

Sermon Title: How To Help Spiritual Family

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Philemon 8-25 (Bible Postcards #3, Philemon #2 of 2)

Date: 10-2-22

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Come back to the Book of Philemon with me. We are doing the Biblical Postcards—the one-page books of the Bible. I have said they are all one page; I didn't say they are all one sermon—they *won't* all be one sermon. Philemon is Part 2 today. We already did Obadiah. Lord willing, next week will be Second John. The following week will be Third John. And then we are going to do something extra-special in the Book of Jude, as the Lord makes it possible for us.

We are not just doing this "just because." I have to admit, it's kind of satisfactory to be able to check off a whole book of the Bible every week or two, and say we finished that. But I want you to understand a bigger picture here: God included these little one-page things for us. That means that we *know* that they are "profitable" for us "for teaching, for reproof, for correction," and "for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16; NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). But these little books tend to suffer from neglect. I've done this a couple of times during my ministry, and I am *always* enriched when I do.

So, a couple of reminders for you: Philemon was one of the leaders of the church in the city of Colossae. And we don't know how, but Paul had come to know Philemon. We don't specifically know of Paul visiting Colossae, but he had a lot of friends there. And we know that church was probably founded during the three years that he was in Ephesus. And somehow Paul had introduced this man named Philemon to faith in Christ, and Philemon had a slave named Onesimus.

Onesimus ran away from his master, Philemon. In the providence of God, Onesimus made it all the way to Rome, where Paul was in prison, and somehow got introduced to Paul. And Paul had led Onesimus to faith in Christ, just as he had done with his master, Philemon.

Paul spent two years in jail in Rome. From his jail cell, Paul wrote four of the books of the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and the Book of Philemon. And Paul sent this letter to Colossae, along with the letter to the Colossians, from Rome. At least Tychicus—another one of Paul's coworkers—and Onesimus accompanied these two letters, the Book of Colossians and this letter, to the church and to Philemon personally.

This letter was intended by God for purposes *far beyond* the immediate circumstances that provoked it. Because it is in the Bible, therefore it is good for us, as well (Matt. 4:4).

We have just taken a real simple approach to it. We took the first seven verses last week: How do you regard your spiritual family? And then, secondly, today: How do you *help* your spiritual family?

From those first seven verses, we gleaned some attitudes that are the right attitudes toward other Christians: You love them—you know they are your spiritual family; there is a bond beyond *any* other bond between people (Ps. 16:3; 119:63; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4). You work together to serve the Lord. You pray for grace and peace for your spiritual family. You thank God for them. You have fellowship with them. You learn God's Word together. You give each other joy. And you comfort each other.

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And he has talked about that to lay the groundwork for, if you will, the hard part of this book. Now Paul confronts a potentially sticky situation. But from his holy boldness and his kindness in "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15; cf. Prov. 3:3) and showing compassion and pressing for what is the best for *all* his spiritual family—all of that comes through loud and clear in what we are defining as the second part of this book: "How To Help Your Spiritual Family."

So, look at Verse 8—"Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper..." I just want to stop there for a second. Paul realized that in his role as an Apostle, and as Philemon's spiritual father in the faith, he could probably have just bossed Philemon around; he could have told him what to do. In fact, he *does* command such respect; his words carry tremendous authority. But Paul didn't operate that way unless it was absolutely necessary. If someone was teaching error (1 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:10-22), or someone was in sin (1 Cor. 5:1-5), he would get in their "face" (Gal. 2:11-14). But this is a situation where he shows *great* tact. So he says: I *could* "order you to do what is proper," but, Verse 9—"yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus."

Now, there were times for him to stress his position as an Apostle (1 Cor. 14:37), especially when it was *attacked*; for example: in the region of Galatia—we are studying that in our daily studies via e-mail here. There were situations like the one in Corinth, where some people came in after him; they undermined his message in Galatia, and when they came to Corinth, they similarly did that. They said, "Well, Paul—he's pretty good for an Apostle, but *we* are the Super-Apostles," and they humbly said, "We are going to fix what Paul did that was wrong."

