



lētheia  
CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP  
December 26, 2021  
“Chains”

*Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids.*

**No** Wednesday Night Classes on December **29**, see you on January 5<sup>th</sup>

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### PHILEMON 1-25...

This Epistle is a practical \_\_\_\_\_ of what we learned in 1 John. What does it look like to allow God to love through you? Here is one well-preserved \_\_\_\_\_.

I’m not a fan of going with a \_\_\_\_\_ idea just because it’s \_\_\_\_\_.

When an οἰκοδεσπότης (oy-kō-dēs-pō-tās), “head of the house,” Latin, “dominus,” became a Christian, his entire household followed suit and were \_\_\_\_\_ into the faith.

Just because you wisely follow suit with your dominus’ wishes, it doesn’t...

Onesimus refused to truly \_\_\_\_\_ which probably caused an escalating unpleasantness.

Slavery was an everyday, everywhere fact of life. In the Greco-Roman world about \_\_\_\_% of were citizens, and about \_\_\_\_% were slaves. The wealthiest elites could wind up slaves and the poorest slave could end up wealthy. Death was everywhere. \_\_\_\_% of the people did not live to be 10 years old.

*Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.*

*God Bless You!*

Philemon had rights and Onesimus did not. It was engrained. It took \_\_\_\_\_ 1,800 years to overcome the natural inclination of fearful men.

Onesimus ran away and pursued Paul to act as a go-between to \_\_\_\_\_ things out.

Paul saw it as an opportunity to share the \_\_\_\_\_ one-on-one.

The Epistle is masterful. Paul reminded Philemon that he was suffering, not because he made a mistake, but for Christ, implying...

Also, to: Apphia, Archippus, and to the church. Paul just cc'd Philemon's \_\_\_\_\_, his pastor, and the whole church that met regularly in his \_\_\_\_\_.

Verses 4 through 7 set the \_\_\_\_\_ for Paul's confidence in Philemon to do the \_\_\_\_\_ Christian thing.

Verse 8 gives us the "Therefore." That would be followed by the \_\_\_\_\_. Paul makes a couple of parenthetical comments first...

First, as an \_\_\_\_\_ appointed by Jesus, Paul could simply order compliance. Paul was literally saying to Philemon that "Christ Himself can command you step up, through me."

Paul said, "I won't do that." It's an example of a profound Christian \_\_\_\_\_.

The first, is that each person must make their own \_\_\_\_\_ and then reap the result. The second, that we \_\_\_\_\_ letting people make choices with which we disagree.

