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Blessed are the Peacemakers

Philemon

1. Show Your Love (verses 1-7)
2. Show Your Wisdom (verses 8-16)
3. Show Your Commitment (verses 17-25)

All of us are sinful creatures, who look out for our own best interests. Country rises against country to protect their own national interests. Political parties fight against other political parties to seek to secure what legislation they most desire. Employees gossip and complain toward other employees, who are getting what they want to get (a bigger raise, better hours, a promotion). Church members complain toward one another when they believe that they are being neglected by others (Acts 6:1). Husband and wife argue against one another when their needs aren't being met. James said it well, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel." (James 4:1-2). As long as we are sinful creatures, such fightings and quarrels and conflicts will exist among us.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes an astonishing statement concerning conflicts that we have. He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). In other words, "Blessed are those who take two warring parties and bring them together, so that they become friends." Making peace is a challenge. As a pastor, I can tell you from first-hand experience how difficult it is. When two parties are seated before you with a complaint against each other, it is very difficult to reconcile them. It takes love. It takes wisdom. It takes commitment. It takes prayer.

In my experience, I have seen Solomon's wisdom ring absolutely true. In Proverbs 18:19, he wrote, "A brother offended is harder to be won that a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a citadel." Solomon is saying that if you offend somebody, whether that be in some sin you committed against them, or in

something that you said about them, or in neglecting them in some way, it is difficult to win them back. In fact, it is easier to go into a strong, fortified, well-armed city and conquer the city, ruling over all of its inhabitants, than it is to win the one you have offended.

I have found that when you offend another brother, something happens within their heart. There is a hardening that happens that is very, very difficult to penetrate. Solomon describes this as the “bars of a citadel.” When offended, the heart of another becomes as strong and fortified like bars on a castle. As a result, the offended party is resistant to all penetration.

I could give you first-hand illustrations of these things. I think about an instance when I was working in the computer world. I was a fairly new employee, out meeting many new people as I was solving their computer problems. In my interactions with people from different departments, I happened to be helping a certain woman. We were engaging each other in a typical, small-talk, office conversation. I found out something about her family, and then quoted a Bible verse to question the situation a bit. She had no clue about what the verse said or meant. I quickly solved her computer problem and returned to my desk. A few minutes later, I received a call from her again. She asked me if I could return, because she needed more help. When I arrived, she took me into a private room. With perceivable anger in her voice, she said, “I looked up that Bible verse that you quoted. I read it. And I want to tell you that I don’t want you ever to question my family again about these matters!” I offended this woman in the things that I said. I immediately apologized. I told her that I was sorry about being insensitive to her in these matters. For my next five years, I never made any advance in my relationship with this woman. I had offended her and her guard was forever up. It didn't matter how helpful and kind and courteous I was, there was always a wall between us.

I could give you illustrations of these things in my extended family, where I have offended others in what I have said to them. Years later, tensions still exist today between us. I could give you illustrations of these things within the church, where I have sinned against others. In these circumstances, it has been very difficult to win my brothers or sisters back. I have confessed sin. I have sought forgiveness. I have spoken of my love for those offended. I have sought to demonstrate my love for them in tangible ways, by calling them, by praying with them, and by physically helping them. I have seen how difficult it is to be fully restored to one

another. Notice in this verse that Solomon isn't talking about enemies who offend one another. Solomon here is talking about friends, brothers. He's talking about those in community with each other.

It's the simple fact that inter-personal conflicts are difficult to restore once they have been broken down. It doesn't matter how close the original friendship. Once an offense takes place, the breach is difficult to restore. Derek Kidner said it well, "The invisible walls of estrangement, [are] so easy to erect, [and] so hard to demolish." [1] Being a peacemaker is difficult. But, there is great blessing in being a peacemaker (i.e. Matt. 5:9).

As Paul penned the letter to the Philemon, he found himself in the role of being a peacemaker. In a Roman prison cell, Paul met a man named Onesimus, who was in conflict with another believer in Christ, named Philemon. Onesimus had wronged Philemon in a major way. Onesimus was a slave of Philemon. At some point, Onesimus ran away from his master. Presumably, he began a new life in Rome, seeking to be lost among the crowds of people there. At some point, Paul came to meet this man and led him to Christ (Philemon 10). As the story unfolded, Paul began to hear the details of this man's life: how he came from Colossae; how he was a former slave under Philemon and how he had run away.