So here, he does not specifically invoke his authority. Now, you *are* going to see in Verse 19 that he *does* make a little quip about it, but he flashes the idea of his authority before Philemon, and then he immediately lets that fade into the background. So, instead of asserting authority, he turns to the most dynamic motivating factor in the universe: love. He has created the right mindset in Philemon: He made a favorable impression on him; he is creating sympathy in pointing out *his* circumstances: "I am appealing to you as 'Paul the aged.'"—he was about 60 by that time, but had a lot more miles than most 60-year-olds in our world would have today. So he was an old man; he knew he was near the end of his life; he wound up being martyred a few years after this.

But he elevates this conversation to the highest possible plane in the way he deals with his friend Philemon. So notice the tenderness and affection in the way that he puts the cards on the table here: Verses 10 and 11—"I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me."

Now, think about what he *might* have written. He could have said: "On my authority as an Apostle, I am writing to you about Onesimus, that good-for-nothing slave of yours who probably, after he robbed you, ran away from you. Well, he is saved now, and I want you to let him stay with me. You owe me that."

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He *could* have put it that way, but that's a better way to win an argument than it is to resolve a problem. So he was spinning the strands together to weave a web of grace and mercy and forgiveness and reconciliation to wrap around this whole situation.

Notice his tenderness there: "I am *appealing* about 'my *child*...begotten in my imprisonment'—the one who is 'useful' to me." He regarded Onesimus now as part of the family—"He is my spiritual 'child.' "

And remember: The name "Onesimus" means "useful," and Paul was making a play on his name there. Now, Onesimus can finally live up to his name! "He became 'useless to you'—he just left a hole in your household. Now he is *very* 'useful' to me, and he can be to you, as well."

But notice: He refuses to *presume* on someone else to obey or to be generous; he just does what he knows he has to do to have a clear conscience before God, and to respect his brothers in Christ. So look at Verses 12 through 14—"I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; 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."

He sent Onesimus back because that was the *right* thing to do; that was the *best* thing to do. Instead of sending him back, he could have just said, "Okay, Onesimus—get back there the best way you can. Get on your knees before Philemon and beg for forgiveness!" No, he sent him—accompanied by another of his co-laborers: Tychicus, whom he mentions in Colossians Chapter 4—and along with this personal letter.

Now, it is clear that he *wanted* to keep Onesimus with him, but he realized that wasn't his decision to make; that was up to Philemon. And Paul does not want to manipulate his friend Philemon; he doesn't want to stack the deck in his favor by keeping Onesimus with him. "Oh, by the way, you know that guy who *really* worked you over and he ripped you off, and he's useless to you and he caused a big problem? Well, rejoice, Brother! Now he's a Christian, and he's with me, and I'll keep him!"

He could have said that, but he didn't. Instead, he shows Philemon what a valuable man Onesimus has now become; he is profitable. Paul's "heart" is poured into this man, and he wants to keep him with him—but to under "compulsion," but of "free will." That is Paul's classy example of respect for his brother in Christ. People resent being told what *you* think they should do. A friend of mine years ago said, "Oh, somebody is 'shoulding' on you again!"

Paul didn't do that. He gives every ounce of respect possible to Philemon; he trusts *him* to make a good decision before the Lord. But he *also* puts the opportunity before him: Verses 15 through 17—"For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, 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. If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me."

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He keeps the tone of this confrontation on a level that it belongs. God is in control (Eph. 1:11; cf. Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:35), and God is "good" (Ps. 119:68). And remember: He "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). "So, Philemon, it was ultimately for your good, for my good, for the good of Onesimus, for the good of the ministry in Colossae, for the good of the spread of the Gospel, that Onesimus and I met this way; and he has come to faith now."

Typically, in our world, people get this backward. Something happens and they say, "Oh, *this is good* for me, I like this...so, God sent it! Thank You, God!"—when really, your perspective needs to be: "God sent this, and *He* is good, and *He* is sovereign...Therefore, this is good for me," even if it is unpleasant (e.g., Phil. 1:29; 2 Cor. 4:17; Heb. 12:11), even if it is your right-hand man that ran away.

Notice also that Paul did not consider immediate forced emancipation of this slave as the solution to this situation, or to confront the problem of slavery. Some people try to turn Philemon into some sort of a declaration about slavery—*it wasn't!* This was about an interpersonal relationship; it is *not* a commentary on the Roman system of slavery—which was very different from the slavery that we think of in some of the darker days of our history.

What was most important for Philemon to know was that Onesimus was returning as *more* than a slave. Becoming a Christian does not mean you are no longer a "slave" (1 Cor. 7:20-21). Becoming a Christian does not necessarily change your social status. The "Health and Wealth Prosperity Gospel" people—they are *liars*, they are *frauds* (1 Tim. 6:5)! No, if you are a slave and you become a Christian, it makes you *the best slave* in the system! If you are a master, and you have people working for you or under you, it makes you the *best* employer, the *best* master in town. *That's* what it does. *Now* there is a relationship between Onesimus and Philemon: They are *both* now "slaves" of the *same* Master (Eph. 6:6)—"King of kings and Lord of lords," Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:15). So he is sending him back, now as a beloved brother.

Notice, he says: "If you regard me a partner"—calling into mind his relationship and friendship with Philemon—"accept him as you would me." Now, how many people do you know that you have a relationship with and Christian fellowship with so strong that you would say, "Here comes my friend; accept him as you would me"? That's pretty amazing!

If you look back through this section so far, you are going to see some principles for "How to Help Your Spiritual Family"—we would call it: "How To *Confront* A Brother or Sister in the Body of Christ." There has been something that has happened; there is a situation that lacks resolution; right now, there may be some strained relationships; there may be hurt feelings. How do you deal with that? Well, I think you can see some principles here for how to confront a brother or sister.

Number 1: Your authority is Scripture; *only* Scripture—not your opinion, not your position. Paul was careful to call his brother's attention to *God's* character and to *God's* Word, and say: "Now, receive him as you would me."

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Number 2: Your motive, and your best ally, has to be love. When you enter a situation that needs resolution, that needs forgiveness, that needs restitution, that needs people to be reconciled to each other—if your attitude is that you are going to win or lose, you are not going to accomplish God's will; you're *doomed*. Enter confrontation with a desire to show love: How can I show love to this other person? How can I apply the principle of loving all of the other people in this situation? You'll start finding creative ways to solve problems.

The godly resolution of a situation *always* involves both "truth" and "love"—we said that last time. Ephesians 4:15—"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." We "speak truth"—and that can be a battering ram (cf. Prov. 12:18)—so we "speak truth *in love*."

We are always loving, but we never love in a manner that contradicts the "truth" (1 Cor. 13:6; cf. Jas. 3:17); we put them together. So Paul takes the situation directly to Philemon, he tells him the whole truth, he tells him what is on his heart, and he leaves it with Philemon and the Lord to do as he senses that God wants him to do.

You need to understand that when you are trying to resolve something with other people in the Body of Christ, peace is not merely the absence of conflict; peace is the presence of righteousness. If you are alienated from another brother or sister in Christ, *there is sin involved*—and it's *your* sin! You say, "Oh, well, *wait a minute!* His sin is 63 percent of the problem; I'm only 37!" Yeah, and you have to deal with that 37. You need to pursue truth, love, righteousness, kindness, compassion—*that* will bring resolution.

Number 3: Be careful to *respect* the other person or the people involved in the confrontation. Assume the best of others!

Now, think about this: Did you get up this morning, roll out of bed, realize it's Sunday morning—"I'm going to church"—did you think of anybody here and say, "Lord, please help me to irritate that person today"? *Of course not!* But we *assume* that other people are out to get *us*, right? Just *lose that!* Your brothers and sisters in Christ are probably doing their best, just like you are doing your best; so "treat" them as "you want them to treat you" (Matt. 7:12). And if there is an offense, realize: "*I have done fifty more than that!*" Accept that they *want* to be glorifying God, that they *want* to be reconciled.