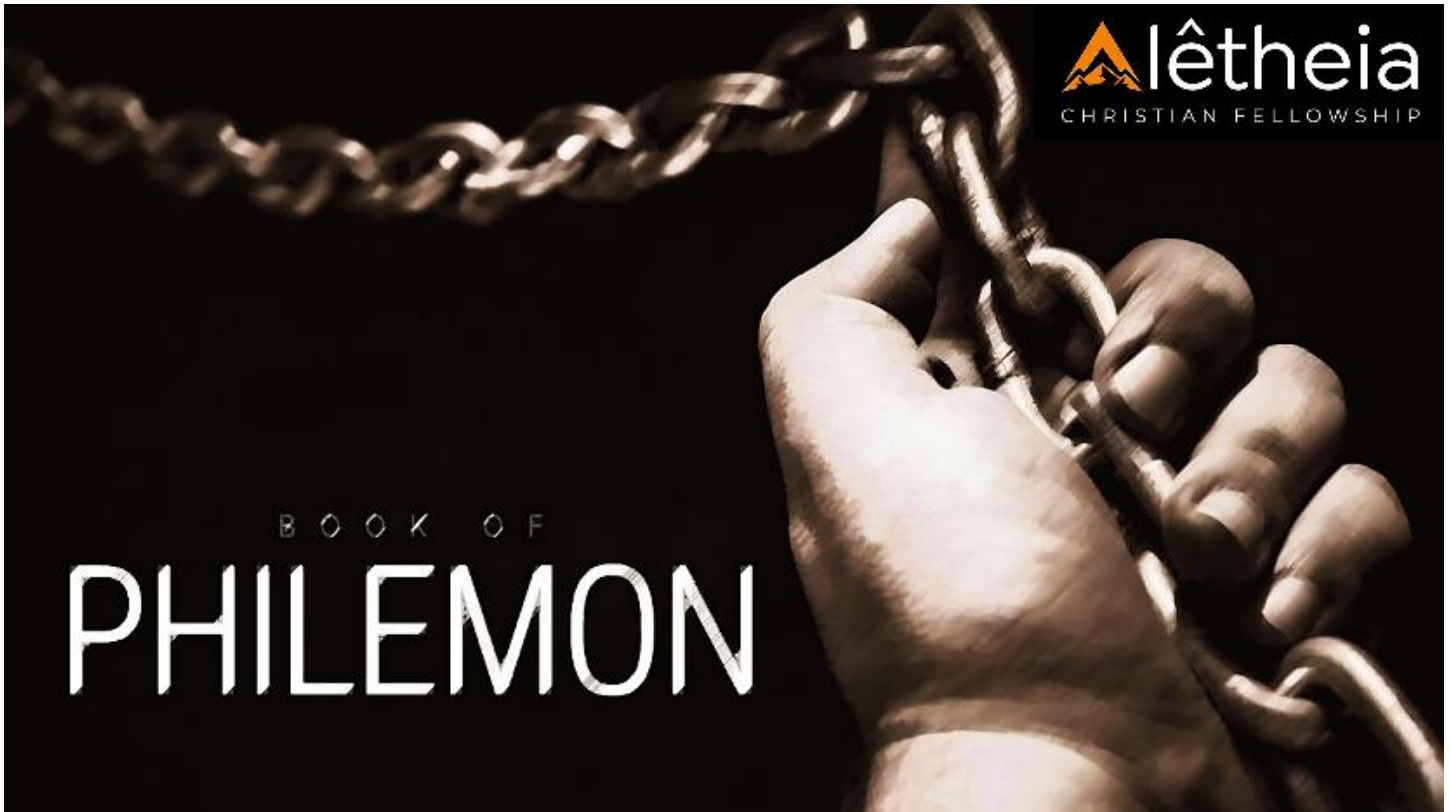
You will personally stand before Jesus and give Him an \_\_\_\_\_.

Any coerced performance is \_\_\_\_\_. When we truly love someone, we want them to grow and do what is right on their own.

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Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

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Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_



PHILEMON 1-25, 1Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, 2and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, 5because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; 6and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. 7For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love,

because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. 8Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, 9yet 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— 10I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, 13whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; 14but 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. 15For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, 16no 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. 17If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. 18But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19I, 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). 20Yes,

brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. 22At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you. 23Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. 25The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

It seems fairly straightforward. It may also seem weird. Here's a Book of the Bible that is so short, so seemingly specific to a personal situation nearly 20 centuries ago, most people don't give it a second thought. In addition, woke people don't even mention the word slavery, let alone discuss it in public. Finally, it is so seemingly lacking in any theological, or Christological, or ecclesiastical content, many people wonder why it's even in the Bible.

The front side of Papyrus 87, the oldest extant copy of Philemon.

Dated between 175-225 A.D.

The fragment contains parts of verses 13-15



τοῖς δεσμ  
 χωρίς δέ τῃ  
 δέν ἠθέλ  
 μή ὡς κατ  
 ὄν σου ἧ̄ ἀλ  
 διά το

1) First, even the most liberal, miracle-denying, inspired Scripture naysaying scholars admit that it is undeniably a Letter written by the Apostle Paul. No one questions the authorship. 2) Second, only the most immature, naïve people on the planet can think that being silent about slavery is better. 3) While certainly not a preaching/teaching Epistle per se, it is the very showcase of Christianity in actual practice.

There is a reason that the Holy Spirit secured a place in the Bible for this short letter - we can learn a lot from it. In a very real way, this Epistle is a practical application of what we learned in 1 John. What does it

look like to allow God to love through you? Here is one well-preserved example.



To set the background we need to talk about a few things. Paul was in prison awaiting trial and as a Roman citizen he was allowed a fair bit of latitude. That seems good, but in reality, what it meant was Roman prisoners, even citizens, were largely required to fend for themselves. If no one who cared about you was able to bring you food, you generally didn't eat.

Paul was jailed in some fashion. It could have been anything from being chained to a wall in a literal dungeon, to being under house arrest. Whatever his

circumstances, he was not free, but did have some degree of companionship.



