Relationships with Humility

To be used with Session 4: Jacob and Esau: Family Rivalry

Scripture: Philemon 1-16

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the Bible study “Jacob and Esau: Family Rivalry,” this sermon builds upon today’s Bible study by expounding upon a New Testament example of someone who was wronged by another.

Introduction: Has there ever been a time in our lives in which we knew we wronged someone, and we were later reconnected with that person? If we are being honest, we felt a sense of apprehension prior to the reconnection. We learned about this in our group study this morning in that Jacob and Esau were reconnected many years after Jacob took the blessing that belonged to Esau. In today’s sermon, we will look at a New Testament example of someone who wronged his master, but later came back to make things right. No matter what the circumstances may be, humility will always be needed when striving for restoration.

1. Philemon’s humble service.

Today’s message has three key individuals and Philemon is the first one for us to seek to understand. We learn from verses 1-2 that he was a follower of Jesus in that Paul addressed him as a co-worker. We also learn that a church met in his house. Given the fact that a church met in his home, he was most likely a man of some wealth. Finally, we can discern that he was a man who actively practiced his faith. Paul had heard of his love for the saints and the faith that he had for the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 3). Philemon’s faith had also brought Paul great joy and encouragement even while Paul was in prison (v. 7).

As this story continues to present itself, we will discover that Philemon had been wronged by a man named Onesimus. We will also see a time of reconnection between Philemon and Onesimus. The reason this becomes important is because Philemon was presented with an opportunity to display his faith to those around him. If he chose to humbly live out his faith, he would offer forgiveness to Onesimus who had wronged him. If, however, he was to seek retribution, he would have condemned Onesimus immediately. For Philemon to live out his faith, he would have to operate in humility and put others ahead of his own desires.

2. Paul’s humble appeal.

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Paul began his letter by pointing out that he was in prison (v. 1). After seeking to encourage Philemon in his walk with Jesus, Paul addressed the main issue. Paul was humbly appealing to Philemon to forgive Onesimus for any wrongs that may have been committed. We learn from the text that Onesimus was a slave to Philemon and that the two of them had been separated (vv. 15-16). This separation indicates that Onesimus most likely ran away, and he may have even stolen things from Philemon on his way out. This is why Paul told Philemon, "If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account" (v. 18).

Paul clearly articulated that he could have commanded Philemon to do what was right, but instead appealed to him on the basis of love (vv. 8-9). This serves as an example of Paul operating in humility. Paul was neither the party that was wronged nor the one who wronged another. He was involved in this because he loved both Philemon and Onesimus. It may have been easier for him to stay out of the whole matter. Instead, he chose to actively engage.

3. Onesimus's humble return.

If we take a moment to understand the context of the times in which this was taking place, we will quickly see Onesimus's humility. If a slave ran away from his master, the master could legally put the slave to death for his actions. Couple this with the fact that Onesimus may have stolen something from Philemon when he left, we can quickly see Onesimus humility and faith in returning home to Philemon.

It is perfectly logical to wonder what caused the change of heart for Onesimus. The simple answer is found in verse 10. We discover that he had become a follower of Jesus, and he was seeking to make restoration for the wrongs of his past. Once again, his humility was on display. We do not see Onesimus offering excuses for his actions. We do see him trying to bring about restoration for those he hurt.

Conclusion: How does this story apply to us? We should be able to find at least two points of application. First, if we have been wronged by another, let's hear from God's Word today and receive those back when they come to us asking for forgiveness and restoration. While we do not know what Philemon ultimately did, we do see the appeal that Paul conveyed to him.

The second point of application may be found through Onesimus and his story. Before he could find restoration with Philemon, he needed to find restoration with Jesus. Sure, he had done things wrong. Paul took the time to explain the good news of Jesus Christ to him and he humbly accepted the grace found only in Christ. If this sounds like your story, then don't leave today without the restoration that can only be found in Jesus.

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