

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 11 April 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Communication of Your Faith

Philemon 1-7

In the year A.D. 63, the Apostle Paul arrived in the city of Rome under military escort, as a prisoner of Rome. His alleged “crime” was raising sedition among the Jews in the Temple; but his real “crime” was preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because Paul was a Roman citizen, he was sentenced to house arrest; and he was placed in queue to stand before Emperor Nero for trial.

Now, how did Paul spend his time in prison? Did he sit around moaning and complaining about the injustices that were being done to him? No, he didn’t. Although Paul was chained to royal guards night and day, he had the unique privilege of having visitors to the house any time he wished; and he made the most of this liberty. Paul’s missionary co-workers were constantly in and out of his house. His house was “Gospel Central”! Paul was constantly sending and delivering messages, and sending food and clothing to the poor. In no time, Paul had a small church gathering, right there in his house. The people weren’t afraid of Paul’s guards, because their only duty was to guard Paul. Soon, servants in Nero’s own household were receiving Christ as Saviour through Paul’s outreach!

However, evangelism wasn’t Paul’s only focus during this time. Paul was also deeply concerned with the welfare of the churches that he had already planted. During his house arrest, Paul wrote letters to several churches. One of these divinely-inspired letters was the letter to the **church of Ephesus**. (Ephesus was located in Asia Minor, in what is now modern-day Turkey.) Paul sent this letter by the hand of a missionary co-worker named **Tychicus**.

Read Ephesians 6:21-22.

Now, about the same time that Paul wrote his letter to the church of Ephesus, he also wrote a letter to the **church of Colossi**. The city of Colossi was also located in Asia Minor, in the same region as Ephesus. Since these churches were in the same area, Paul sent *both* these letters by the hand of Tychicus. In fact, Paul commissioned Tychicus to read these letters in *other* local churches, as well.

Read Colossians 4:7-16.

Now, in the church in Colossi there was a man named **Philemon**, whom Paul had led to Christ years earlier. It had been many years since Paul had seen his old friend; but now, Paul was writing to him about an important matter that had recently arisen. It is this letter (the **Epistle to Philemon**) that we will be studying over the next few weeks. Just like the letters to the churches of **Colossi** and **Ephesus**, this letter to Philemon was written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

This letter is a short one; however, it is packed with rich doctrinal truths about salvation, and about practical Christian living. This letter is also very personal. In this letter, Paul was making an urgent

request to his friend Philemon, in regard to a slave of his named Onesimus. You see, Philemon's slave Onesimus had, sometime prior to this, stolen from him, and run away to Rome. However, while Onesimus was in Rome, God caused him to cross paths with the Apostle Paul. We don't know exactly how Onesimus came into contact with Paul. (Perhaps Paul's co-workers had seen that Onesimus was in need, and had provided him with food or clothing.) However, what we do know is that Paul led Onesimus to the Lord. Now that Onesimus was a Christian, he knew that he needed to make things right with his master. Thus, Onesimus was now travelling back to Colossi, along with Paul's co-worker Tychicus, so that he could repay Philemon for what he had stolen, and submit himself to him again.

Now, perhaps you are thinking, "O.K., Pastor, this is interesting history; but what can we really learn from a short, personal letter from Paul to Philemon?" Well, as you will see, there is *much* we can learn! You see, the Bible is filled with many different people who, in one way or another, are **types** of Jesus Christ. **Moses** was rejected by his brethren at first, but later saved them from the bondage of Egypt. In this, he was a type of Christ. How so? Because just as Moses was rejected by his brethren, and later saved them, so Christ was rejected by own people, but will one day forgive them, and save them, and deliver them from their enemies. **Abraham** willingly offered his only son **Isaac** on the altar; and Isaac willingly got up on the altar. In this, Abraham is a picture of God the Father, who willingly gave up His Son to die for us; and Isaac is a picture of Christ, who willingly went to the cross. I could give dozens more examples; but the types that we will be examining in the next few weeks are **Philemon** and **Paul**. In this letter, Philemon is a type of God the Father; and Paul is a type of God the Son.

Now, before we get into these pictures and types, we need to learn a few things about the character of Paul and Philemon. The title of this message is *The Communication of Your Faith*.