We are certain that Paul was imprisoned on several occasions, most notably in Philippi, then two years in Caesarea and about the same in Rome. We believe He was imprisoned a second time in Rome resulting in his execution as well as in Ephesus.





Which imprisonment is this? Most people assume that this Letter was written at the same time as Colossians and if so, we're talking the Pauls' first imprisonment in Rome and so about the year 61 A.D. A newer theory assumes an imprisonment in Ephesus that would put the Letter 7 or 8 years earlier.

The reason for this idea is that Philemon was a wealthy Roman citizen residing in the city of Colossae in what is today inland western Turkey about 125 miles east of Ephesus. An easy enough journey for a runaway slave, while it was roughly 900 miles as the crow flies from Rome. Could Onesimus get himself to Rome? Sure,

but obviously more difficult and more expensive - boat rides were not cheap, and would attract some unwanted attention.

I'm not a fan of going with a new idea just because it's new. There are two additional things to consider. In the closing Paul called "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus," and mentioned, "Aristarchus," as "My fellow worker." In His closing of Colossians Paul called, "Aristarchus," my fellow prisoner," and essentially, "Epaphras," as my fellow worker, not a big deal, but interesting. The final piece is in Colossians, "Tychicus" will deliver the Letter and other information about Paul accompanied by "Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number." Then Paul added, "They (Tychicus and Onesimus) will inform you about the whole situation here."

The idea being that the situation has changed between the two letters. Colossians was written from Rome in about 61 A.D. Being about 8 years after this Letter, Onesimus was by then a free man - "Who is one of your number," ministering alongside the Apostle Paul. Tidbits like these lead to speculation and so new ideas. C. S. Lewis said, "Almost anything can be read into any

book if you are determined enough.” As I say, it’s interesting, but certainly not conclusive. I would probably lean to the traditional view that this letter was written in conjunction with Colossians and sent together from Rome in the early 60’s A.D.

The most probable situation was that Philemon, and his household, became Christians through the ministry of the Apostle Paul, likely as a consequence of his Third Missionary Journey in about 52 A.D. (Acts 18:23). It’s a bit less likely, but possible that it was on his Second Missionary Journey in 49 A.D. (Acts 16:6).



When an οἰκοδεσπότης (oy-kō-dēs-pō-tās), the Greek word for the head of the house, in Latin a dominus, a man of the house... When such a person became a Christian, his entire household followed suit and were baptized into the faith. That included his wife, children, extended relatives and all his slaves.

Just because you wisely follow suit with your dominus' wishes, it doesn't make you a Believer. This is the same problem churches with infant baptism face. Onesimus as one of Philemon's slaves would have gone through the motions, but may have been extremely resentful about being forced to abandon his childhood religion and adopt a new one.

One quick point about infant baptism, since I brought it up and it bears on this situation... Such practice stems from the idea that God has chosen to put such children or in this case such a slave where He has determined and so they are saved even if it doesn't seem like it. Eventually they will truly believe. It isn't the baptism that saves, contrary to that misconception, it is that people recognize what God has already decided. In our case, it turned out to be justified - Onesimus did become a true Believer.

Philemon was, by all accounts, a true Follower of Christ and he and his wife, most likely Apphia, opened their home as a church. Archippus was the primary leader of that church - we would say the pastor.

Onesimus refused to truly believe and may have caused difficulties, frustrations, and even anger in his masters and perhaps the church. It is reasonable to assume a deteriorating relationship between Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and others. They may have begun abusing Onesimus, at least mentally, and it may have been escalating.

What, Christians owning slaves - Christians abusing a slave? Well, Christians have a long track record of being less than loving. Even more though, is we live in such a different world than they did back then that it's hard to overstate.

Carved relief of Roman slaves going to the Arena near Ephesus



Slavery was an everyday, everywhere fact of life, and had been for millennia before, and would last for millennia after. In the Greco-Roman world only about 15% of the roughly 60 million people in the Empire were citizens and at the other end of the spectrum about 15% were slaves. That leaves the vast majority, 70%, like Jesus. People with minimal rights just trying to eke out a living in a very harsh world. In that world, literally anyone could become a slave. Being a slave had far more to do with bad luck, than anything else.

The wealthiest elites could wind up slaves and the poorest slave could end up wealthy. It had absolutely

nothing to do with race, creed, religion, culture, or color. You could be born into slavery, you could be taken as a prisoner of war, you could get sideways with the wrong person, you could be sold by your parents or even sell yourself into slavery.

Death was everywhere. 50% of the people did not live to be 10. If you were in the half that lived past 10 your life expectancy went way up... All the way up to about 35. Life was cheap.

It was Christianity that changed all of that and it took 18 centuries for it to do so. For Christianity to finally eradicate slavery and establish the idea that owning another person was actually wrong. A mere 150 years ago in this country half of the citizens thought owning slaves was a mark of civility, a badge of honor, a sign of wealth and a demonstration of power. It is obvious to fallen and depraved human beings that slavery is good if you are the master. Many business owners demonstrate the same tendency even today.

## Slaves and treasure taken from Israel in 74 A.D.



To fully embrace the notion that it is a horrible institution that degrades human life to that which ranks below feral animals, and that's the slave holder I'm talking about, took a monumental leap. The very leap that Nietzsche decried as weak as he reduced all human motivation to a will to power. We don't get it. How could a slave owner be seen as blessed? It's actually a good thing that we no longer understand. Things were far different then.

Philemon had rights and Onesimus did not. If a master chose to murder his slave in public, in front of women and children, even his own, no one would bat an eye.



Beating and otherwise mistreating slaves was nothing. It was engrained. As I say, it took Christianity 70 generations to overcome the natural inclination of fearful men.

At some point Onesimus ran away. He may have taken some money or other valuables from the house to secure his escape. Philemon has lost his slave and Onesimus was a wanted man.

He sought out the Apostle Paul as an intermediary - he knew his master respected Paul and he assumed that Paul would be receptive to his plight. To coincidentally run into Paul in jail is a farce beyond imagining. Paul was a Roman citizen and Onesimus was a runaway slave - they didn't travel in the same circles even in prison unless it was intentionally. The most likely scenario is that Onesimus realized that he was in deep trouble and pursued Paul to act as a go-between to smooth things out with Philemon.



Paul saw it as an opportunity to share the Gospel one-on-one with Onesimus as a fellow human being and it worked, Onesimus was Saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. A cynic, would say, “How convenient.” I sincerely doubt that Onesimus could have fooled the Apostle Paul concerning his conversion.

Onesimus then stayed with Paul for some period of time learning more and helping the Apostle and his companions. The way the Letter was written, there’s a definite feeling that it was Onesimus that insisted on going back and making things right with his master, come whatever may. That is precisely what a true

Christian would do - I can't go forward with Jesus until I have done my best to reconcile my past.

Paul, with somewhat mixed feelings, agrees to write the Letter and send both it and Onesimus back to Philemon.



# Philemon

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,  
To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, <sup>2</sup>and  
to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier,  
and to the church in your house:

The Epistle is masterful. There are so many nuanced, well-crafted, and carefully interwoven rhetorical devices, that we don't have time to cover even a quarter of them. Right out of the gate in verse 1, Paul introduces himself, not as an Apostle, but as a prisoner. Literally as one in chains. Not an inmate of the state, but a man confined only because Christ Jesus allows

it. A man imprisoned not just for Christ, but by Christ for His divine purposes. Paul never questioned the hands that he was dealt. He was about the Lord's business, and it was none of his business where that business took him.

Paul has reminded Philemon that he is in unenviable, difficult and sacrificial circumstances, not because he made a mistake, but because of his faithful service to Jesus. The implication? I'm going to talk to you about a potential loss financially and perhaps a blow to your ego, but look where Jesus has me.