The tension between Philemon and Onesimus would have been great. A runaway slave could easily have been killed for his crimes during the days of Paul. Philemon, as a slave owner, would have many reasons to treat Onesimus very harshly. If nothing else, to be an example to his other slaves, of how they had better not try to run away. Now, Paul was in a unique situation. Here was Onesimus, seated beside him in prison. He came to know him and love him. Paul also knew Philemon, who, by God's providence, was also converted to Christ through Paul's ministry (Philemon 19). At some point, they had a major conflict between them, enough to stir Onesimus to run away. Paul tries his hand at making peace between these two brothers in the Lord. We can only assume that Paul's attempt was successful. Otherwise, I'm not sure that this letter would surface in our Bibles.

This little book is a great lesson on peacemaking. Do you want to be a peacemaker? Do you want to be a person who has the ability to knit two people in harmony together? It's a noble task. Those who possess this ability, will shall be called "sons of God." Perhaps there are people in your life who you know are

quarrelling. Perhaps your mind can think of some right now. Then you can follow Paul's model and try your hand at peacemaking. Paul gives us three lessons on peacemaking. The first lesson is this:

1. Show Your Love (verses 1-7)

I believe that this is Paul's spirit in the first seven verses.

> Philemon 1-7
> Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; and 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. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

These words are literally packed with expressions of love that Paul has for Philemon.

First of all, Paul says, **I am thankful to God for you** (verse 4). When Paul thinks of Philemon, the first thought that comes into his mind is one of thanks to God for this precious saint. This man was a loved man. In verse 1, Paul referred to him as "our beloved brother." Philemon was a faithful man. In verse 1, Paul describes him as a "fellow worker." He labored in the ministry. Certainly, as a slave owner, he wasn't a pastor of the church. Rather, he was a fellow member in the church who was known for his labor in the Lord. Philemon was willing to allow his home to be used for the church in Colossae, as we can tell from verse 2. This meant a weekly sacrifice of preparing and cleaning and dealing with any messes that took place. When you combine all of these traits together, it's no wonder that Paul was thankful to the Lord for these things. But, Paul didn't merely keep these things to himself. Rather, he let Philemon know of how thankful he was to the Lord for the blessing of Philemon's life.

Paul continues to show his love for Philemon in telling him, **I am praying for you** (verse 4). It's a simple expression of love. But, it demonstrates a bunch. It says

that Philemon's name often dripped from the mouth of Paul into the throne of grace. God heard the pleas of Paul to help and strengthen and support and encourage Philemon in his particular struggles in life.

Continuing on to verse 5, Paul identifies Philemon's reputation among the saints. Philemon had a reputation for being **a man who loved**. He loved the Lord, Jesus Christ. And, through his service in the church, he demonstrated himself to be a man who loved others. He would go the extra mile. He would give the shirt off his back. He would speak kind words of encouragement. He had a genuine interest in others. As people watched his life, they could easily perceive these things. His reputation was getting around. In mentioning this, Paul is identifying in him an evidence of the grace of God in his life.

Verse 5 also indicates that Philemon also had a reputation for being **a man of faith** . Obviously, it means that Philemon professed a faith in Christ. He was a Christian, a saint, one who loved God, a fellow worker. But, should you dig a bit deeper here, you find out that Paul's words indicate something bigger than being a man of faith. He had a reputation of being a man of faith. As people watched his life, the things he said, the things he did, the way in which he behaved, It was clear that Philemon's life was lives as always under the watchful eyes of God. The chatter around town was of how he was a righteous man who trusted the Lord. Paul probably heard about his love and faith through Epaphras, who had come from Colossae to inform Paul of everything taking place (Col. 1:8). In mentioning these things, Paul was bringing to mind the things that God had been working in his life as an encouragement to Philemon.

In verse 6, Paul continues on with his expressions of love to Philemon. Paul wrote, "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." In effect, Paul was saying, "**I desire great things for you**." I want for your faith to grow. I want for your faith to be shared among many. I want for your knowledge to grow. I want for you to experience great blessing in your ministry to Christ. This is a prayer for spiritual prosperity. Oh, not health and wealth, but spiritual fruit that would make an impact upon others. Paul affirms his desire for Philemon's faith to carry on it's work in all its fullness.

Similar types of things continue in verse 7. He begins by telling Philemon of the effect of Philemon's love upon himself! "I have come to have much joy and

comfort in your love" (verse 7). As Philemon demonstrated himself to be a man of love, and as Paul heard about his love toward others, two things happened in the heart of Paul: (1) he became joyful, and (2) he was comforted.

He was joyful because he was able to witness the work of God in this man's soul. His love was the means of helping the saints. His love was the means of encouraging those in the church. His love provided a place for the church to meet. In these things, Paul can do nothing, but rejoice at this man's work! It brought great comfort to his soul knowing that the Lord had planted Philemon in Colossae to serve and minister among the people to help and encourage and edify those in Colossae.

Near the end of verse 7, we see another way in which Paul is expressing his love toward Philemon. "The hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother" (verse 7b). "**God is using you, Philemon!** People come to you depressed and downcast of soul. When you speak to them and care for them and show your interest in them by asking them caring questions, they begin to have hope! They come to see that they are merely enduring 'momentary, light afflictions,' but, there will be a day when they will experience the 'eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison' (2 Cor. 4:17). God is using you, Philemon! I'm so happy that He is and that you are being faithful to the call."

We could take all of these things that Paul communicates with Philemon in the first seven verses and dig much deeper into them, I am sure. But, when you put them all together and see the main point of what Paul is saying, the point is clear: Paul loves the fruit of Philemon's life. Paul is putting forth all of Philemon's good qualities. He has a church in his home (verse 2). He is working hard for the Lord (verse 1) He has a genuine faith in Christ, that is known far and wide (verse 5). His love for others is unquestioned (verse 5). He is helping the souls of many through his ministry (verse 7). Paul prays that it would all abound to the glory of God! (verse 6). In communicating these things, it is an act of love. You build up those whom you love. You identify in them the ways that God has worked in them. It's an encouragement to them. It's a way to show your appreciation for them. This is what Paul is doing for Philemon. He is showing his love for Philemon, by identifying ways in which God is using him to impact people.

When you are attempting to make peace with others, it is a good strategy to build them up first. Once they are convinced of your love for them, then, and only then are you able to deal with the difficulties created in the damaged relationship. And this shouldn't be some false form of flattery, where you are deceitfully attempting

to say good things about them for your ultimate advantage. The Proverbs speak strongly against this. "A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading anet for his steps" (Prov. 29:5). No, this should be a genuine expression of your love for this individual, wanting to build them up in the faith.

This is the first lesson that Paul teaches us on peacemaking: Show Your Love (verses 1-7). The second lesson is ...

2. Show Your Wisdom (verses 8-16)

In verse 8, Paul finally gets to the issue at hand: the conflict between Onesimus and Philemon. It's what the "Therefore" of verse 8 is intending to communicate. It' s indicating a turning point in his letter. Paul is saying, "I have shown my love for you and for everything that you are doing, but I have something for you to consider." And here it is.

Only first, **Paul is very gentle**. He doesn't even get to the issue until two verses later, "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus" (verse 10). He spends two verses softening the blow. A peacemaker needs to be gentle. A peacemaker needs to be patient with his words. After nearly fifteen years of marriage, I can always sense when I am in trouble. When my wife and I have a conflict between us, she often becomes slow with her words. She doesn't ever spit them out in anger towards me. Rather, her words often come more slowly and with much more care. They are couched with excess verbiage to help soften the blow.

This is what Paul is doing. By using the word, "Therefore," Philemon knows that Paul is beginning to get to the point of things. But, they don't come for two more verses. On another occasion, Paul had counseled those seeking to restore those with difficulties, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." Paul is being very gentle here.

In verse 8, he began to get to his point by saying, "Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, yet for love's sake **I rather appeal** to you." In other words, Paul is saying, "I have authority, but I'm choosing the path of wisdom." Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, sent from God, Himself. Paul had a face-to-face encounter with the risen Lord. As a writer of Scripture, he spoke for God. Certainly, Paul could have told Philemon, "I see the situation here of conflict between you and Philemon. I know full well that he is a runaway slave and deserving of punishment (if not death). I know that by letting him go free, you will incur some difficulties, especially as the other slaves see how

lenient you are. Perhaps they will run away as well, hoping for forgiveness if they are caught." And yet, I am telling you what you have to do. You have to accept him and forgive him of all of his transgressions against you. Listen to me! Obey me! I am the mighty, apostle Paul!" Instead, Paul simply "appealed to" Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. It wasn't a command. It was a request.

