

For the Love of God

Week 40: Sept October 1-7 — *Philemon, Philippians 1-4*

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Helpful Resources

Map of Paul's Missionary Journeys

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

This week we read Paul's letters to Philemon and the Philippian church. Both letters dealt with challenges that we face every day, and both letters helped us to identify what is to be our focus in life. With so many responsibilities, events, difficulties, and distractions, it is easy to lose sight of why we are here and what we are supposed to be doing. Paul clarified our goals, our priorities, and helped us focus on one thing — the love of God.

When Paul wrote his letter to Philemon, he appealed to him "for love's sake," to reconcile with Onesimus, his servant (*Phi. 1:9*). But what does that mean, "for love's sake"? As an Apostle of Christ, Paul could've demanded Philemon to do the right thing, but instead he appealed to him out of love or genuine care for Philemon. So then, Paul wanted Philemon to reconcile with Onesimus for love's sake, out of genuine care for his servant.

In truth, love is to be a motivating force behind all that we do in life. When Jesus shared the two greatest commandments, He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself" (*Mk. 12:30, 31*). The common denominator for both commandments is love, love for God and love for others. Remember, Paul wrote to the Romans, "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (*Rom. 13:10*).

But it's even simpler than that. These two commandments or principles could really be reduced to one — the love of God. Because we love God, we honor His Word and do what He says. Because we love God, we pursue His interests above our own. Because we love God, we hold His values first and foremost. Because we love God, we love His people. God (Christ) is our one thing, and for the love of God, we do what we do. It is for the love of God that we love others and seek to be at peace with them. In this review, we will rediscover that our motivation to love and care for others is our love for God.

- For the Love of God
 1. **One Thing** (*Phil. 3:1-4:1*): Paul wrote, "One thing I do, I forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God..." (*3:12-14*). What was the one thing Paul was pursuing? It was Christ — to know Him, be like Him, and to be with Him. His love for Christ motivated everything he did in life. Just as Jesus told Martha that "only one thing was necessary" — Him — our lives would be simplified if we pursued only one thing — Christ (*Lk. 10:41, 42*).
 2. **Fruitful Labor** (*Phil. 1:1-26*): Paul wrote, "To live is Christ." His labor was only fruitful if it was for Christ's sake. He commended the Philippians for being the same. They were not pew-perchers but participants in the gospel. We, too, are not to watch, but to do, not only to receive, but to give, not only to be ministered to, but to engage in His ministry.

3. **Supporting the Work** (*Phil. 4:10-23*): An avenue in which we can participate in fruitful labor is giving financially to support the work of ministry. The Philippians supported Paul's ministry, not for earthly reward but for heavenly rewards. It was for the love of God that they gladly gave to those laboring for His sake, both inside and outside the church.
 4. **Timothy's Proven Worth** (*Phil. 2:19-30*): Paul used Timothy as an example of one with right priorities. He did not seek after his own interests, but those of Christ in furthering the gospel; and because of Timothy's love for God, he was "genuinely concerned for the Philippians' welfare. Again, it is for the love of God that we love others in the Lord.
- For the Love of Others
 1. **Selfless Servitude** (*1:27-2:18*): Paul wrote that he desired to see the Philippians "standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith." Then, he gave them the key to achieving this unity — selfless servitude, to emulate the heart of Jesus. For the love of God, we pursue unity with others, and we achieve unity with humility.
 2. **Live in Harmony** (*Phil. 4:2-9; Phi. 1:1-25*): Much of Paul's letters include the importance of unity within the church. One of Jesus' last prayers was that His followers would be one (*Jn. 17:11, 22*). But, for the love of God, we must pursue peace with all people.
 3. **The Hard Thing** (*Phil. 4:2-9; Phi. 1:1-25*): Twice this week Paul encouraged people to reconcile their differences, once with Philemon and Onesimus, and then with Euodia and Syntyche. While it is easy for us to talk about unity, it is another thing to achieve it. None of us enjoys confrontation, but sometimes it is necessary in order "to maintain the unity in the bond of peace" (*Eph. 4:2*). For the love of God, it is necessary for us to do the hard thing and forgive, forbear, and rebuild broken relationships.

The Bottom Line

It is for the love of God that we love others and seek to be at peace with them.

Questions to Consider

1. In order to obstruct the pursuit of our "one thing," Satan places roadblocks in our way — our past (sin and shame), our successes (appealing to our pride), the world (attractions, distractions), and/or people (who either discourage us or who have fallen away). How do we overcome these obstacles?
2. Paul encouraged us to be participants of the gospel. We are not to watch, but to do, not only to receive, but to give, not only to be ministered to, but to engage in ministry. Which of these categories best describes your attitude and efforts regarding the church?
3. How are you financially supporting gospel work inside and outside the church?
4. Paul prescribed selfless servitude as the key to achieving unity in the church. Is he right? Why or why not? What other suggestions do you have for achieving unity in the church?
5. Why is it so difficult to live in harmony with other people inside and outside the church?
6. Why is reconciling broken relationships so difficult? What does it require of you to reconcile with another person?
7. Share a reconciliation success story. What did you learn through the process?
8. With whom do you need to reconcile a broken relationship? For the love of God, do it.