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God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing

The Letter to Philemon

The Ties That Bind: Faith, Family, Forgiveness

**Part 2: “Restoring the Broken Ties:
Paul’s Principles for Reconciliation”**

Blest Be the Tie That Binds: Hymn Connection

3. We share each other's woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

4. When we are called to part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.

Today we move to the 2nd of Paul’s ‘Prison Epistles’... The Letter to Philemon. To be accurate we don’t have a 100% positive knowledge on the exact order of the Four “Prison Epistles” (Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians). But I think we can logically deduce that Colossians and Philemon were written closely together because of the content, people involved and similar verses.

“Restoring the Broken Tie:

Paul’s Principles for Reconciliation”

Key Scripture: Philemon 8–16

Big Idea: The gospel calls us to restore broken relationships, making reconciliation central to the life of the faith family.

Philemon 1:8–16

⁸ That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the Name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do.

⁹ But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.

¹⁰ I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison.

¹¹ Onesimus hasn’t been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us.

¹² I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

¹³ I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf.

¹⁴ But I didn’t want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced.

¹⁵ It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever.

¹⁶ He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. NLT

The following outline points are adapted from Daniel Akins’
Christ -Centered Exposition of Philemon. (pp. 167-177).

Have you ever experienced a relationship that was broken—a friendship, a family bond, a partnership—where trust was lost and the tie that once held you together was frayed or even snapped? Maybe you’re thinking of someone right now. The pain of broken relationships is real, but so is the hope of restoration. In the small letter to Philemon, Paul gives us a masterclass in how the gospel empowers us to restore the broken ties in our lives and in our church family.

Today, we’ll look at Philemon 1:8–16 and discover five principles for reconciliation—principles that are as needed today as they were in the first-century church.

1. Walk in Humility (vs. 8,9)

A. DO NOT PULL RANK (V. 8):

⁸ That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the Name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do.

Paul could have pulled rank, demanded obedience, and used his authority as an apostle to get his way. But he chose not to. Paul learned that true reconciliation never begins with power plays or ultimatums. Instead, he laid aside his rights and approached Philemon with gentleness and love. He didn’t pull rank, even though he could have. He didn’t neglect love—he made it the reason for his appeal.

b. DO NOT NEGLECT LOVE (v. 9):

⁹ But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.

Paul appeals “for love’s sake.” He models the humility of Christ, who laid aside His rights for our sake. When we seek to restore broken ties, we must lead with humility and love, not pride or pressure.

Illustration:

Think of a parent who, instead of demanding obedience from a child, kneels down and gently invites them to do what’s right. That posture changes everything. Humility opens the door for healing.

Challenge: As your pastor, I want to challenge you: When you approach a strained relationship, lead with humility. Listen more than you speak. Let love—not pride—guide your words and actions.

Application: Who do you need to humble yourself before this week, setting aside your pride to begin the work of reconciliation? This week, choose to approach a strained relationship with humility—listen more than you speak, and let love guide your words and actions.

2. Practice Sensitivity (vv. 10–11)

Paul didn't gloss over the past. He acknowledged that Onesimus had failed Philemon, but he also saw what God was doing—Onesimus was now “useful” to both of them. Paul made a hopeful appeal, believing that God could redeem anyone's story, and he made an honest appeal, naming the hurt without pretending it didn't happen.

a. MAKE A HOPEFUL APPEAL (v. 10):

¹⁰ I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison

Paul doesn't just state the problem—he expresses hope for Onesimus's future. He sees beyond the failure to the possibility of redemption.

b. MAKE AN HONEST APPEAL (v. 11):

¹¹ Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us.

Paul is honest about Onesimus's past—he was “useless” to Philemon. But he's also honest about the change: Onesimus is now “useful.” Sensitivity means we acknowledge the hurt, but we also believe in God's power to transform.

Illustration :Have you ever seen someone write off another person because of their past? Paul refuses to do that. He sees what God can do in a life surrendered to Christ.

Challenge: Will you let God's hope shape your words, even as you face hard truths?

Application: Reach out to someone who's hurt you or whom you've hurt, and speak honestly—acknowledge the pain, but also express hope for what God can do.

3. Live With Integrity (vv. 12–13)

Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, even though it cost him dearly. He called Onesimus “my very heart.” Paul wanted to keep him, but he knew the right thing was to send him back and let Philemon decide. Paul shared his heart—he was vulnerable and real. He stated the facts—he was clear about what happened and didn't hide or manipulate the truth.

a. SHARE YOUR HEART (v. 12):

¹² I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

Paul is vulnerable—he calls Onesimus “*my on heart.*” Reconciliation requires us to be real, to share our true feelings, not just our opinions.

b. STATE THE FACTS (v. 13):

¹³ I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf.

