Favorite Chapters - Philemon

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Preacher: Jeremy Davis

[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Good evening.

You'll open up your Bibles to the book of Philemon. If you've been on a mission trip to New York with me, and you've played a card game called Dutch Blitz, you might call me a cheater.
And that would be an accurate description of the way I play Dutch Blitz. Because my mind can't keep up with how fast that game moves, so I just cheat my way through it. It doesn't yield any reward. I still lose, but nonetheless, I'm giving it my best effort.
We are in a series called Favorite Chapters. And again, I'm going to cheat a bit, and I'm going to teach a whole book. But this book is just one chapter.
So, depending on how you look at it, maybe I'm cheating and teaching a whole book. Maybe I'm not. This is just a chapter. If it makes you feel better, you could put Philemon 1 in your notes.
[1:11] This is a favorite chapter of mine. It's just 25 verses. This is a short book by Paul. Yet it gives us a very vivid picture of how to live out the gospel.

This letter is personal and heartfelt, deeply theological, and extremely practical. Because it puts on display the character of our God, and it shows us how to live it out in a very easy way.
If you look at verse 1, you see that it is Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy, our beloved brother, to Philemon, our beloved fellow worker.
And he is identifying Philemon as a believer as he writes this letter. This book is unique, and there's a few books that are like this, but it is one that is written from Paul to one individual primarily.
But this is late in Paul's life, and I assume that by this point, he is well aware that the things that he writes are going to have a great impact on the churches and will be circulated. So while he is writing to Philemon and the people in his home, I believe he is also writing to the church there and to us.
[2:30] In verse 2, it says, To Aphia, our sister, and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house. And then you have this standard Pauline greeting in verse 3. Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps Aphia, our sister, another believer, would be Philemon's wife, and Archippus, his son, or his oldest son. And the church there meets in his home, so he's obviously wealthy enough to have a home big enough for the church to meet in.
This is a book that, other than being in seminary, I had not given a lot of attention, certainly not the attention that it deserves, until just recently.
Now, when I talked through this book, and I thought, you know, this is short, 25 verses, there can't be that much there. There is, I believe, quite a bit here. So I've been convicted that this book is certainly worthy of our attention and our efforts and to study.
This evening, I want us to see that Paul writes, yes, about Onesimus, a runaway slave who belonged to Philemon.
[3:42] But I think at a deeper level, he is writing about us, a runaway people who has gone astray from God, our Father.

This is a book that's all about reconciliation. The reconciliation of Philemon and Onesimus, who has wronged him. But at a deeper level, it is about us being reconciled back to God the Father.
So I think it's needed. I think it's important. We see Onesimus in verse 10. He is, I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.
So he's writing about this runaway slave who he has come across in Rome. Colossians 4.9 also mentions Onesimus. And in that, Paul tells us that he's sent him, our faithful, beloved brother, who is one of you.

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He will tell you of everything that is going on here. This letter, along with the letter to the Colossians, are delivered, most likely delivered, from Paul's imprisonment in Rome by Tychicus, who has Onesimus with him in 60-61 A.D.
[4:50] So near the end of Paul's life. Paul writes not to command Philemon, but to appeal to him in love.

And like I said, this is a book all about reconciliation. The reconciliation that God works between himself and sinners, and then also between believers, between one another.
So Paul appeals, and I believe he gives a great example of ministry. The first thing that we see, number one, would be the private ministry of the Word. I think that Paul gives a great example of this private ministry of the Word.
The private ministry of the Word, we may call this discipleship. We might call this biblical counseling, but it is simply Christians applying Scripture to one another's life in order to help them be more like Christ.
That is the private ministry of the Word. And when we think of ministry, we often think of ministry from behind this pulpit, or up on this platform, or some kind of public teaching.
[5:53] And certainly that is true. That is certainly a part of ministry. And Paul was certainly involved in that kind of ministry. Now, Jeff rightly pointed this out last Sunday evening in Acts 20, verse 20, how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, this is Paul speaking, and teaching you in public and from house to house.