Read Philemon 1-7.

I. Paul's character (vv. 1-3)

The very first thing that stands out in this letter is the way that Paul identifies himself in his greeting to Philemon. He says, "**Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.**" Stop and think about that for a moment. Paul could have identified himself as an "Apostle of Jesus Christ," as he often did in his letters to the churches; and he certainly had the right to assert his apostolic authority. However, on this occasion, he didn't identify himself as an Apostle. Instead, he identified himself as a prisoner! Not only that, but he identified himself as a prisoner of *Jesus Christ*!

Not once do you hear tones of bitterness from Paul. Instead of being bitter, Paul *embraced* his status as a prisoner. Paul didn't think of himself as a man whose humanity was being degraded by an unjust government. In fact, he didn't even seem to think of himself as a prisoner of *man*. Paul never identified himself as "Paul, a prisoner of Caesar" or "Paul, a prisoner of Rome." He considered himself to be the prisoner of his *Lord*, not of the government. He reckoned himself as one who was exactly where *the Lord* wanted him to be! God had many purposes for Paul during His imprisonment; and one of those purposes was that he might cross paths with a thief named Onesimus, and lead him to the Lord.

Paul's introduction of himself as "*Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ,*" tells us much about Paul's character. Paul totally identified himself with his risen Lord; and he was glad to partake of the "*fellowship of his sufferings.*"

Read Philippians 3:10.

Would you count it an honour to be a "*prisoner of the Jesus Christ*"? This isn't a mere hypothetical question: this is a serious question, which every child of God needs to ask himself. In fact, if there were ever a time for us to do this self-examination, it is now. The signs of the times are clear: *real* persecution of Bible-believing Christians is right at the door. The question is not "if" we will undergo persecution: the question is "when." (In fact, it is already beginning.) Are you ready to partake of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings? Are you ready to be bound, and to be taken "where you would not," as Jesus told Peter would happen to him? Are you ready to follow the example of Christ Himself? Remember, we are not above our Lord. Christ Himself was bound, and taken away as a prisoner; yet, the Father was pleased to allow His Son to undergo this disgrace. Would you count it God's will—and a great honour—if such a thing were to happen to you someday?

Read Isaiah 50:5-7 and 53:7-8.

Probably one of the most shameful things that a person can experience is to be bound, carried away as a criminal, and put in prison. We often see pictures in the news of prisoners holding bags or coats over their faces as they are being carried away in handcuffs, because they are ashamed to show their faces. Usually, the people whom we see covering their faces deserve the shame they are experiencing, because they have committed a real crime. Yet, Christ was without any moral blemish. He had done no crime. He didn't deserve *any* of the injustice that He was experiencing. Yet, the Bible says that Jesus set His face as a flint, and was not ashamed. In fact, in **Hebrews 12:2**, Paul says that Jesus "despised" the shame (in other words, counted it as nothing). And why did He despise the shame? Because of the "*joy that was set before him.*" Jesus considered it a "*joy*" to go to prison and to death, because He knew that through His suffering on the cross, we would purchase our salvation.

The New Testament doesn't give us any information about the hours that Jesus spent in prison; but we do know that He spent some time in prison on the night of his arrest. We know this to be so, because Isaiah prophesied that He would be "*taken from prison and from judgment.*" By the way, archaeologists have found the house of the high priest Caiaphas in Jerusalem; and below the floor of his house was a small dungeon, with a hole just big enough to lower a man

into it. This was probably where Jesus spent a few hours before dawn, before they sent Him to Pilate's judgment hall.