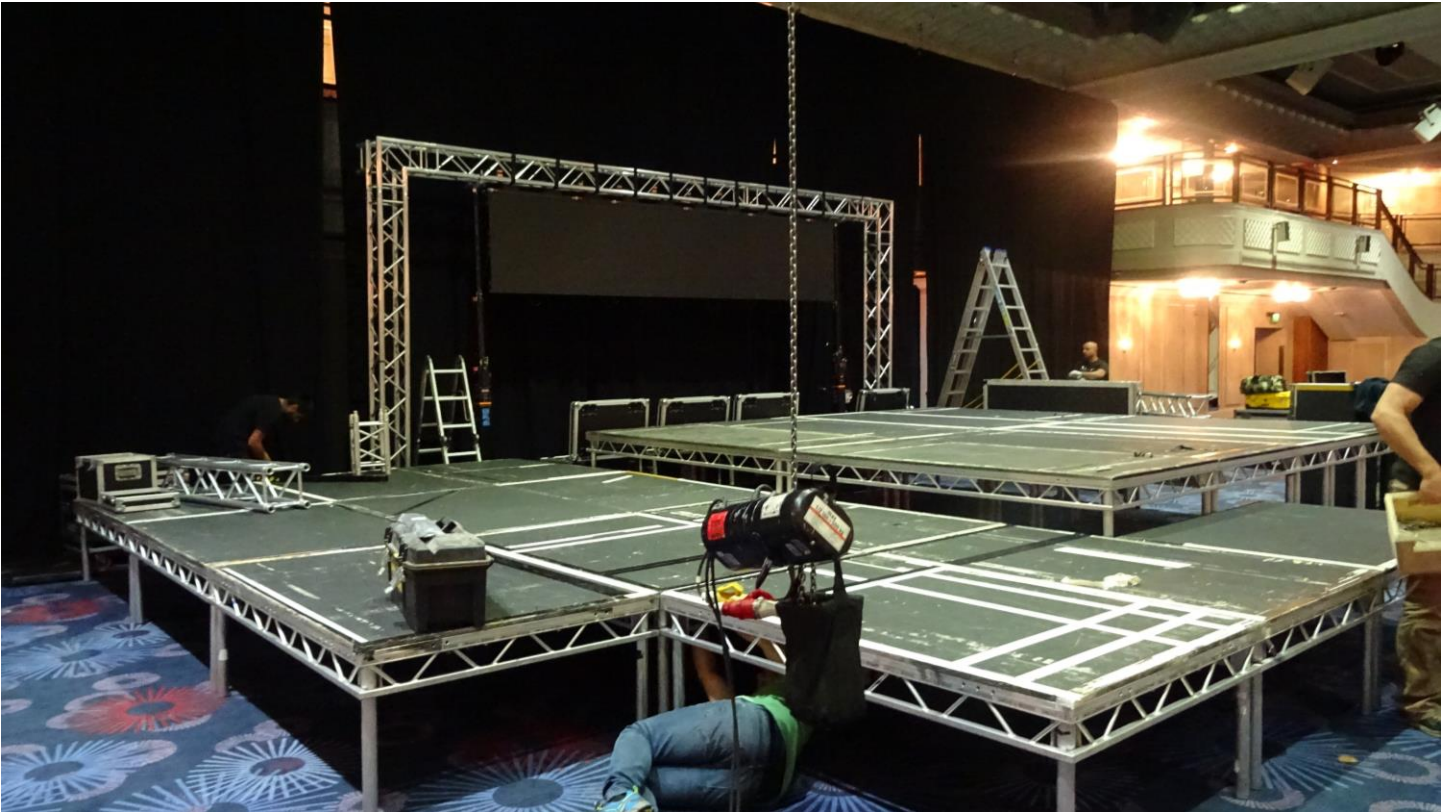
Then he added Timothy calling him "our brother." By adding Timothy, Paul undoubtedly brings up someone Philemon knows and likes and by calling him "our brother," Paul implies that he and Philemon are brothers well. Without directly saying it, Paul has connected himself with Philemon.

He goes on to make that explicit, which heightens the emotional appeal of it - "To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker." And not just a brother, but someone called to work sacrificially in ministry together for the same ends. God's ends, not our ends.

Apphia was likely Philemon's wife. Archippus was their pastor. And to the church. What's happened here is similar to Paul sending an email to Philemon and cc'd Philemon's wife, his pastor, and the whole church that meets regularly in his home. Talk about subtle pressure. All of that and we're only 2 verses in... And trust me I could say more.



Verse 3, “Grace” is the unearned and unearnable kindness of God extended through Jesus making true “peace” possible. If you can fully understand and fully embrace the words I just said, you are on your way to good theology.