And as Jeff pointed out, you see Paul's public ministry. And then here, Philemon, I think he describes Paul's private ministry of the Word.
This is a different side of ministry. It's the quiet side of ministry. Behind closed doors part of ministry. Ministry that is not out in front of people, that often people don't know even happens, or it may go unnoticed altogether.
These are those times when you go to a hospital, and you visit a family. Those times that you help a brother or sister in Christ who are struggling through a season.
When you rejoice with a brother and sister in Christ, as they're walking through a season of joy. It's the private ministry of the Word. Verse 4, Verse 6, The first thing they teach us in biblical counseling is that we're supposed to offer the hope that is found in Christ, and remind counselees of the hope that is found in Christ, in him alone.
[7:48] And that is exactly what Paul does here. He gives thanks for Philemon and reminds him of the evidence that he sees in him of his salvation. He has derived much joy and comfort from him.

He sees his love in the way that he has refreshed brothers and sisters in Christ, the church there in Colossae. He's seen the work that he does, and he prays for him.
He prays for the fellowship and the sharing of the faith. This is a great reminder that Paul is engaging someone who he knows is a believer.
He's not concerned about his salvation here. But nonetheless, he knows that he needs to exhort him and restore him, and Paul fulfills his responsibility. And what a wonderful gift this is for the local body of Christ.
That as we walk through life, we have brothers and sisters who are around us, who can exhort us and encourage us and restore us back to where we need to be, rightly walking with the Lord.
[8:59] And I think so often we push against that idea. We don't want any input here. But I'll remember a fellow pastor in New York that I served with who was probably 20, 25 years my senior.

And I'll never forget him calling me up one Friday evening and him saying, Hey, this is kind of awkward, but I need to talk to you about something. I was like, okay. And he said, look, I've been doing all of our year-end financials and turning in a bunch of stuff and writing out all these letters. Now, remind you, we were all volunteers pastoring this church, trying to do ministry. So he was just a volunteer guy doing this in his spare time. And he took the time because he noticed something that was off about my life.
And he said, look, you are either not making enough money to live, or you're not giving faithfully like you should. One or the other is off here. And I think about that regularly.
The way that he came to me as a brother in love and said, Hey, I want to make sure that we are either coming and helping you if you need it, or that you are leading by example in our church as a pastor.

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[10:12] There was some of both. We didn't make much money. But I certainly learned a valuable lesson there. And the most valuable perhaps was not even that I need to be giving like I needed to, but that I need to be exhorting brothers and sisters in Christ when I see something that is wrong and not right.

And he did a great job of that, and I will always be grateful. And so that's what we see Paul do here in this book. When Jesus is before the Pharisees, he summarizes the Ten Commandments, and he says in Mark 12, verse 30, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind, and with all your strength.
And the second is like this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these. We are to be a people, as Michael often says, that are marked by love. It should be obvious when you look at our life, and you see the motivation of our heart, and you see the things that we're involved in, that we are a people who are marked by love.
And when you look at verse 8, I think you see the love that Paul is showing to Philemon. He says, Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you.
I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus. Paul is an apostle, and he has a Christ-given authority over the church to lead and to shepherd these people, to give them direction, and he had all the authority in the world to show up and say, Hey, correct this and do it now.
[11:48] But he preferred to appeal from a place of love, because he genuinely loves this brother. Remember, verse 19 may indicate that Paul actually led Philemon to Christ.

So he loves him. He cares about him. Paul is an old man, and he's essentially saying, Philemon, I'm an old guy. Listen to my wisdom that I have for you.
Give me your ear and listen. Take it to heart. Learn from me. You see Paul's private ministry of the word, and that it comes from a place of love, not from a place of selfishness or selfish ambition or selfish motive.
So let me ask you, when you see a brother or sister in Christ who have misstepped, who are not walking in line with Scripture, do you approach them at all about it?
Do you ask them to go to coffee and get clarity on the situation at all? Do you just ignore it? Do you approach them with a selfish motivation to try to prove that you're holier or more righteous than them?
[13:09] Are you just trying to put them in their place? How dare you do this? Do you think you're a believer? Or do you approach them and appeal to them from a place of love and concern?