To have the joyful attitude that Jesus had as He lay in prison, or that Paul had as he lay in prison, we must have the mind of Christ. **Philippians 2:5** says, ***“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”*** Paul was a sinner, like you and me; yet, he allowed Christ to control his thoughts and actions. Not only did he rejoice in his infirmities, but his tongue was full of kindness. Listen to how Paul speaks in the opening of his letter to Philemon. **(Read Philemon 1-3 again.)**

Paul addressed his friends as ***“Philemon our dearly beloved,”*** and as ***“our beloved Apphia,”*** and as ***“Archipus our fellow soldier.”*** These aren't the words of a flatterer; these are the words of a man who loved people with Christlike love. These are also the words of a humble man. Though Paul was an Apostle, and though He had been given many revelations, he included young Timothy in his greeting, right alongside himself. At the end of the letter, he took time to salute several more people in Colossi; and he spoke of them as his equals, as well. He called them “fellowprisoners” and “fellowlabourers.” Remember, too, that these people were all *Gentiles* (or, at least, *half* Gentiles, such as Timothy). Before his conversion, Paul had hated the Gentiles; but now, he dearly loved them. In fact, he regarded them more highly than he regarded himself. This was the character of Paul.

What made Paul the man that he was? Humanly speaking, he was no different from us. He was a man of like passions as you and I. He was no worthier than any other Christian. Yet, he was one of the mightiest men of God who ever lived. What made the difference in his life? I believe the answer can be found in **verse 3**. **(Read Philemon 3.)** Why made Paul such a mighty man of God? I believe the reason is that he never forgot the ***“grace and peace”*** that comes only from God. In nearly every one of his letters, Paul began and ended the letter with the words “Grace be to you, and peace.” Paul didn't use these words lightly. He realised how desperately he needed God's grace. He also never forgot that true ***“peace”*** comes only through complete surrender of one's heart, mind, and will to Christ.

Six hundred years before Christ, the prophet Jeremiah preached against the lying prophets of Judah who cried ***“Peace, peace; when there is no peace”*** (**Jeremiah 8:11**)! Nothing has changed, has it? We have an abundance of lying religious and political leaders in our world today. They speak of “peace,” “love,” and other sweet-sounding things; yet, *people are hurting!* People's lives are falling apart, and their souls are in anguish, because they have not heard about the only way that a man can have true peace. **The only way to have peace is to be reconciled to God through the shed blood of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ!**

Do *you* believe this, Christian? Do you believe that the Christ who brought peace to your soul can bring peace to others' souls, as well? Are you allowing the peace of Christ to reign in your heart, and to shine forth in every word and action, as Paul did?

II. Philemon's character (vv. 1-7)

We are blessed to have an abundance of information about the life of the Apostle Paul. However, there are many great men and women of God in the Bible of whom we know very little. Philemon was one of those people. We may not know much about Philemon; but in these few short verses, we see the portrait of a godly man.

For one thing, it is evident that **Philemon brought up his family for the Lord**. How do we know this? Well, you'll notice that there are two names mentioned in **verse 2**—**Apphia and Archipus**. Who were these people? Let's take another look at that verse, and see what we can learn about them. **(Read Philemon 1 and 2 again.)**

When you look at the context of these verses, it is evident that Apphia and Archipus were Philemon's wife and son. This is apparent from the way that Paul addresses the lady (Apphia) just *after* Philemon. He then addresses Archipus (their son), and *then* the rest of the church body. Paul was addressing Philemon's family first, and then the rest of the church.

Now, as I said a moment ago, it is evident that Philemon's family knew the Lord. The way that Paul addressed Apphia and Archipus shows that they were members not only of Philemon's family, but also of *God's* family. He calls them "***beloved Apphia***," and "***Archipus our fellowsoldier***." Clearly, Apphia and Archipus not only *knew* the Lord, but were faithfully serving the Lord. Let's look at some other evidence.

Read Colossians 4:17.

We mustn't forget that these words were written to *Philemon's* home church--the church of Colossi. This means that the "Archipus" whom Paul was addressing in **verse 17** was, most likely, Philemon's own son. Paul doesn't mention exactly what kind of ministry Archipus was involved in; but in some way, he was serving God in his church.