And then, Number 4: Do what is *right*; not necessarily what is easiest, what is most convenient—sometimes that is just to run away! "Well, Lord, I'll just sit on the *other* side of church so I *don't* have to say, 'Good morning' to that person today."

No, Paul did not do that. He could have just sent the letter with Onesimus. He could have just sent Onesimus alone. He could have put this whole thing into the Book of Colossians, and made it Chapter 5 of Colossians, and had it read in church for Philemon and Onesimus to have the spotlight shining on them. He didn't do that. He did it the *right way*, the *loving way*, the *kindest way*, the *gentlest way* that he could. He was rigorously committed to doing the right thing *and* doing it in a way that brings people together.

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He understood Romans 12:18. As a matter of fact, I think he wrote it down one day: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." The guy who *wrote* that is *living* it in the Book of Philemon.

And he is putting into practice other things that he knew were true: Galatians Chapter 3, Verse 28. He could have said, "Onesimus, Philemon is your master; you get back there now! Philemon, make sure you discipline him appropriately when he gets there." But, no—he understood that he also wrote Galatians 3:28—"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The relationship of brother and sister in Christ transcends every other human distinction (cf. Col. 3:11).

And Colossians Chapter 4, Verse 1 was probably read in church the Sunday nearest when this letter to Philemon arrived. The masters there are reminded: "Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven." Same thing as Ephesians Chapter 6, Verse 9, that we just studied.

The conclusion the Scriptures lead us to is that God cares equally for *all* men and women of *all* levels of social status. As James put it: There is no "partiality" with Him (Jas. 2:9). As a matter of fact, Paul wrote that, too (Eph. 6:9).

But rather than requiring that he confront this whole societal issue of slavery, he didn't do that. He did not require the immediate emancipation of all slaves. He did not say: "Okay, now, Onesimus got saved. Let *all* your slaves go, and just release every connection you have to them." He didn't say that.

What is true, though, is that wherever Christianity has become a strong influence in a culture, slavery has always *tended* to decrease and disappear (cf. 1 Cor. 7:21, 23).

One of my favorite Bible commentators, William Hendriksen, wrote it this way about this passage: He says, "All this does not mean that either Jesus or Paul advocated social revolution—immediate emancipation of every slave. Such a sudden upheaval of the entire Roman economy would have resulted in *indescribable* misery for many a slave who depended on his master for a living, and would have placed an insurmountable obstacle in the way of the propagation of the Christian faith."

We are not here to *fix* what we think is wrong with society. We are here to proclaim the message that fixes what we *know* is wrong with people—that they are "alienated" from their Creator (Col. 1:21; cf. Is. 59:2; Eph. 2:1-4, 12), and they need to be "reconciled" (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18).

Hendriksen said further: "This love is the response to God's love for His child. Whether that child be black or white, bond or free, makes no difference. It is this love of God which melts cruelty into kindness; and in so doing, changes despots into kind employers, slaves into willing servants, and all who accept it into brothers in Christ. The kingship or rule of God works from within outward, not from without inward. The truth of the Gospel will do far more to solve social questions than any number of bayonets."

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We said it in the last year or two. Our society has been *awash* in this so-called "Social Justice Movement"—redefining the definition of justice from what God says, turning it into: "It has to be equal *outcomes* for everyone!" No, no! That has *never* been God's way! That has *never happened*, that everybody has had equal outcomes! Equal *treatment*, equal *opportunity*, equal *consideration*, no partiality—that is justice, and the Gospel *brings that*. And that is why Jesus could say so boldly: People "will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).

Read on: Philemon 18—"But if he"—Onesimus—"has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account."

Now, that's an interesting thing to say. Paul knew that anyone travelling from Colossae to Rome would need some money. He also knew that a slave probably didn't have a savings account set aside for such a trip. I am sure that Onesimus, when he fled Colossae and went to Rome, was *not* thinking, "I'll get a round-trip ticket." And Paul knew that any man who, before he was saved, would sneak away from his master was not the epitome of morality, and he probably stole from him.