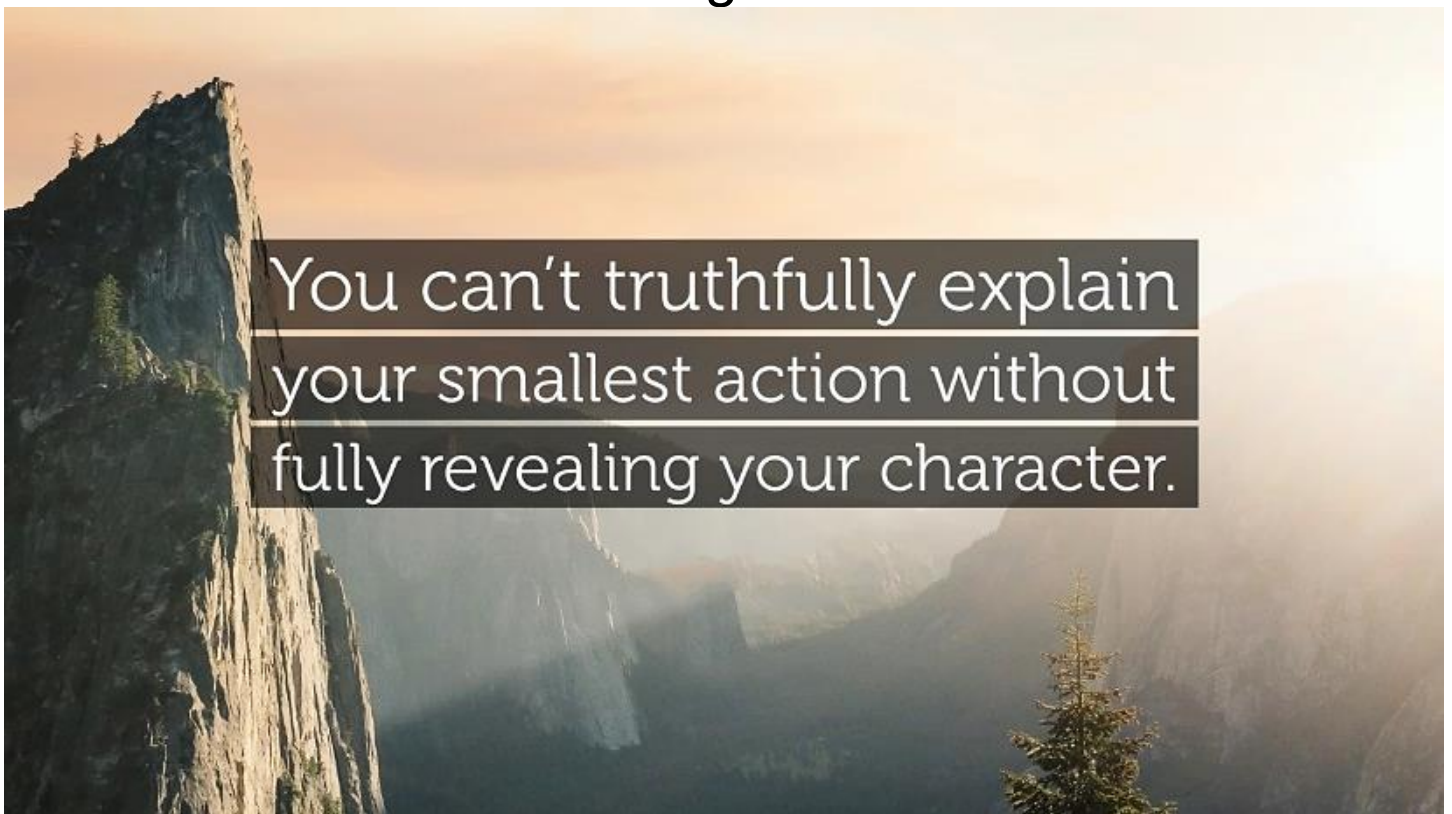


Verses 4 through 7 set the stage for Paul's confidence in Philemon to do the mature Christian thing. Verse 8 gives us the "Therefore." Because you are the Christian, I know you to be, I Paul, therefore appeal to you to do something. You say wait a moment, there are more words than that. Yes, Paul, never the man to hold anything back makes a parenthetical comment - two really - before he gets to his request.

First, I, as an Apostle appointed by Jesus and confirmed by the other Apostles, could simply order you to do what I wish in the matter before us. Paul was

literally saying to Philemon that “Christ Himself can command you step up, through me.”