Notice, that it isn't for any lack of power or authority or hesitation or doubt that Paul chose not to exert his authority, but instead chose the path of love. He said that he had "enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper" (verse 8). Rather, it's because he was compelled by love to see Philemon willingly submit himself to what is right. You can see that in verse 14, where Paul explicitly says that he wants Philemon to comply to Paul's request willingly. He wants Philemon to be put in a situation where he can say, "Of my own accord, I forgave Onesimus. I wasn't forced to forgive him. Paul didn't strong-arm me in any way. I forgave him, because I wanted to forgive him."

This is a wise path for peacemakers to take. Peace comes when two parties have come together willingly. There is a difference between a "peace" and a "truce." Think about two countries at war. A cease-fire isn't peace. To be sure, no guns are shot, but the animosity still runs high. Without constraint from the outside, the fighting would continue on. But, the truce compels them not to fire their weapons. When genuine peace is achieved, things are different. You can travel between the two countries. Open trade is a possibility. There is no need for a heavy build-up of arms along the border. The same is true in relationships. When there is peace among the brethren, there is openness, honesty, love, trust, and willingness.

When there is truce among the brethren, there is a peace on the outside. But, there is no openness on the inside. Nor is there trust. Nor is their willingness. Paul was seeking peace, not an external constraint to make all appear to be right. This is why Paul chose to appeal, rather than command. In appealing, Paul was seeking the genuine peace that should exist among the brethren. With peace comes unity. When unity comes, happiness comes. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing--life forever" (Psalm 133). This is great blesing.

At the end of verse 9, Paul appeals to who he is. He says, "I appeal to you--since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus." With

these words, Paul is appealing to his own reputation, not in high-standing words of authority, but rather in words that demonstrate his weakness. He said, “I’m an old man, without the strength of my youth.” He said, “I’m in prison, without any ability of myself to get outside these walls.” He said, “I’m appealing to you out of my weakness, not out of my strength. Please grant the request of this old man in prison."

In verse 10, we finally see Onesimus come up in the conversation. He is named as the object of Paul’s letter. Verse 10, “I appeal to you for my child Onesimus.” And then, the wisdom of Paul’s appeal continues to flow fully and freely. Whereas the first 7 verses the focus was upon all of the great things that the Lord had done through the life of Philemon, these seven verses (from verses 10-16) call our attention upon the great things that the Lord had done in the life of Onesimus. And, as Onesimus has been such a faithful servant, it is only fitting to forgive him and restore him.

As we run through these things, you can see Paul’s wisdom in counseling Philemon to receiving him back with kind arms. At the end of verse 10, we find out that **Onesimus is a repentant man**, “Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment.” As a runaway slave, he was without Christ. But, he found Christ when Paul was able to communicate with him the glories of the gospel. We don’t know the details about this man, but we do know what the Bible says about being born again. When Onesimus confessed his sin to a holy God and pleaded mercy at the foot of the cross, his life was forever changed. He was born again. He was born from above. Paul uses the term, “begotten,” which is used of children who are born. This was not a physical birth that Paul was talking about. It was a spiritual birth that Paul was talking about.

Onesimus experienced a change in his life, that can only be described by a super-natural work of the Spirit of God upon his own soul. In fact, should you read between the lines only a little bit, you will quickly realize that this new birth of Onesimus is what caused this letter to be written in the first place. One of his sins was running away from his master. He was sorry about it. He knew that it was wrong. He was seeking to make it right. But, returning without a letter might mean his death. And so, Paul steps in as the peacemaker between Philemon and Onesimus.

Paul’s commendation of Onesimus continues in verse 11, “[Onesimus] formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.” As this point, Paul is using a play on words. The name, “Onesimus” comes from a Greek word which

means, “a profit.” So, “Onesimus” means, “profitable.” When Onesimus ran away, he was not profitable for you. Now, **Onesimus is profitable for you**. As a fellow believer in Christ, the useless one has become useful. And so, there is wisdom in receiving him back again.

In verse 12, Paul expresses his**own affection for Onesimus**, “I have sent him back to you in person, that is sending my very heart.” When Onesimus went back to Philemon, it was as if his very heart was being ripped away from him. Many women face this today, when their military husband is called of to a foreign country in the life of duty. It is as if their hearts heave left them. Their thoughts and their minds and their concerns are focused on their husband’s well-being. Their love has left them. So also with Paul. His love had left him and gone back to Colossae to make things right. And so, if nothing else than for Paul’s sake, Philemon could forgive him and send him back to Paul. Paul would have loved that.

In verse 13, Paul wrote, “Whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel.” Not only is Onesimus useful to Philemon, he was also **useful to Paul**. In fact, Paul wanted to keep him around but, that’s not the wise thing to do. Wisdom always does the right thing. And in this case, the right thing was for Onesimus to go back to Philemon and see the relationship restored. There is great wisdom in the apostle Paul’s words.

The thought continues in verse 14, “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.” In effect, Paul is saying, “**I desire your willing support** with Onesimus.” He’s a changed man. He has embraced Christ. He has turned from his sin. He has a great desire to do what is right, in reconciling with you. He is useful for me in kingdom work. But, I don’t want to force the issue. I don’t want to pressure you in any way to think the way that I think. I want for you to come to your own conclusions on these matters. I hope that you agree: he is useful to me and I would love to use him. But, I'm not going to do so without your agreement in these matters.”

The wisdom here is abundant. It is far better to convince someone to see the issue for themselves, rather than to do what your convictions think is right and say, “trust me in this.” One action will bring peace and harmony and support. The other

action will bring tension and discord and resistance. Paul didn't want to force any issues here. Rather, he wanted Philemon to come on board with him and support him with regards to Onesimus.

In verses 15 and 16, Paul continues to stack more and more reasons upon this whole situation. In the sovereign purpose of God, **it may actually turn out for the better**. Paul writes, "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." No doubt, it was a sinful thing for Onesimus to run away. But, it may be the very thing that will bring great blessing to Philemon. Because now, as he comes back, he comes back changed for the better! He is the new and improve and long-lasting Onesimus. He is new, because he comes back as "a beloved brother" (verse 16). He is improved, because he comes back as "more than a slave" (verse 16). He is long-lasting, because he comes back "forever" to be with you (verse 15).

It's like Onesimus went out from Philemon as an old, rusty, antique car, but came back completely refurbished, ready to last another 40 years. The Lord had done great things in his life. He will be a blessing to Philemon. When it comes to being a faithful slave, he isn't going to serve with external service only. He isn't going to be a man-pleaser. He is going to be one who does his work heartily, as for the Lord, rather than for men (Col. 3:22-23). In this way, all will turn out better than before!

Do you want to be a peacemaker? Show your wisdom (verses 8-16). This is what Paul was doing. He was listing reason after reason after reason of why Philemon should receive Onesimus back again. Paul had authority, but he chose not to use it. Paul had a reputation as an old man and prisoner for the gospel, and was appealing to him from a faithful, persecuted saint. In making his appeal, Paul was very careful and gentle in his wording. Onesimus has repented of his sin! Onesimus is now a useful vessel! Paul loved Onesimus. Onesimus is helpful to Paul. Paul wanted Philemon's consent and full agreement. These entire trying circumstances may just turn out for the best!

Now, if ever you are playing the role of peacemaker, your reasons for reconciling the relationship may well be quite different. The details are certainly going to be different. You need to carefully think about the things that you will present to the parties involved. Your role is to demonstrate the wisdom of your thinking. Bring Scripture into the equation. Bring logic into the discussion. Make known your

affections and desires. Don't exert your authority. Be gentle. You are going to need it all to win the strong city. And now, our last point this morning:

3. Show Your Commitment (verses 17-25)

When seeking to reconcile two parties together, it's not enough to stand on the outside and observe. You should to put yourself into the middle of things and help the process along. This is what Paul does in verses 17-25. These verses are packed with expressions of Paul's commitment to be engaged in the entire event. Paul isn' t a cold third-party bystander in this whole process. No, he is willing to do whatever it takes to get this reconciliation thing done. He puts himself right in the middle of the conflict, even putting himself at great risk.

Look at verse 17 "If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me." Paul was saying, "Philemon, I'm a partner in ministry with you. I'm committed to you. I'm committed to Onesimus. I'm so committed to Onesimus that I want you to consider him to be one of us. In receiving Onesimus, you are receiving me. So, treat **him like you would treat me**." Paul wasn't on the outside looking in. He wanted Philemon to consider Paul as coming in and through Onesimus.

In verse 18, Paul is committed to stepping into the situation himself. He said, "If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account." Paul was **willing to pay any financial loss** that Philemon experienced. If Onesimus stole anything, Paul was willing to repay it himself. If Onesimus caused a stall in the business for any reason, Paul was willing to repay Philemon. If he was a difficult slave to replace and there were any training costs associated with his loss, Paul was willing to repay. If Philemon occurred any legal fees, Paul was willing to repay. He wanted to remove all financial obstacles that might get in the way of this reconciliation.

Verse 19 continues the theme, but with a twist, "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)." Paul was very willing to repay. Paul He even took out his pen and wrote the note himself, effectually signing his name to the agreement. The twist in this whole matter is that Paul reminds Philemon of how he was converted through the ministry of the apostle Paul. Were the truth to be known, there was nothing that Onesimus would owe that would ever match up to what Philemon owed Paul. Onesimus may have cost Philemon financially, but Paul's work in Philemon's life made an impact for eternity. Paul was committed to this reconciliation. He was calling Philemon to be committed as well.

Verse 20 indicates how **emotionally involved** Paul was to this whole thing. He wrote, “Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.” Paul’s heart was given over to this thing. He was hoping to be encouraged in his spirit as he heard how things took place. Paul was going to be affected by how this thing turned out. Oh, how he wanted his heart to be encouraged. There is a connection in our hearts when we see the Lord work in the lives of other people. In his third epistle, John wrote, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth” (3 John 4). As Onesimus and Philemon would be reconciled to each other, it would certainly give Paul encouragement in his soul.

Verse 21 demonstrates how much **Paul believed in Philemon**, “Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.” Paul didn’t believe even for one moment that this was going to be a futile exercise. He was fully confident in Philemon’s response. He was fully confident that Philemon would go above and beyond the call of duty in these matters. He was so confident, that he was planning on coming and seeing him in Colossae in the near future, “At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you” (verse 22). He wanted to go and be among these reconciled believers and enjoy the blessing of unity.

Finally, he closes the letter with a quick greeting from his fellow friends with him in Rome, “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (verses 23-25). By mentioning these people (as well as those in verses 1-2), Paul was commiting other people to join him as witnesses to the process. I’m sure that the were certainly praying for the situation, especially Epaphras. Paul gave testimony of his great heart to pray in Colossians 4:12-13. He was “always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. He has a deep concern for you” (Col. 4:12-13).

Do you want to be a peacemaker?

1. Show Your Love (verses 1-7)
2. Show Your Wisdom (verses 8-16)
3. Show Your Commitment (verses 17-25)

It all sounds so easy, but, it’s very difficult. As a pastor, on several occasions, I have sat as a mediator between two parties in the role of being a peacemaker. The

task has seemed very difficult and insurmountable to me. I have lost sleep over these issue. I have lost weight over these issues. Solomon's illustration of trying to win a strong city is very appropriate.

These situations are very difficult. In some ways, it is more difficult trying to mediate the parties than it is being one of the parties involved in the conflict. When you are in the conflict, you can control half of the outcome. You can confess sin. You can apologize. You can express love with your words. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18). But, when you are seeking to mediate between two people, it's very difficult, because you can't control either side of the equation.

One side can be willing and the other side is obstinate. David and Saul is a great example of this. Though David had many opportunities to kill Saul and become King, he never did so. Rather, he was loyal to the Lord's anointed. At one point, Saul brought 3,000 men against David to find him in the wilderness and kill him. But David, and his handful of men were hiding in the caves. In the providence of God, Saul came into the cave where David was hiding! His friends urged him to kill him. It was a great opportunity! But David said, "Far be it from me to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD's anointed" (1 Sam. 24:6). But Saul was never willing to reconcile. A few chapters later, we find Saul on a hunt to kill David again. It takes two parties to reconcile. And that's why it is so hard to be a peacemaker.

Think a moment with me about the Prodigal Son. The prodigal son demanded his portion of the inheritance and ran away to a far country. In so doing, he greatly dishonored his father. He wasted tremendous financial resources. There are some parallels here in real life with Onesimus and Philemon. And yet, he came to his senses in a foreign land and returned, willing to be reconciled. When he came back to his father as a repentant man, his father could have easily rejected him, "My son, you have dishonored me. You have squandered my hard-earned wealth. You have lived sinfully. You have no right to be my son. I will never accept you back into my house. But, the good news is that the Father was willing to receive him, forgiving him all of the wrongs that he had done. There was reconciliation. There was peace. there was unity.

But, the story of the prodigal son isn't a story about two people who were estranged from each other, finally making their peace. On the contrary, it's a story of God's willingness to reconcile with straying people. Even if the transgressions are great (i.e. squandering all of your wealth, living sinfully for years, and being

interested only in yourself). Should you repent from your sins and return to God, you will find Him willing to reconcile you through the blood of HIs Son, Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate peacemaker. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 4, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www. rockvalleybiblechurch. org.

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[1] Derek Kidner, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Volume 15, Proverbs, p. 130.