Christian, it should be your heart's fondest desire that your *own family* would all be saved, and serving the Lord! Having a godly seed should be of paramount importance to you. Your children are not bound to get saved sooner or later, simply because you are saved. They must be taught the Word of God from an early age; and they must be confronted with the Gospel, with the utmost wisdom and discretion. Then, after they receive Christ as Saviour, you should be expending the utmost of your energy, resources, and prayer, to encourage and direct them to serve the Lord in whatever way God leads them! Your children should see, from your example, that there is *nothing* more important than knowing, loving, and serving God with all their hearts. Your child may grow up to be a successful doctor or lawyer; but what profit will it be to him if he lose his own soul, and go into eternity without Christ? Should your child receive Christ as Saviour, yet grow up to be a lukewarm, half-hearted Christian, what profit will he be to God's Kingdom? Of course, even the godliest parents, who have done their best to bring up their children for the Lord, can, to their sorrow, still have a child who goes his own way. However, let it not be said that they went their own way because they looked at their parents' half-hearted Christian life, and concluded that serving God isn't important!

Read 2 John 1-4.

What "**commandment**" is Paul talking about in **verse 4**? He's talking about the commandment that God gave to Israel in **Deuteronomy 6**. In **Deuteronomy 6:6-9**, God said, "***And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.***" This is God's will, brethren! God wants whole families be saved, and to become strong in the Lord. Remember how Paul told the Philippian jailor, "***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thine house***" (**Acts 16:31**)? Paul wasn't satisfied merely with the jailor's getting saved; he wanted to see his *whole family* saved. As it turned out, they *did* all receive Christ that very night. The seed of the Gospel had been planted in their hearts through Paul and Silas's preaching in the streets of Philippi; and now, the time was ripe for them to believe and receive the Gospel into their hearts. Not only that, but they were ready to follow the Lord *wholly*, by being baptised! That very night, they all followed the Lord in baptism, and joined the new little church that was now meeting in Lydia's house.

While the rest of the world is in darkness, Christian families should be a burning and shining light for the Lord. Everyone in your block should know about that peculiar family down the street that is constantly talking about the Lord, and quoting the Bible! That's the kind of family that Philemon had. Philemon was a man of God; and his family was a testimony to that fact. They knew that the life Dad lived at church was the same life that he lived at home.

Now, not only did Philemon bring up his family for the Lord; but **Christ's church was of paramount importance to him.** How do we know this? Because he used his own house as a meeting place for his church. **(Read Philemon 2 again.)**

Philemon was a man of means. God had given him a nice house. Yet, instead of keeping his house to himself and his family, he opened it to God's people! Some people even believe that Philemon was the pastor (or, at least, *one of the pastors*) of the church of Colossi. This is likely, because churches in those days often met in the house of the pastor. By the way, don't ever think that a church is any less a "church" if they do not own a nice building! *All* the churches that we read about in the New Testament were house churches. God doesn't command us to build impressive buildings; He commands us to preach the Gospel, and to baptise converts, and to teach them to observe all that He has commanded. God isn't concerned about a church's *seating* capacity; He is concerned with its *sending* capacity. He is concerned with how faithfully we are using our resources to carry out His Great Commission.

It seems that the more wealth that Christians have, the less keen they are to use their wealth for the Lord. However, Philemon wasn't that way. He viewed his possessions as a tool to serve God, and God's people. Do *you* have this outlook, Christian? Do you view your church as the most important thing in your life after your own walk with God, and after your own family's spiritual welfare? Can your family see, by your actions, that church is immensely important to you? Or do they perceive that church is of casual, secondary importance to you?

What else do we find in Philemon's spiritual portrait? We see that he was filled with the love of Christ. **(Read verses 5 and 7 again.)** At the end of Paul's letter to the church of Ephesus, he said, "***Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith.***" True faith in God, and true *love* for God, always go together! In fact, true faith in God *produces* love—not just for God, but for others, as well. That is the kind of love that Philemon had. In **verse 5**, Paul commended Philemon for his "***love...toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.***" Christ's love was manifested in Philemon's life by his caring for the needs of others, and by his giving of his resources to help his brethren in the church of Colossi. **(Read verse 7.)**

There was once a time when even many unsaved people had a sense of duty to help those in need. Of course, helping someone in need doesn't make a person saved! Nonetheless, there was a time when biblical teachings about loving your fellow man made an impact on society. Sadly, that time is long gone. We are living in a day when the Bible is being thrown aside and trampled; and, as a result, unbridled covetousness, unspeakable selfishness, and shocking callousness to the needs of others is now the norm. Even the normal ties of family love are rare to see these days. Jesus prophesied that it would be this way in the last days. He said, "***and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold***" (Matthew 24:12).