Paul said, “I won’t do that,” and it’s one of the most profound examples of a Christian principle imaginable. A principle that was, and still is, so alien to people, that it is violated constantly in big and little ways. It’s in two parts. The first, is the fundamental reality that each person must make their own choices and then reap the result. the second, that we hate letting people make choices with which we disagree.



For the first, it’s why I say a clear conscience before God is so vital. You take the information you’ve got,

and part of that information is knowing full well that you have access to more information. You have a Bible. You have a church. You have me. You make the best decision you can and then there's fallout. Oh, it gets on you and it gets on those around you, but never miss the point that for the Christian, you will personally stand before Jesus - the Ancient of Days and He will look into your soul with His eyes blazing like fire and you will give Him an accounting.

Too many watered-down, grace-heavy, people-pleasing pastors leave this bit out. On that day, you can't look to anyone else for help, you can't have me or anyone else stand there with you, you will have no excuses, rationalizations or denials. That day will be your time alone with Jesus explaining the actions of your life. Describing to the Lord of Lords what you did with His resources and there will be a settling of accounts.

That is precisely why I will do all that I can for you now. I will study and pray and deliver the best that I can for you, but I will never take the decision out of your hands. You must choose because you are the only one who will answer for your choice.





Beyond that is the fundamental reality that any coerced performance is meaningless. I'm sure Philemon had Onesimus baptized along with everyone else under his roof. I'm sure Onesimus begrudgingly went along with it and I'm sure that in the joy of that day no one else noticed that Onesimus was coerced.

You can be as strict as you like with your family, but rules don't make character and tyrants don't foster belief. If you want your kids to follow Jesus, make sure they meet Him. Make sure that you're transparent with them about your own walk. Help them to see that it is a relationship following the Lord and not a religion

obeying rules. Help them to realize that they need to get their eyes off of men and on to Jesus.

Being a parent means taking choices away from your children. If you're good at it, it also means giving them their choices back over time so that when they leave you, they will know how to proceed in life without you.

That's a little scary, but do you seriously want your adult children dependent upon you? If you do, please set up some counseling. We already keep kids, kids too long. If you've done it right, by age 18, your child should be able to function as an adult in this world. Not getting everything right, not able to ignore sound advice, but able to make their way on their own.

How do you never take an adult's choices away and still have a society? Boundaries, consequences, costs.



When I was a Marine, now that was a long, long, very long, time ago. Back then Marines were mostly volatile, aggressive, young men. 17-21 mostly - I was a sergeant when I was 21. On more than one occasion, I had a Marine get so angry with me that they wanted to discuss the matter physically. I used to say, "I don't recommend it, you'll probably end up in the brig or worse, but if you're feeling froggy - jump." I didn't take away their choice, I simply reminded them that there were consequences. You can decide whether the toad is me, or the other guy.