A love that we should all be marked by as a people. A love that is displayed in our Jesus.
Secondly, we see the example of Paul. So we see the private ministry of the word, and now the example of Paul.
Paul models this in his ministry himself. When Onesimus is running from whatever happened in Colossae, he comes in contact with Paul, and Paul doesn't shame him.
He shepherds him. He points him to Christ. And when he deals with his sin, and he confesses Christ at some point, we don't know the whole story there, but now Paul is sending him back to be reconciled, back to the person that he has wronged, back to the person that he is at odds with.
[14:23] Paul gives us this great example of how to encounter messy situations and lovingly minister in that moment.

Verse 10, I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. He refers to Timothy in a very similar manner, my beloved child.
So this means that Paul has led Onesimus to Christ. Verse 11, Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me. I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.
He's very useful, and Paul could have used him there while he's in his imprisonment to do ministry in Rome, but he chooses, because it's the best thing for him to be reconciled back to a brother in Christ, Philemon.
He wants these guys to make up and to move forward. But I also see another great example of biblical counseling here, that Paul doesn't send him before he has been reconciled to Christ to reconcile with Philemon.
[15:36] Notice the order of things. Onesimus leaves, and he flees, and encounters Paul, and comes to know Christ, and it's only after that that Paul sends him back to now live as a believer.

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And so often we think that any random person around us, a neighbor who doesn't confess Christ, should be living by our standard in the way that we want them to live, or a family member who doesn't see Scripture and Christ the same way we do to be living according to our standard, but we can't expect a lost world to live like a Christian.
It just doesn't make any sense. Paul first makes sure that Onesimus knows Christ, and then he holds him to the standard of living like Christ, to go and be reconciled back in this relationship.
And when Paul begins to engage in this, he doesn't try to use man-made advice or therapy.
He's simply applying the gospel to real-life situations. Paul wants believers to obey Christ in conflict and fear and guilt and grief and sin, and we see this throughout his letters.
[16:57] To set our minds on things above, not on the things of this world, the love that we see from Paul. He sets this high example of how we are to love the brothers and sisters in our local body, to care for one another.

And biblical counseling is all about stepping into messy situations and addressing issues with the Bible. And so often we see a messy situation and we just let it pass us by.
And just kind of ignore that it's happening. Say, oh man, I don't want to get involved in that. That's going to require a lot of study, and I'm probably going to have to go carve out some time to meet with that person, and I think I'll just, I'm sure someone will take care of that.
I'm sure there's a Sunday school teacher or Bible study leader or somebody else, a pastor, that'll just take care of that. I have the privilege of teaching in our Crossroads ministry.
I'll tell you, one of the greatest joys of my ministry is watching our college-age students go and minister to other college-age students on their campus.
[18:15] I talked to one student just recently who gave me his testimony and was walking through how the Lord saved him and now what life has looked like after that, and he named two of our college students who have been walking alongside him, and not through easy stuff, through messy stuff, through difficult things, walking with him, and he is experiencing freedom and growth in the Lord like he never thought was possible.

I talk to students all the time that are trying to reach the people on their campus or in their workplace or in their families with the gospel, engaging in exactly what Paul is doing with Philemon and Onesimus here.
He's acting as this mediator trying to reconcile these guys, trying to walk through this with them, and the book of Philemon reminds us that we don't need a program to do ministry.
We just need a relationship and a Bible to do ministry with other people, and Paul is not just giving instructions, but he's also living it.
If you go over to verse 23, it says, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greeting to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.
[19:43] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. So often we look at these final greetings, especially from Paul, and we say, man, there's a bunch of weird names there. I'll just pass that and go right into the next book that I'm reading.

But there's a really important name here. In verse 24, he mentions Mark. You remember Mark? And what happens between Paul and Mark?
In Acts 15, verse 36, and some days after, Paul said to Barnabas, let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaim the word of the Lord and see how they are.
Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought it was best not to take with them the one who had withdrawn from them and Pamphylia, sorry, and had not gone with them to the work.
And there arose a sharp disagreement, so they separated from each other. And Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away. There's conflict between Mark and between Paul.
[20:52] And we don't know exactly what happens here. But we do know that by the end of Paul's life in 2 Timothy, so 2 Timothy is right at the end of his life.

