

When the Gospel Comes Home

Philemon

Bob Pershe



Background

Homecomings are often cause for celebration – a reunion with a family member or friend who you haven’t seen in a long time. Other times the person who is returning may be the last person you were expecting or wanting to see, as was likely the case with the person delivering the letter Paul had written to Philemon. Sometimes it’s not just an unwanted person, but it’s the full impact of the gospel that’s knocking at the door.

Sermon Text: Philemon

¹ 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.

⁸ 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.

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- a. What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- b. What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?
- c. What stands out to you the most from this sermon?

2. Sunday questions (pick 3?)

- a. What is your take-away after the facility update? Explain.
- b. Do you have anyone in your life who was once “*useless*,” but is now “*useful*” to you (v 11)? Explain how that happened.
- c. Bob spent some time explaining why Paul does not condemn slavery outright. How would you respond to someone who questioned you on why the Bible does not condemn slavery outright?
- d. Is there a broken relationship in your life in which you have the power to bring about reconciliation – or at least be the one to “open the door” to reconciliation? Here are a few more searching questions:
 - “Are you convinced that Jesus died for that other person?” Why or why not?
 - Secondly, if others know us by our love (John 13:35), and Paul appeals to us “*on the basis of love*” (v 9), will love be a driving force in your life? Why or why not?
- e. The act of communion brings home the theme of reconciliation. As Bob explained, Scripture affirms that “reconciliation is costly, but *you* are infinitely worth it.” Do these words encourage you to open that door to that other person? Why or why not?