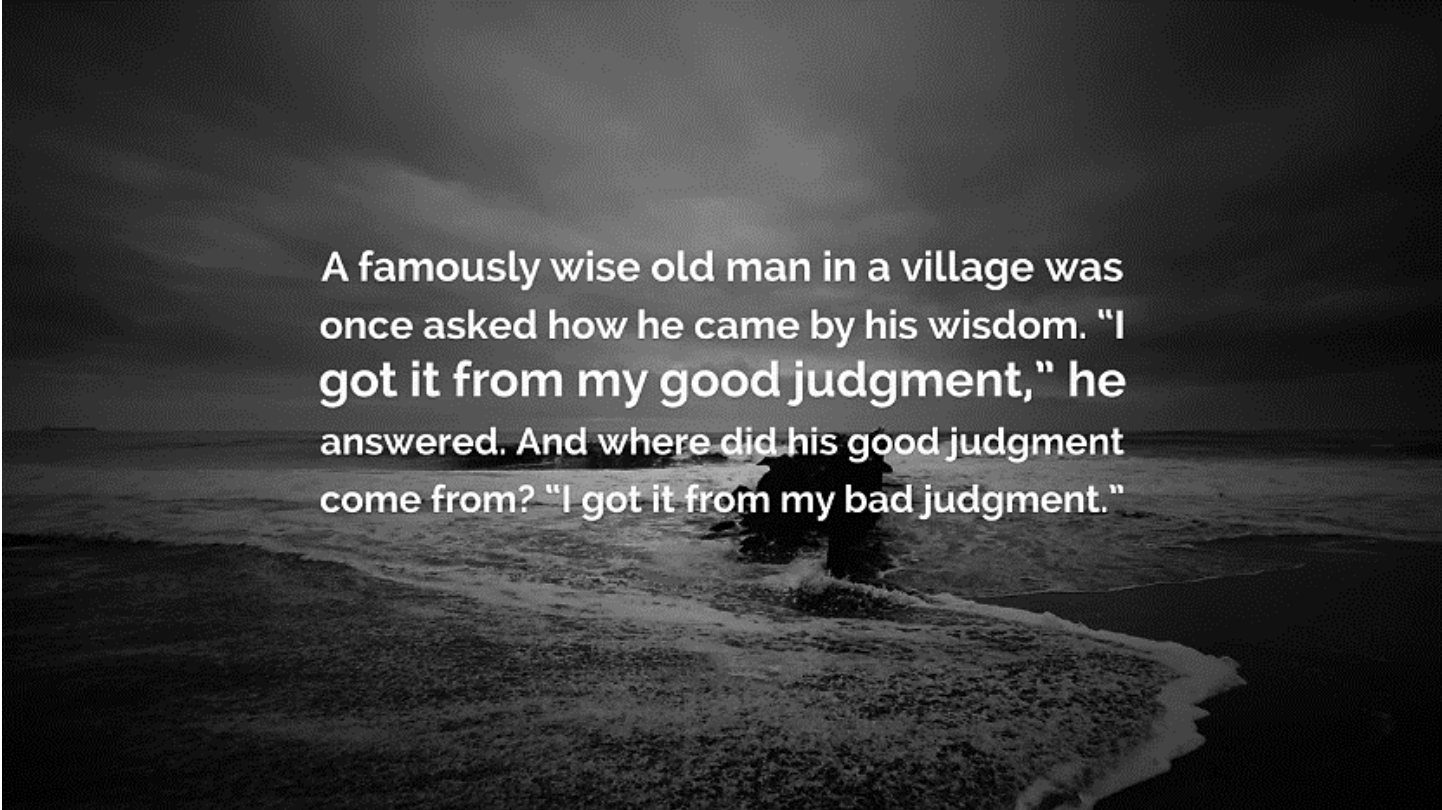
That brings us to the final reason we don't want to command people. It goes hand-in-hand with what we've already said. When we truly love someone, we want them to grow and do what is right on their own so that both the growth and the credit is theirs alone.

When our son was transitioning into manhood - no I'm not saying that he started as a girl - he was a pain. You think the teen years in the home are bad, just wait until the late teens and early twenties. He would go out of his way, not only to avoid asking my advice, but to actively spurn it when offered to the point that he would sometimes do the opposite of what he thought I would

advise. It was all an effort to gain independence. To be his own man. To get out from behind the shadow of oppression that he perceived I cast. Thankfully he's past that now, but it didn't end without cost - it wasn't over with before there were scars.

The point is, allow people to be in the driver's seat of their own life, and then they get the credit for making good decisions, just like they will get the loss for the bad ones, but through it all they will grow and mature. If you love people that's what you do.

In verse 9 Paul said as much and based upon the principle of love, Paul beseeched, begged, pleaded on hands and knees for Philemon to do the right thing. He did all that he could to encourage the right choice, but he never took it from him.



A famously wise old man in a village was once asked how he came by his wisdom. "I got it from my good judgment," he answered. And where did his good judgment come from? "I got it from my bad judgment."

The second item in Paul's parenthesis is that he's a feeble old man - just a sad decrepit dude in chains for Christ Jesus. The way we read that today, we think that Paul is trying to generate sympathy.

It's all wrong - that's not what this means. What Paul was saying was that while he would not command Philemon as an Apostle, he would appeal to him as an Elder. This is another thing we don't get. Back then older people were respected for their experience.

For Paul, his chains were a badge of honor, because he had a completely clear conscience. He had done

nothing wrong except be a stellar Apostle for Christ and that's why he was in jail - again. His point in verse 9 was heed my advice on this as a man who has been extremely familiar with the Lord for a very long time.

Now, halfway through the Letter, Paul will actually make his request. "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus".