

## **An Attitude Reflective of Grace**

**September 5, 2010**

**Philemon 1 – 21**

### **The reading of God's Word for the people of God.**

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, <sup>2</sup>to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:

<sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup>I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup>because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. <sup>6</sup>I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. <sup>7</sup>Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

<sup>8</sup>Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, <sup>9</sup>yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. <sup>11</sup>Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

<sup>12</sup>I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. <sup>13</sup>I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup>But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. <sup>15</sup>Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—<sup>16</sup>no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup>So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup>If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup>I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. <sup>20</sup>I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>21</sup>Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

### **This is the Word of God and It can be trusted.**

Let us pray:

*Most blessed God of Heaven, which makes the poor in spirit rich in virtue and makes the wealthy humble of heart, we invite you to come and descend upon us today. Fill us with your comfort that our souls which are faint from weariness and dry of mind, may be made new through your love, acceptance and grace; for your grace is sufficient for us.*

*May the meditations of our heart and the words of my lips be pleasing to you today. Amen!*

The more I read the Bible, the more surprised I become that more people aren't reading it. Many people have the impression that the Bible is a dry book of theology accompanied by a long list of 'thou shalls' and 'thou shall nots,' but it really is a good read. The stories of the Bible are full of adventure, heartache, pain, joy, overcoming obstacles, and great miracles; there are stories of love, betrayal and compassion, the kinds of stories that shape not only our view of the world, but how we view ourselves. The letter that Paul is writing to Philemon is one of those that offer us so much more than what we believe that twenty five verses can contain. It is a letter written full of compassion, love and excitement for a lost soul that has found reconciliation with the Creator. It is a model of how we ourselves are to react when one of our own comes to know the saving grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and all this is told by Paul, who finds himself imprisoned for his own faith in Christ with little to no thought of his own well being.

Philemon was a member of the church of Colosse and very active in his church. It is possible that he was one of Paul's own converts and it is also conceivable the other two people mentioned here, Apphia and Archippus were Philemon's wife and son. This letter is not only written to Philemon himself, but is written to Philemon's family, as well.

It is evident by the words in Paul's letter that Onesimus had been one of Philemon's slaves and had stolen from this family and had run away. During his escape, Onesimus had made his way to Rome and found himself in the presence of Paul, during which time Onesimus is converted to Christ. With the same sort of love that Paul has for Philemon, Paul expresses a new found love of Onesimus and has taken a vested interest in him. Onesimus had proven himself quite useful to Paul during their time together, but Paul did not think it was right to keep Onesimus with him in Rome and he is now preparing to send Onesimus back to Philemon and his family.

It seems that this letter to Philemon is an appeal for him to receive Onesimus back not as the slave he once knew, but as a brother in Christ and Paul urged Philemon to forgive Onesimus for any wrong that he may have committed against him and his family. Though the letter itself is short in comparison to those written to others by Paul, there is invaluable insight to be gained. The letter provides a model for *Christian Courtesy*, a manifestation, if you will, of *Christian Love* and a focus on the importance of reacting properly to *Christian Conversion*.

Paul often began his letters with a warm greeting and took the time to stroke the ego of the recipient. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul writes to Philemon, “I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.” Aside from the brief mention in verse one of Paul being a prisoner in Christ Jesus, Paul has not allowed his focus to be on himself or his own situation, but rather he focuses his attention purely on Philemon and his family. This model of *Christian Courtesy* is certainly something we can all learn from. It is an attitude that we ourselves should adopt when bringing the hope of Christ to others. As children of God, we know that we ourselves are saved and Mount Zion awaits us regardless of our fate here on Earth.

How often have we begun a conversation with, “You won’t believe the kind of week I had,” or “Oh, the woes my life has dealt me . . .?” Paul is in imprisonment as he is writing to Philemon and yet he does not allow that to be his major focus, rather he shows concern for Philemon, his family and in turn begins to ask that they draw their attention away from their own woes and look to the glorious conversion of their new brother in Christ, Onesimus. Each of us here today, at some point in our lives, has found ourselves imprisoned in some form or fashion. It is quite possible that many, if not all of us here today find ourselves imprisoned today. Our

jobs, our families, our secular responsibilities, our financial obligations and distractions, our health, our addictions and even our own sense of self worth can become heavy chains for each us. So much so, that they become our very focus in life as we forget that God has called us to something much more wonderful in our lives. God has called us to reach out to those who are lost, to share our personal stories of triumph and our blessings with others so as to offer hope to the hopeless, peace to those who find themselves in a time of war and persecution and justice to those who are being marginalized by those who consider themselves to be amongst the majority. Paul, however, models for us a true example of *Christian Courtesy* as he puts aside his own needs for the needs of others, in this case for Philemon, his family and their new brother in Christ, Onesimus.

Here amongst the lines of this letter we also find a message that is reflective of the grace that God offers each of us, a message – a manifestation – of *Christian Love*. Paul writes, “I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.” The words – *active in sharing your faith* – speak to our responsibility to get up, get out and get moving; not only so that we may bring the message of Christ into this lost and dying world but so that we may gain a better and more full understanding of what Christ offers each of us; a love expounded by grace. Do you know what grace is? It is the giving of what is not deserved. We don’t deserve to be loved and forgiven, but by the *grace* of God we are. We, too, are to adopt this attitude of grace and express it to all those we encounter, whether they become a part of our daily lives or are with us for just a moment. Every opportunity we have to love one another is a reflection of our understanding of the love that God, through the sacrifice of Christ, has given each of us.

And then there is our reaction to *Christian Conversion*; our reaction to those who may have seemingly been useless to us once upon a time but now have proven themselves useful – not to what we ourselves can gain from knowing them, but rather the usefulness they now offer to the bringing forth of God’s Kingdom into our communities of faith, our community at large and to all those that they themselves will encounter. “I appeal to you,” Paul writes, for my son “Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me,” and if I may add, to the very Kingdom of God! If it were not for the conversion experience, then none of us would have a story to tell, or a testimony to share. If it were not for the conversion experience then none of else would have any hope for tomorrow. But by the grace of God, we have found reconciliation with our Creator and we do have hope for tomorrow.

We, then, should be forever ready to receive back those who have wronged us and we should be ready to receive them with the same joy and excitement that God has received each of during our own conversion in Christ. Like Paul, who was rejoicing in his chains, we should be ready and prepared to accomplish all of this with little to no thought of our own dilemmas, our own sufferings and our own needs. God will provide and protect us according to God’s will and way for lives. Joy is not found in our own doing, but in the realization of what God has done for each of us and in the nurturing of one another. Our attitudes are not to be a reflection of what the world offers us or what the world has to say about us, but rather our attitudes are to be reflective of the grace offer to each of us by our Savior, God’s son, Jesus Christ. Only then can we begin to offer *Christian Courtesy* to those around us, become active in our call to *Christian Love* and encourage one another and begin to share in the joy and excitement of seeing others brought to their place in God’s Kingdom through *Christian Conversion*, that is, to share in the joy and

excitement of seeing our brothers and sisters saved from the perils of this lost and dying world through the same grace offered to each of us in Christ Jesus.

I would like to invite each of you today to adopt an attitude that is reflective of the grace in your lives; to look at the world through the eyes of Christ, the same eyesight that Paul gained upon his own conversion on the Damascus Road. Stop hurting one another, stop holding each other back and stop holding on to what the world has to say about you. Forgive those who have hurt you, those who have spoken ill about you and find value in one another, especially in those that you have declared to be useless. The truth remains that we, as earthly bound individuals, are going to be wronged, we are going to be talked about, we are going to hurt and we are going to find ourselves imprisoned by others and unfortunately even ourselves. Don't let this become the focus of your existence. Don't let these experiences shape your attitudes about life, but rather focus your attention and your attitudes on the hope that is Christ Jesus.

Maybe you haven't yet experienced the grace of God for yourself. Know that you are being offered that experience today; all you have to do is accept it for yourself. God has already made the offer and Christ has already made the sacrifice. Today it is up to you to accept what is so freely being given to you. Won't you accept it today.

In the name of the one who has offered his life, his blood and his body as a sacrifice for the atonement of our sin and our shame, let us ready ourselves today to be called saints among the sainted. Amen!