Truly, we are living in a time when the *“love of many”* is waxing cold. We have become accustomed to seeing footage of people burning down cities, and physically assaulting and beating people in the streets. People can’t even speak without cursing. People’s hearts are filled with perverseness, ferocity, hatred, cursing, and calloused disregard for human life! We live in a wicked day. Yet, in this wicked day, we, as Christians, should *“shine as lights in the world.”* God’s saved, blood-bought, born-again children should be known as the people who truly care for others. We should be known as people who give until it hurts. Do you have this kind of character—the kind that Philemon had?

III. Paul’s prayer, and Philemon’s purpose (vv. 4, 6)

(Read verses 4-6.) In these verses, we find two things. First, we find that Paul had a **prayer** for Philemon. Secondly, we find that God had a **purpose** for Philemon.

First, let’s look at Paul’s prayer for Philemon. Paul’s prayer was that the *“communication”* of Philemon’s faith would be *“effectual.”* Now, what does Paul mean by the word *“communication”*? He’s talking about Philemon’s *giving* to others. In Scripture, the word “communicate” means to “share of one’s wealth with others.” With this in mind, please notice how Paul *describes* Philemon’s giving. He calls it *“the communication of thy faith.”* This means that Philemon’s gracious giving was the “product” of his faith. As Philemon trusted God to do His good work in him, God enabled him to give to others from a heart of love.

With this in mind, let’s look at the rest of Paul’s prayer. Paul prayed that Philemon’s giving—which was the result of his faith—would *“become effectual.”* In other words, Paul was praying that Philemon’s giving to those in need would accomplish its intended purpose. And *in what way* would it accomplish its purpose? *“By the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.”* Simply put, Paul was praying that Philemon’s giving to others would result in people’s acknowledging the goodness that was in him, and in the other members in his church. The word *“you”* is plural. Paul’s prayer was that Philemon’s *whole church* would be a showcase of goodness to those around them. As Philemon set the example of gracious giving, other Christians in his church would be encouraged to follow his example; and lost people in their community would be forced to see and acknowledge their goodness.

Now, this raises a question. The Bible says that there is *no* good thing in us. Paul himself said, *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.”* In **Romans 3**, Paul said, *“As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one.”* Since there is no “good thing” in us, then what “good thing” is Paul talking about? He’s not talking about *Philemon’s*

own goodness; **he's talking about the goodness of Christ**, who dwelt within Philemon! Those words "***in Christ Jesus,***" right at the end of the verse, are the key to understanding Paul's meaning. Whatever "good thing" that was in Philemon, or in the other members of his church, was actually *Christ's* goodness working in and through them.

Christian, as you allow Christ to work His righteousness in you, the world will see your good works, and will glorify whom? Yourself? No! "***Your Father which is in heaven!***" Paul's prayer was that through Philemon's giving to others, people would see God's goodness in Philemon's life, and in lives of his entire church body, and that God would be glorified.

Now, in closing, I would like to point out **Philemon's purpose**. God had a purpose for Philemon; and that purpose was that he would use His *gift of giving* to serve Him.

Read Romans 12:4-8.

Every Christian has been given one of these seven spiritual gifts. If you don't know what your gift is, ask the Lord to show you what it is! God wants to be glorified in *your* life! He wants you to use the spiritual gift that He has given you to serve Him. God wants to make *your* spiritual gift "***effectual***" in bringing honour to Himself-- just as He did with Philemon.

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask, "**Do you know Christ as your Saviour?**" If you have never been born again, you cannot even begin to use your spiritual gift for His glory. God has a spiritual gift for you to use; but without the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in your life, that gift is "dead" and inactive, and useless to God. My friend, God wants to be glorified in your life. Repent in your heart, and place your complete trust in Him, and let Him come into your heart! If you know Christ already, I would ask, "**Are you using your gifts to glorify God?**" Are you allowing Christ to be glorified in your life, as Paul did, and as Philemon did? You *have* a gift; but are you using it for *Him*? Should you not be walking closely with the Lord, let Him draw you close to Himself today!