

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Forgotten Book Series

LOVE EXTRAVAGANTLY

Philemon

May 28, 2023

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This is our second sermon in the Forgotten Books series. We are working through some of the shorter and less studied books of the New Testament. Last week, we looked at Titus and talked about living what we believe. This week, we are covering Philemon. Today's sermon has 2 points:

- Our private life of faith has public ramifications.
- Christ calls us to love extravagantly.

1-OUR PRIVATE LIFE OF FAITH HAS PUBLIC RAMIFICATIONS

SCRIPTURE: Philemon 1:1-7

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—² also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home: ³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. ⁶ I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. ⁷ Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

EXPLANATION: Although other people are mentioned in this introduction, this letter was primarily written from Paul to a man named Philemon. We do not know exactly where Philemon was located, but we know from the book of Colossians that he had a connection to the church at Colossae. Apphia and Archippus may have been family members of Philemon, or they may have been church leaders.

As Paul often does, he begins his letter with a prayer or blessing for those receiving it. In this prayer, Paul mentions Philemon's love, faith, and partnership. Notice that Philemon's love for other Christians has brought Paul joy and encouragement.

Paul was writing a very personal letter about a very private topic. Yet, he fully expected that it would be read to the entire church. He understood that even private areas of faith affect the body as a whole. Even though the message was written for Philemon, he knew that it would have a practical application for the body of believers.

ILLUSTRATION: If you do not believe that our private lives of faith have public ramifications, check out Acts 5. There you will find the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Money is usually top on the list of things people consider a private matter. Most of you would probably balk if I asked the treasurer to pull out the books and start talking about who gives what to the church. It's a very personal and private area of our faith, right? Yet, the story of Ananias and Sapphira perfectly demonstrates how even personal and private areas of faith impact the corporate body of Christ.

Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property. Let's say that they sold the property for \$100. They decided to donate \$50 to the church. However, they told the church leaders that they were donating the full amount of the sale. No one asked them to sell the property and donate the money to the church. There was no rule forcing them to give the full amount or any amount for that matter. Ananias and Sapphira did not give the money out of the goodness of their heart. They gave the money because they wanted to promote themselves in the eyes of men, and they lied about the amount to make themselves look better.

It was their business to keep or sell property. It was their business to make a donation to the church or not to make a donation. Some might even say the matter of lying was a personal sin and should have been addressed only between them and the apostles to whom they lied. God felt differently. Peter confronted Ananias first, in the presence of other individuals. When he lied again, God struck him dead. Sapphira made the same mistake with the same result.

Acts 5:11 says that, as a result, "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." Why? Because Christians are part of the body of Christ,

and how each individual member lives his or her life of faith impacts the rest of the body.

APPLICATION: We live in a day and age where society promotes doing what is best for you. People are encouraged to have it their way, do what feels good, and live for their own happiness. We do not like it when people step on our toes or invade our space. We value our privacy. In that regard, there is little emphasis on or concern for how our actions affect the people around us.

By all accounts, the issue that Paul was getting ready to discuss was an intensely personal one. Yet, Paul did not write a private letter addressing his concerns or making his request. He wrote a letter to not only Philemon but to the entire church because he knew that Christians are part of a community of faith.

Whether you agree with it or not, as a believer you too are part of a community of faith. In particular, if you are a member of Tusculum Hills, then you are a part of this community of faith as well as the larger body of Christ. Paul, who was separated from these believers by miles and by prison, was still impacted by their deeds. In the same way, how you live or do not live out your faith impacts other Christ followers. If you fail to live a Godly life, lost people see your actions and think poorly of Christians as a whole. If you do not follow through on your commitment to Christ through gifts and service to the church, the church suffers because needs are not met. Your actions either spur others on to good works or they discourage other believers and hinder the work of the Holy Spirit.

- Our private life of faith has public ramifications.

2-CHRIST CALLS US TO LOVE EXTRAVAGANTLY

SCRIPTURE: Philemon 1:8-25

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹ yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—¹⁰ that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. ¹² I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor

you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. ¹⁵ *Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—* ¹⁶ *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 fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.* ¹⁷ *So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.* ¹⁸ *If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.* ¹⁹ *I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.* ²⁰ *I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.* ²¹ *Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.* ²² *And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.* ²³ *Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.* ²⁴ *And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.* ²⁵ *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

EXPLANATION: Philemon, like many people during this time, was a slave owner. Onesimus was a runaway slave who came to know the Lord under Paul's ministry. There are a couple of interesting notes about verse 11. First, the name Onesimus means useful. Therefore, Paul did a little wordplay with the name indicating a change in Onesimus. The man may have not been the best worker prior to his escape, but he had been a blessing to Paul, serving and helping him in the ministry. We read in the book of Colossians that Paul even sent Onesimus to report on his behalf to the church of Colossae. In addition, the Greek word for useful is a compound word *eu* and *Chrestos*. Of course, that second part sounds a lot like *Christos* or the Greek word for Christ. While making this appeal, Paul was also gently reminding Philemon of his commitment to Christ.

While there is much about this story that we do not know, it's obvious that at some point, Onesimus and Paul decided that it was necessary to inform Philemon of Onesimus's whereabouts. Onesimus was by law still the property of Philemon. By this time, however, Paul's relationship with Onesimus was more than just a preacher and a convert. Paul considered him family. As an apostle and prominent figure in the New Testament church, Paul could have used his position of authority to command Philemon to free Onesimus. Instead, Paul chose to appeal to him as a fellow brother in Christ. He gave Philemon the opportunity to be a blessing because he knew that in doing so, Philemon himself would also receive a blessing.

ILLUSTRATION: The Dapper family was struggling to make ends meet. In particular, they were having car trouble. One day Mrs. Dapper heard a knock on the door. A friend stood there with a set of keys. The friend and her husband had a vehicle they were thinking of selling. Instead, God told them to give it to the Dappers. Was that a financial sacrifice? Definitely. But it was love.

It was Thanksgiving evening, and Todd's teenage son wanted to go Black Friday shopping. It had been a long day of celebration, but Todd decided to take his son out to a few stores. On the way home, in the early hours of Friday morning, Todd passed a couple who were broken down on the side of the road. Todd pulled over to help. The vehicle needed a part that could only be purchased at a shop, and it was a holiday, in the middle of the night. The couple was from out of town. Todd took his son home and hunted down a place that would be open in a few hours. It was in another town, at least 30 minutes away. Todd went back, picked up the man, and took him there. When they returned to the broken-down car, Todd helped the man repair it. It was well into Friday morning when Todd finally arrived back home. Did Todd sacrifice time, sleep, and money to help the stranger? Yes, he did, but it was love.

EXPLANATION: Christ died on the cross as an act of love for the world. Can you imagine any act that was more grandiose? It is the ultimate measure of affection, to give one's life for another. It's something that most of us will not be asked to do. Yet, he calls us to love in the same way.

This is the kind of love that Paul wanted Philemon to show to Onesimus. Paul asked Philemon to do an unusual thing for this day and age. Paul wanted Philemon to welcome Onesimus home as a brother in Christ and not as a runaway slave. Unfortunately, we do not get the rest of the story. We do not know for sure what Philemon's response was and what happened to Onesimus. History does record that sometime after this there was a man named Onesimus who became the Bishop of Ephesus. So, it leaves room for our imagination. Is it possible that Philemon freed Onesimus and that Onesimus went on to become a church leader?

Regardless, the story of Onesimus and Philemon still has applications for us today. Paul called for Philemon to love in an extraordinary way. He wanted Philemon to

forgo his legal rights and forgive Onesimus for running away. He wanted Philemon to accept Onesimus as an equal. Such a decision would have come with a personal and financial cost, but Paul knew that it would also come with a blessing.

APPLICATION: Thankfully, we do not own slaves today. However, God still calls us to love in extraordinary ways.

- He calls us to forgive people who have hurt us.
- He calls us to give sacrificially to meet the needs of people we may never meet.
- He calls us to be patient when people mess up.
- He calls us to serve when we have other things to do.
- Sometimes, he calls us to surrender our rights so that we can help or honor someone else.
- He calls us to love the unlovable.

Paul's letter to Philemon was about a private matter, but it was written for the entire church—then and now—because Paul knew that loving is hard. But Jesus called us to not only love but to love like he did.

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 3:16 says:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

- Our private life of faith has public ramifications.
- Christ calls us to love extravagantly.

INVITATION: The book of Philemon is a little book with a big message. The altar is open if you need to spend time praying about your life of faith. If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, I am here, and I would love to tell you more about the most extravagant love this world has ever known.

OFFERTORY PRAYER: Dear God, you tell us to honor you with our gifts. So, we ask that you receive these tithes and offerings as an act of worship. Help us to give with a joyful heart and multiply this offering for your kingdom.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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