Paul later wrote what we know as Titus 2:9-10—"Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, *not pilfering...*" Remember, slaves were mostly regarded as members of the household; there would be a lot of opportunities to "pilfer" things, and anybody without the moral compass of knowing the Lord would probably give in to that. So it is likely Onesimus confessed to his spiritual father, Paul, that he stole from his master before he left him.

But here is a little interesting sidebar to think about: Where is Paul when he wrote this? He's in jail. How could he say, "I'll pay for it; put it on my tab"? Had he come into an inheritance in recent years, that he could make a generous offer like that? Over in Acts Chapter 24, Verse 26, it mentions that Felix detained Paul, hoping that Paul would give him money as a bribe for his freedom. Well, you don't ask the guy that just came in from the gutter somewhere for a *bribe*. There was something about Paul that made Felix think that Paul had some means. We know that he used his tent-making skills as a way to support his whole team (Acts 18:3; 20:34); but in Acts 28:30, it says that while he was still under house-arrest in Rome, Paul "stayed...in his own rented quarters." And notice, when Paul wrote to the Philippians, he said, "I know how to get by on next to nothing, and to have a lot" (cf. Phil. 4:12). So don't assume that Paul was a pauper here.

We don't know how it happened; we will never know for sure how he was able to make the offer; but he did, in Verse 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)." He *couldn't* resist! But there's nothing *wrong* with that. "As I loved *you*, and introduced *you* to Christ, I have come to love Onesimus. Receive him as you would me, and I will take care of it."

He said, "I...am writing this with *my own hand*." It's like he is saying: "Regard this as my promissory note, with my signature attached." And by the way: He *may* have written this book in his own hand. Most of the time, he used an amanuensis; we would call him a

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stenographer—or, someone who takes dictation (Rom. 16:22)—but he would often, at the end of a book, write a greeting in his own hand (1 Cor. 16:21); it was a way to authenticate it and to make sure that they knew this was really his words (2 Thess. 3:17).

Verse 20—"Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ." Paul considered that whatever good thing Philemon might do for Onesimus was as if he had done it for Paul himself.

I think Paul was *fully satisfied* if he just heard back that Philemon had been welcomed as a brother, that they were now part of the church of Jesus Christ together. That would have refreshed his heart. There is nothing in ministry of any kind as refreshing and uplifting as to see forgiveness and restoration and generosity and kindness, all because somebody belongs to Christ.

So, Verse 21—"Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say." Here is a clear example of how to help a brother or sister in Christ: Expect them to do the best. Root for them, rather than doubting them. Pray for them, rather than criticizing them.

Now, what might have happened? Well, we don't know, but we can certainly *think* about it. I don't think that there was time for the Book of Colossians and the Letter to Philemon to get from Rome to Colossae, and for Philemon to have released Onesimus and sent him back to Paul, before Paul got out of prison. Indications are that this was probably pretty late in his time there (cf. vs. 22), so *maybe* Philemon sent Onesimus back to help Paul. Maybe they arranged to meet along the way. Maybe Philemon gave Onesimus his freedom; we don't know. Maybe, since Onesimus obviously had some reason that he was enslaved to Philemon, he probably owed a debt; and clearly, if he had skipped out, that debt wasn't paid, so maybe he kept him on but gave him more free time to minister the Gospel. I would like to think that Philemon became all the more compassionate to all of his slaves, however many there were. Maybe he helped Paul even more than anticipated after he was released. Who knows?

But I do think these guys all saw each other again, because look at Verses 22-24—"At the same time also, prepare me a lodging"—get my room ready; I plan to come see you—"for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers"—the people who were with him. Those are the standard kind of greetings in the early church.

But Paul expected to be released fairly soon. The New Testament doesn't tell us exactly *how* it happened. The Book of Acts ends with Paul still in prison in Rome, but we can piece together Paul's later writings; and we know that there was *some* sort of chronology in which he was released, he travelled again, he visited some of the churches that he was associated with, he was eventually re-imprisoned, and then he was martyred shortly after he wrote Second Timothy (see 2 Tim. 4:6).

So those are just normal greetings. The always said, "Hello from so-and-so; please greet the saints," and all of that.



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And then, Verse 25—"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

That's how he prays. That's what he wants. Whatever else happens—"I'm sending you Onesimus, I'm sending you this letter, I wrote a letter to the whole church"—just *bathe it all in grace*, practice God's grace.

Now, how can you best help a brother or sister in Christ? Well, just look at what we have seen:

Expect the best of them; root for them (1 Thess. 5:11).

Share the burden (Gal. 6:2). You know, they probably didn't roll out of bed this morning deciding how to annoy you; but maybe there is something on their mind, maybe there is something that is distracting them, maybe there is something that is making them see things differently than you do. Maybe you need to come alongside and share their burden, and you'll be much better off.

Be generous (Deut. 15:7-10; Ac. 4:34-35; Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 6:18). Paul didn't *have* to pay Onesimus's way back to Colossae; he didn't *have* to pay any of his debt—but he did.

When you are dealing with a rift in a relationship with a brother or sister, call them to rise to the highest level of maturity. Don't treat them with the *presumption* that they are going to be carnal; say, "Hey, here's what the Word says. Here's my heart. Come, join me; let's work together!"

Don't put off telling them what they do well. Notice how Paul always commended people (e.g., Rom. 16:1-13; 1 Cor. 16:15-18; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 2:19-20, 22-30; Col. 4:7-14). The only letter that Paul wrote in which he doesn't commend anybody is the Book of Galatians, because he was *on fire with zeal* because the Gospel he taught these people was being *corrupted!* (cf. Gal. 1:6) Otherwise, he *always* sent commendations—even to the *cruddy Corinthians!* Read Chapter 1. He even talked about all the things that *they* had going for them.

Be truthful, *always* (Eph. 4:25; cf. Prov. 30:8a; Zech. 8:16). It is *always* the boundary on our communication: Be truthful (Ps. 24:4; 119:63; Prov. 13:5).

And: Be loving (Jn. 13:34; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:2; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:11, 16, 23; 4:7, 11-12).

So, yeah, we can look at this book and ask: "How is your attitude toward people in different social strata?" (cf. Jas. 2:1-9) You may not be dealing very often with slaves, but how do you do with the realities of what God calls you to do? You may not be a slave, but you are probably an employee. You may not be a slave master, but maybe you are an employer or a manager of some kind.

God put the Book of Philemon into His Word as part of His inscripturated revelation to teach us on several levels.

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We know from Second Timothy 3:16 and 17 that just because this is here:

This is here to "teach" you (cf. Ps. 119:24, 100, 104).

This is here to "reprove" you (cf. Heb. 4:12). Maybe you are at odds with someone. Maybe there is a strained relationship between you and a brother or sister in Christ, or maybe somebody under your own roof. If you haven't done everything possible, "so far as it depends on you," to bring that whole situation under the authority of the Word of God, and come alongside and say, "Let's work this out; let's do this the Lord's way," then you are a big part of the problem, and there needs to be "peace" (Mk. 9:50)—and there won't be peace without reconciliation; there won't be reconciliation without repentance; there won't be repentance without the knowledge of the truth, which means: you go to the Scriptures.

And so, this is also here to "correct" you (cf. Ps. 119:59). You have an example of what to do—so, if we need to, let's take the correction (Ps. 19:9, 11; Rev. 3:19b).

And the result: When it has taught you, reproved you, corrected you—it "trains you in righteousness."

And that, my friends, is how we help our spiritual family.

Oh, and we "pray for one another" (Jas. 5:16), so let me pray for us all, would you?

*Father, how we thank You for the goodness of Your grace. Thank You for this amazing man, Paul, and all that You did for him and through him. Thank You for all these portions of the New Testament that he wrote. Thank You for this man, Philemon, and his transformed life by Your grace. Thank You for this man, Onesimus. And thank You for that triangle between Paul and Philemon and Onesimus that has turned into a three-dimensional pyramid by connecting with us. Thank You that Your Word is so powerful. Please, may it have its effect in each of our lives as we seek to honor You in all that we do and say, for we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*