

Theme: When we come to Christ, all of our relationships are changed, and we are called and empowered to serve others and to further God's kingdom.

I. The Story of John Newton

- A. He began a life at sea as a boy
- B. Worked on a slave trader ship
- C. Eventually became a Christian - but continued on slavers
- D. Eventually became a pastor - and an abolitionist
- E. Advisor of William Wilberforce - and saw slavery ended
- F. Wrote Amazing Grace and other hymns
- G. A great story of a man unchained
- H. Today we see another one - Onesimus

II. A Chained Request

- A. Paul could be bold - but is not
Therefore, **although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹ yet I appeal to you** on the basis of love. I then, as Paul — an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus — Philemon 1:8–9
 - 1. He is an apostle - he has authority!
 - 2. He is naturally a bold man - but restrains himself
- B. Paul is very gentle in this request
 - 1. He only very gradually introduces the request
 - 2. He does not even mention Onesimus' name until last word of v10 (in Greek)

- 3. He does not actually make his request until v 17

C. Paul wants Philemon's consent

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. Philemon 1:14 (NIV 2011)

- 1. Important that Philemon freely does what is right
- 2. He wants Philemon to do the good (literal), but it must be voluntary

D. Side note - a lot of wisdom here

- 1. Appeals often go much further than bald authority
- 2. Especially important for parents of older children
- 3. Essential for parents of grown children
- 4. This is how real growth occurs - through free choice

III. Paul's Appeal

- A. He appeals to Philemon based on love
Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹ **yet I appeal to you on the basis of love**. I then, as Paul — an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus — Philemon 1:8–9
 - 1. First an appeal to Philemon's love for believers
 - 2. 'Therefore' - based on love I gave thanks for I appeal
- B. He appeals based on his own circumstances
Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹ yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. **I then, as Paul — an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus — ¹⁰ I appeal to you....** Philemon 1:8–10

1. It is Paul the great man of God who is appealing
2. It is Paul an old man who is appealing
3. It is Paul who is chained for Christ who is appealing
4. Paul mentions his chains three times in this section yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul — an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus — ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains... 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. Philemon 1:9–10, 13
5. The irony - the man in chains is pleading for a slave!
6. This can't help but move Philemon, the man of love

C. He appeals based on the change in Onesimus
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. Philemon 1:10–11

1. Onesimus is Paul's son in the faith
2. This is recent - Paul was in chains - a new believer
3. Formerly useless, but now useful - see below

D. He appeals based on his own love for Onesimus
I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains... ¹² I am sending him — who is my very heart — back to you. Philemon 1:10, 12

1. Onesimus is Paul's son in the faith - deep love
2. Onesimus is Paul's heart/guts - σπλάγχνα

3. Philemon had refreshed hearts - σπλάγχνα - v7
4. Paul is saying - you can refresh my heart - v20

E. He appeals based on God's purposes and plans
Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good Philemon 1:15

1. Perhaps God was at work in all this!
2. You lost him for a little while - but gained him forever
3. "We don't know - but I think I see God's hand here!"

F. He appeals based on new relationship between Philemon & Onesimus
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 man and as a brother in the Lord. Philemon 1:16

1. They are brothers in Christ now
2. Brothers - Paul was the spiritual father of them both (v10, 19)
3. I love him like a son - but you know him longer and better
4. "You wanted him saved, right? Well he is!!!"

G. What a masterful appeal!

1. What more could be said?
2. How could Philemon say no to all of this?

IV. Unchained To Usefulness

A. A key part of the appeal - Onesimus is now useful
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... ²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some **benefit** from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.
Philemon 1:10–11,20

1. There is a huge wordplay going on here
 - a. Onesimus was a common slave name - meaning useful or profitable
 - b. But this Onesimus has been useless & unprofitable
 - c. But now that he is a Christian, he is useful & profitable
 - d. v20 - Give me some 'benefit' - related to Onesimus' name
2. Philemon - don't keep him chained to his past
 - a. He was useless - and a runaway and a thief
 - b. But I have seen him changed - he is useful
 - c. You could punish him, send him away to the mines - but don't!
 - d. Jesus has him for a reason!

B. The future story of Onesimus?

1. We are not certain what happened to Onesimus
2. But there is a possible story that makes sense
3. Onesimus - the bishop of Ephesus
I received, therefore, your whole multitude in the name of God, through Onesimus, a man of inexpressible love,

and your bishop in the flesh, whom I pray you by Jesus Christ to love, and that you would all seek to be like him. And blessed be He who has granted unto you, being worthy, to obtain such an excellent bishop. Ignatius, *Ephesians*, 1:3

- a. Onesimus was bishop of Ephesus
 - b. If our Onesimus - probably 70 or so
4. Some scholars think it is the same man - so do I
- a. If our Onesimus - probably 70 or so
 - b. Allusions to Philemon in Ignatius' letter - refreshed; 'benefit' play on Onesimus' name (2:1-2)
 - c. Why keep letter to Philemon?
 - d. Did Onesimus gather Paul's writings - including this?
 - e. It is just the kind of thing our God would do!
 - f. We don't know - but talk about being useful!!!!

C. In either case - we are redeemed for usefulness!

1. The Gospel changes everything
2. Thanks be to God for his grace and gospel!

V. Applying the Word

A. Do we allow others to be unchained by the gospel?

1. People always come with baggage!
2. We love their stories - as long as it was not us!
3. Are we willing to let them be unchained to usefulness?
4. NOTE: This requires clear change on their part

5. Do we set them free - or keep them chained?
- B. Do we see we are unchained for usefulness?
1. The Gospel sets us free from sin and our past
 2. We are not identified by our past but by our future
 3. We are not defined by labels but by being in Christ
 4. Even if Onesimus remained a slave - he is now useful
 5. Do I see that I am unchained to serve Christ?
 6. Do I see I an unchained to serve others?
- C. Song - Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)

Unchained To Usefulness

Philemon 1:8-16
August 10, 2014
Prayer
Deuteronomy 1:11

May the Lord, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised! Deuteronomy 1:11

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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 will be spontaneous and not forced.¹⁵ Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good —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 man and as a brother in the Lord. Philemon 1:8–16