Paul is clear about the situation. He could have kept Onesimus, but he honors Philemon's rights. Integrity means we don't manipulate or hide the truth; we bring everything into the light.

Challenge: Be honest with someone about how you feel and what has happened. Don't hide behind excuses or half-truths. Let your words be real, your motives pure, and your actions transparent. Integrity invites empathy, and empathy opens the door for true healing. Where do you need to risk vulnerability and speak with integrity to restore trust?

Application: When you're seeking reconciliation, be honest about your feelings and the facts. Don't sugarcoat, but don't exaggerate either. In Love... "let your yes be yes, and your no be no". Mt. 5:37

4. Honor Accountability (v. 14)

¹⁴ But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced.

Paul could have made the decision for Philemon, but he didn't. He respected Philemon's responsibility and his right to choose. Paul knew who was responsible for what, and he didn't force forgiveness or reconciliation. He gave space for Philemon to respond freely, to do what was right—not out of compulsion, but from the heart.

Sometimes, this means waiting, and yes, sometimes it means parting ways for a season.

a. KNOW WHO IS RESPONSIBLE:

Paul recognizes that the decision ultimately belongs to Philemon. He doesn't overstep; he respects boundaries.

b. KNOW WHAT IS RIGHT:

Paul wants Philemon's response to be genuine, not forced. True reconciliation can't be coerced; it must come from the heart.

Illustration: Think of a time when you were pressured to forgive or apologize. It doesn't work. Accountability means we give others the space to make the right choice for themselves.

As your pastor, I invite you: Give others the space to make their own decisions about reconciliation—don't try to control the outcome.

Challenge: Who in your life do you need to release from your expectations, allowing them the space to respond freely? Will you trust God enough to let go of control, even if it means waiting longer than you'd like? Are you willing to wait patiently and trust God with the process, even if it means letting go for a time?

Application:

In our relationships, it's easy to want to "fix" things on our own timeline or to pressure others into forgiveness or reconciliation because we're uncomfortable with the tension. But true healing happens when we respect each person's responsibility in the process. That means recognizing when it's our turn to speak and when it's our turn to step back and pray. Sometimes, the most loving thing we can do is to honor the other person's journey—giving them the freedom to choose, to process, and to respond in their own time.

So, if you're waiting for someone to forgive you, or you're hoping for a relationship to be restored, resist the urge to push or manipulate. Instead, trust God with the outcome, and focus on doing what is right on your end—being honest, being available, and being patient.

5. Trust the Sovereignty of God (vv. 15–16)

When Onesimus ran away, it seemed like a loss, a mistake, a tragedy. But Paul came to see that perhaps God was working through it all—turning a temporary separation into an eternal gain. God's goals are eternal, not just temporal. He's after spiritual transformation, not just surface-level fixes. When we trust God's sovereignty, we can believe that even the hardest stories can be redeemed, that even broken ties can become testimonies of grace.

Even in the waiting, even in the pain of separation, we remain united in Christ, trusting that God is still at work.

a. GOD'S GOALS ARE ETERNAL, NOT TEMPORAL (v. 15):

¹⁵ It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever.

Paul sees God's hand at work, even in the pain of separation. What seemed like a loss was actually part of God's greater plan.

b. GOD'S GOALS ARE SPIRITUAL, NOT CARNAL (v. 16):

¹⁶ He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

Onesimus returns not just as a servant, but as family—a brother in Christ. God's purpose is always to build up His people, to restore and redeem. God's story is bigger than our pain, and His purpose is always restoration.

Challenge: Surrender your broken relationships to God, trusting that He can bring good even from what seems lost. Will you believe that God is working behind the scenes, and will you pray for His eternal purposes to be fulfilled in your relationships?

Application:

When relationships break, it's easy to focus on the hurt or the loss. But God is always working for something greater—eternal reconciliation, spiritual growth, and the witness of a restored family.

Conclusion:

Restoring broken ties is never easy. It requires humility, sensitivity, integrity, accountability, and above all, trust in God's sovereign plan. Paul's letter to Philemon isn't just ancient history—it's a living example for us today.

- Who is God calling you to reconcile with?
- Where is He inviting you to restore what's been broken?

Let's be a church that lives out these principles, so that the world sees in us the power of the gospel to heal, restore, and bind us together in Christ.

Let's be a church that restores the broken tie—walking in humility, practicing sensitivity, living with integrity, honoring accountability, and trusting the sovereignty of God. When we do, we become living proof of the gospel's power to bind us together in love, across every divide.

Closing Prayer:

Lord, give us humble hearts, sensitive spirits, honest words, and the courage to trust Your sovereign hand. Restore what is broken among us and let our love for one another be a testimony to Your grace. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Invitation: