

# Peace for Feuding Families

## Philemon (Part 3)

- Introduction
  - What a morning worth celebrating!
  - Are you feeling filled already?
  - Between our singing, our praying, our baptisms (2<sup>nd</sup> service)
  - We have so much to rejoice in as God's people
  - And if that were not enough, we now have the privilege to hear from God Himself as we turn our attention to His written word
    - Open to Philemon
    - Bibles made available if needed
  - Reminder of context & review of what we have studied so far
  - Paul's role to Philemon, Philemon's to Onesimus, Onesimus to Paul
  - Paul sending Onesimus back to be restored as a brother in Christ
    - Week 1: Onesimus' perspective
    - Week 2: Philemon's perspective
    - Today: Paul's perspective
      - Stand, read, pray

- From the moment sin entered the world, so did excuses
  - Familiar with those in Genesis 3
    - Adam & Eve
  - But in the very next chapter we are met with one of the most prevalent excuses in human history
  - When God confronts Cain on the whereabouts of his brother Abel (who he had killed), Cain's response was what?
    - Am I my brother's keeper?
  - Such a question stands front and center as we think about the nature of the church even today
  - Do we have a responsibility for the spiritual well-being of those in the family of God?
  - While we certainly do not deny the importance of personal responsibility, we do acknowledge that the teaching of the NT, even here in Philemon, speak to our collective role in spiritual growth
  - In particular, maintaining peace and unity in God's family, b/c...

**MP:** As those who have been forgiven, we will passionately fight for unity in God's family.

- Want to look at this letter one final time through the perspective of Paul, who stands in the role of mediator between two friends, Philemon and Onesimus, who need reconciling
  - What can we learn today about being a faithful member who fights for peace in God's family?
- **Prop:** Eight principles that guide peacemaking in God's family.
  - If you are a Christian, God expects you to be involved in the work of peacemaking in the local church
  - Of course, that means if you are a Christian, God has the expectation that you join yourself to the life and ministry of a local church body as a formally recognized member (part.)
  - So what are these peacemaking principles?

# 1. **Peacemaking is a collective Christian responsibility (1-3, 23-24)**

- Talked about how postcard centers on three primary characters (recap them)
  - Vv.1-2, 23-34 mention 8 others
  - Reminds us that Christianity is never just about your personal relationship with God
    - Danger of adopting the language of a “personal” relationship
    - God saved us into a “familial” relationship, not just personal
  - When we become Christians, we don’t become lone rangers
  - Rather, we are welcomed into a family (fellowship, community)
  - As such, we are responsible for the well-being of those in our family
  - In fact, nearly 60 commands in the NT involving “one another”
    - Pray, forgive, encourage, etc.
  - Level of accountability to other Christians increases like a funnel
  - All Christians, geographic region, local church, life group

- Paul is making Philemon aware that he (and Onesimus) are not in this alone; there is a whole community who is surrounding them in love
  - As Christians, we strive for peace among our brothers & sisters

## 2. Peacemaking requires the right heart attitudes (4-10)

- Peacemaking is a sensitive subject
  - Have to approach it with the right attitude if you want it to be received
  - Balance between those attitudes
    - Like baking ingredients: too much of one can have a drastic and even catastrophic impact on the intended product (vs. cooking)
  - Paul is masterful in how he does it
  - What attitudes does he balance?
  - First attitude: love (4-7)
  - Builds him up in the faith rather than just coming at him w/command
  - Shows Philemon he cares about him (prayer) and encourages his relationship w/ God & the church
  - Second attitude: humility (9)
    - How does Paul refer to himself?
  - Sees himself as nothing
  - Does not seek to elevate position
  - Third attitude: boldness (8 & 10)
  - Gets to the heart of the matter; says exactly what he wants to happen

- Can you see how emphasizing one of these attitudes over the others could be problematic?
- Emphasize love w/o boldness or boldness w/o humility
- Balance of appropriate heart attitudes is important for bringing about peace in God's family