It's the last letter that we have from Paul. He says something very different. He says that he wants to see Mark, bring him to me because he is useful to me for ministry.
So not only is Paul giving us an example and giving us instructions, he is living out this reconciliation the believers should have between one another.
He's not shying away from this himself. He's living it out. And he's saying, look, just like I have reconciled with Mark, you guys need to be reconciled.

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The same grace that redeemed Onesimus also restored Mark's relationship back to Paul. And Paul is now shepherding Philemon to live that out. So Paul is living as an example of reconciliation.
[21:59] He appeals. He does not demand. He identifies with Onesimus as his child, as his very own heart. And he stands there in the middle as a peacemaker. But then, he goes as far to offer to pay the cost for this reconciliation.

Go to verse 18. I, Paul, write this with my own hand. I will repay it to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.
I'm sorry, verse 18. If he has wronged you at all or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand.
Paul is willing to pay for the reconciliation that he wants to see between Philemon and Onesimus.
Which brings me to our third and final heading.
Philemon is a picture of the gospel. Like I said, this book is not just about Philemon and Onesimus, but it is a picture of our relationship with God. We, like Onesimus, are runaways.
[23:06] We are rebels and we have wronged our master. We have a debt that we cannot pay. But God sought us out and he saved us.

Now he sends us back into a restored relationship. In the beginning, God creates Adam and creates Eve and he puts them in a garden of perfection.
In perfect fellowship relationship with him and expects them to live to his standard in this perfect relationship. But Adam and Eve, they rebelled and went against God and broke that relationship.
In Genesis 3.15, God promises that he will reconcile this. That he will once and for all crush evil forever. forever.
And through Jesus Christ coming to earth and living a perfect life, Christ has reconciled those of us who confess him back into a restored relationship with God the Father.
[24:16] This book is all about us. And when Jesus went to the cross and died for our sins, he was saying if he has wronged you, if he owes anything, charge it to my account.

Just like Paul was willing to do for Onesimus. A debt Onesimus could not pay himself. A reward he did not deserve.
A cost that Paul did not deserve to pay. And in the same way, Christ paid that debt for us. This book is all about reconciliation.
It's all about the gospel. And Onesimus is not just forgiven, but he is welcomed back as a brother.
Go to verse 16. No longer a bondservant, but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother.
So the gospel does not just cancel out our sin, but it makes us righteous before God and reconciles us back to him, restoring the relationship that was lost.
[25:27] lost. This book is calling us to forgive as we have been forgiven. To pursue reconciliation whenever possible.

To see every believer, not as their past sins or mistakes, nor their past issues that have gotten in between the two of you, but to see them as Christ sees them.
as God sees them reconciled back to him as righteous thanks to what Christ has done for them.
And when we do these things, we are living out the gospel.
We are living out the very character of God who forgives and redeems those who will put their trust in Christ Jesus and him alone.
So, this single 25-verse book is not just a short little letter that Paul writes to Philemon, but it teaches us that the gospel is something to be lived out, to be displayed, that we privately minister the word to one another, that we follow this example of Paul to be gracious and patient and sacrificial as we do ministry with others, that we display the gospel when we practice reconciliation between us.
[26:56] Whenever there is conflict, whenever there is broken relationships, the gospel doesn't say to walk away. The gospel tells us to go and reconcile because Christ has reconciled us back to God.

And that is why this is one of my favorite chapters. Let's pray. Father, you are so good and gracious to offer redemption for us through Christ Jesus, your son, who came and lived a perfect life and then died a death that we deserved, all so that we could be reconciled back to you.
And this comes from the great love that you have shown us. Lord, I pray that we would be a people marked by love, that we would be a people who are quick to reconcile, that we would not do this from a place of self-righteousness or pride, but that we would do this because we are commanded

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to in love for one another.
Lord, I thank you for this opportunity for us to come together and open your word and see the gospel on display and then go out and live it in our lives.
Thank you for the saints who have gathered here this evening. Lord, you are so, so good to us.
Lord, we love you, we praise you, we pray all of this in Jesus' name, amen.

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