### 3. Peacemaking can be immensely personal (10-12)

- Why do we often feel so broken when two Christians friends are in conflict?
  - Is it b/c we don't care enough?
  - No, its b/c we care deeply for them
  - Such is the case w/Paul towards both Philemon and Onesimus
  - We already saw his love for Philemon in vv.4-7, but look at how he refers to Onesimus in 10 & 12
    - My spiritual child; my heart
  - Do you have any friends like that?
    - Can say w/everything in your being "I love them"
    - Guys, I know you are afraid to use this type of language, after all you are men, right?
    - But in today's culture, I think we have been taught to think wrongly about our friendships (esp. guys)
  - If you are not worried about unity among God's people, then I worry that you are lacking the depth of community God desires for your life

- Peacemaking can be immensely personal, since our hearts are so often deeply knit with the friend experiencing brokenness
- But in many ways, that's the way it should be; again, I would be concerned if you weren't broken over unrest in God's family
- Probably a concerning sign if you are calloused or indifferent towards Christian friends who are going through such situations ("that's their business")
- A true peacemaker mentality says, "in love and humility, I want to help them out." "I will run towards them rather than run away from them."

#### 4. Peacemaking is prepared to do the hard work (13-16)

- Paul's earnest desire is to keep Onesimus with him in Rome
  - But wanted Philemon's consent and even Philemon's blessing first
  - Did he need it? Probably not. Was it the right thing to do? Probably so.
  - Did it make it easy? Absolutely not.
  - No, in fact he knew it would be hard and it might even be messy
  - But Paul set aside his personal desire, b/c he believed something bigger & better was possible
    - Bigger & better game
    - Trading something good for something even better
  - How could Onesimus benefit Philemon more than Paul? By having him back as brother in Christ
  - V.16 – God more glorified in this
  - Why is it that we often shy away from being a peacemaker?
  - Often times it b/c of excuses rooted in pride or ease

- Many times we avoid helping maintain peace b/c of some personal benefit we could get
- Gain stronger ally w/one person if reconciliation doesn't happen
- Sometimes its simply easier and less stress to stand on the sidelines
- Peacemaking is hard work, after all, we just said it is immensely personal and later we will see how it often proves costly
- Selfishly, we don't want the mess
  - Peacemaking is messy; just ask any of our biblical counselors or elders
- But if we have these personal relationships, we will be willing to engage the mess for God's glory
- We will be willing to do the right thing, even when it is the hard thing

## 5. Peacemaking calls attention to our common salvation (vv.17)

- V.17 where Paul makes his official request to Philemon for Onesimus
  - Paul trying to bring all these parties (himself, Philemon, & Onesimus) together for peace & unity
  - So how does he try to do this?
  - Reminds them of common salvation
  - Remember fancy word for partner in v.17 (koinonia = fellowship)
  - Paul is saying, if you consider me koinonia, consider him koinonia
  - Receive him as you would me
    - Fellowship = united in something
    - LOTR: Fellowship of the Ring
      - What was their fellowship in?
      - All kinds of different people (dwarfs, elves, hobbits, men, wizards) brought together for common cause (destroy ring)
  - Peacemaking always calls attention to our common salvation

- After all, it was Jesus' death that united us and brought us peace w/God
- **Rom. 5:1-11** – though we were enemies, God went to such great lengths to make peace w/us
- Peacemaking calls all parties to remember that even though we may not have the same blood that runs through us, we all have the same blood that purchased us
- And if God was willing to go to such great lengths to bring us to peace with Him, how much more should we strive to bring about peace with one another

## 6. Peacemaking can often prove costly (18-20)

- Let me be very clear, helping make peace among Christians is not easy
  - It is hard work and it often proves very costly to the mediator
  - Paul: I will pay Onesimus' debts
  - But it proved costly to Paul in other ways – how do you think?
    - Time: taking the time to write this letter, think about these matters
    - Emotion: postcard shows that this has impacted Paul deeply
  - We see this w/peacemaking today: biblical counseling and/or eldering
    - Takes time, consumes emotion, and even impacts relationships
    - Sometimes, those relationships don't get mended, and that is often the hardest part of it all
    - But does that mean we shouldn't do it? No – if it was messy for God to bring about peace, then it will be for us as well

- While here, worth a moment to look at a phrase in v.19 we haven't said much about so far in our study
  - "To say nothing of your owing me"
  - On surface, this sounds like a bold statement & almost manipulative
  - Sounds like an underhanded way of saying "even though I'll pay it back, let's not forget that you owe me"
  - Tricky to know full extent of what Paul is saying here, but he is not wrong to say Philemon is very much in debt to Paul, considering Paul's work in leading him to Christ
  - Very much is a call for Philemon to remember the value of what it meant to become a Christian (put yourself in Onesimus' shoes)
  - Paul's acknowledging all the ways debts exist among God's people
  - Yet, Paul's message is conveying something bigger: let's stop focusing on the debts we owe one another and, rather, start focusing on the grace we have each been given by God

## 7. Peacemaking anticipates seeing a glorious outcome (22)

- V.22 is a strange verse: Paul requests a guest room be prepared for him
  - First, b/c he has not been to Colossae (didn't start the church)
    - Designated 'guest room' in our home when we bought it
  - Second, Paul is in prison, his release is uncertain, and the direction would be inconvenient and out of the way
  - So why the request?
  - Some see this as Paul's way of saying he will be checking in on Philemon to see how he responded
  - A possible form of genuine Christian accountability; believe that to be true to some degree
  - But even more than that, I think Paul is looking forward to celebrating together with them!
  - This is the message of hope before anything has officially taken place

- Paul, without trying to get ahead of himself, is already getting excited about the prospect of seeing two brothers in Christ being reconciled to one another and living in unity
- Of having their new found spiritual relationship transcend the relational boundaries that once separated them from one another
- He anticipates a beautiful outcome or, as we like to say in our fairy tale culture, a happy ending
- Why? Why does Paul have such hope? How is he able to communicate such confidence?
- B/c...

## 8. Peacemaking trusts in the power of the gospel (21)

- Backtrack to v.21 b/c I think this is an appropriate final point to consider
  - After reading this postcard dozens of times over the last few weeks, I can't help but think how awkward it would be if Philemon didn't respond well to Onesimus' return
  - But notice that Paul never thinks that way
  - I appreciate what Paul says here
  - He is "confident" of Philemon's obedience & even beyond that
  - Why do you think that is? B/c he believes so strongly in Philemon?
  - No, believe his confidence rests in the object of Philemon's faith: Christ
    - Trusts in the power of the gospel
    - God's Spirit has the power to do what we ourselves cannot do
    - It is the perfect bond of unity that brings peace to feuding families, esp. in situations where all hope seems lost

- The gospel reminds us that as those who have been forgiven much, we are now able to forgive much
  - If we believe the gospel is powerful enough to save sinners like us, then we better believe it is powerful enough to bring about reconciliation between brothers & sisters in Christ

**App:** Be eager to maintain unity among God's people (Eph. 4:3)

- For many of you, I think you believe in the importance of peace & unity
  - But for most of you, I think there is a disconnect that recognizes your responsibility in these matters
  - But when Paul writes to the Ephesians, he is not writing to just their elders, leaders, or formally certified biblical counselors
  - He is writing to the whole church
  - Encourages them to have the right heart attitudes of humility, gentleness, patience, and love
  - And that those very heart attitudes would drive our passion to eagerly maintain the unity of God's family
  - You will passionately fight for what you believe is important to you
    - True of job, school, family, etc.
  - But will you passionately fight for what you know is important to God?
  - A mediator like Paul...we'd all be blessed to have a friend like that

- Benediction
  - Segway off closing song
  - Church, it has been my great desire these past weeks to show you the joy of belonging to God's family
  - I trust that it has been an encouragement to you and has even challenged you to consider your role in the local church body
  - That said, for some of you, you might still be wondering what does it really mean to belong to the body of Christ? What does it mean to be forgiven by God?
  - Second service: heard Courtney talk about her relationship with God and want to know more about that?
  - If that's you, you are asking some great questions we want to help answer (invitation to discuss)
  - Next week, enter back into the tribulation (academically not literally) as we resume our study in Matthew's gospel
    - Ephesians 6:23-24 (themes of grace, peace, and love)