

Personal Property, Responsibility, and the Gospel

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Bible Text: Philemon 1:18-20
Preached on: Sunday, April 15, 2018

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Well, make sure all of your electronic devices are off and then open your Bibles to Philemon toward the back of the New Testament, a little one chapter book which is actually a letter. The Apostle Paul wrote to his dear friend, Philemon. Philemon and Paul went back a long way. Paul preached for three years in Ephesus and Philemon was undoubtedly one of his converts. Philemon was a man of means, had a good degree of wealth and influence in the city, and he became a humble, devoted, faithful churchman. He was the kind of man that the Apostle Paul could bank on. I know what that feels like. I have a lot of men at Grace Life Church that I feel just super-confident that I could call them and say, "As your pastor, I need this." And I'm convinced from their hearts they would say, "Pastor, I'll do the best I can." Well, that's the kind of man Philemon was. He and Paul had a tight close relationship and we'll see in next week's lesson, Lord willing, how the Apostle Paul just assumed that Philemon's material wealth was there to be used for the ministry. That's a rare thing because material things have a way of being idols and we aren't to ready to give them over to be used of the Lord sometimes, but not Philemon. Paul has this deep confidence in Philemon.

Then something happened. One of Philemon's slaves named Onesimus betrayed Philemon and ran away. It looks like he probably took some money with him that belonged to Philemon. He certainly cost Philemon significantly in a financial way and lo and behold in the providence of God, Onesimus as he's running away from Philemon runs into the Apostle Paul who is under house arrest at Nero's palace. So here Paul is chained to a praetorian guard but he has some openness there, he has a place where his disciples and those he is training and teaching can gather around him and care for him and him minister to them, and among them now is this runaway slave, Onesimus. Onesimus has been gloriously converted to faith in Christ. As Paul talks to Onesimus, "Where are you from, Onesimus? Who was your master, Onesimus?" "I'm from Ephesus. My master is a man named Philemon." And Paul's ears perk up, "Philemon? The Philemon who has a church meeting in his house in Ephesus?" "Why, yes." And then the dominoes begin to fall and the Apostle Paul tells Onesimus, "You've got to go back now that you're a Christian. Go back to Philemon's household. Go back to the church that meets in Philemon's house. You've got to get this right. You've got to be restored to your master, but I'm going to send you a letter, Onesimus, and when you get to Philemon, you give Philemon this letter," and that's what you and I are studying through, and all through this letter, Paul has been appealing to Philemon on behalf of his runaway slave, Onesimus.

He's charging – that's not what he's doing – he's encouraging, he's urging, he's tactfully, gracefully guiding Philemon to forgive Onesimus, to receive him back not as a slave but as a brother in Christ, and do this before the whole church.

Now, remember this is not just addressed to Philemon, this letter is addressed to Philemon and the church that meets in his house. So this was to be a living illustration of the power of the Gospel and how the Gospel changes everything. Onesimus, the runaway slave, has been changed. Philemon, the master who has a church now meeting in his house, he's been a transformed man. Then as they come back together, the kind of restoration Paul is hoping for between Philemon, the master, and Onesimus, the runaway slave, is something the world knows nothing of. It will be a beautiful and glorious testimony of how the Gospel has changed us.

We get to the end of it now and we are in verse 18 and we're going to go now through verse 20. Look at it there, Philemon verse 18 going through verse 20. He's writing to Philemon about his runaway slave, Onesimus. He has given Onesimus this letter. We are reading the letter now. Verse 18,

18 But if he [Onesimus] has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). 20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

Here's what he's saying, "Philemon, Onesimus has come back. He's become a convert. He's your brother in Christ now. However, as he comes back, what ever you decide he owes you, I, Paul, will take care of that debt." He says, "I'm writing it with my own hand," which in the law of this day meant Paul was now legally bound under law to pay that debt for Onesimus. He said, "I'm writing with my own hand." Then he throws in this phrase, "However, Philemon, not to mention to you that you owe me even your own life. Just thought I'd throw that in, Philemon. Just thought I'd add that on." Then he says now, "Philemon, benefit me in this. Bring refreshing to my soul by the way you handle this and settle this."

I've entitled this message "Personal Property and Responsibility and the Gospel." Personal property, responsibility, and the Gospel, because the Gospel changes everything. I'll say it one more time. I know you don't have a screen. Some of you like to take notes. Most of all, I hope you'll take notes in your heart. Personal property, responsibility, and the Gospel.

I. Personal property and accountability. I. Personal property and accountability. We see here Paul talking about how Philemon has personal belongings, he has property rights, Onesimus has taken some of that property, has in effect robbed from his master, Philemon. He's coming back. As Onesimus comes back, Paul says, "Now if Onesimus owes you, Philemon, I, Paul, will take the accountability. I'll be accountable. I'll be responsible for his debt." But that brings up a truth that I want to talk about for a moment

and that is I see this everywhere, I hear it everywhere, I mean in the culture at large, and that is through time and history there seems to be the opinion that the early church and early Christians did not believe in personal property rights, but that's clearly not what the Scriptures teach. Now they teach we are responsible for how we use our personal property but it doesn't teach that we should not have personal property. How we utilize our personal property or our wealth, should reflect a Gospel-changed heart, should be the administration of personal property of what you would expect out of one who has experienced the new birth. But here's sub point A under I: Christianity does not encourage socialism or communism. Let me say that again. Christianity, biblical Christianity, not this stuff that we hear about in our culture, biblical Christianity does not encourage socialism or communism.

You remember me telling you about the atheist Jew, I'm not sure how that works but that's what he was, an atheist Jew who was a sociologist at prestigious college in New York State who was doing some kind of sociological study on the Shoals area, he interviewed me and in the interview he asked me, "Is your conservative, political, cultural viewpoints, is that based on Scripture?" Because they believe that everything is summed up and Jesus says love everybody and so if we love everybody, we just don't have any morals or absolutes or any values. We just whatever anybody does at any time, we just hug their necks and say, "Well, we love you." That, I mean, their view of Christianity is not much more than that. So he wanted to know, "What's in your Christian doctrine that leads you, Pastor, to this conservative viewpoint politically and culturally?" And I said, I just immediately said, "I'll tell you exactly one of the primary things and that is the doctrine of total depravity. The doctrine of total depravity, that all men's hearts are fallen, all of men's hearts are prone to evil, all of men's hearts are prone to selfishness and corruption and abuse, therefore, politically speaking, I do not want to live in a culture where the vast majority of the authority of the culture is vested in one or a few people been the central government because when you give them that power and authority, them being totally depraved, fallen sinners, they're going to abuse that authority and abuse their people." So I said, "Yes, we believe in a decentralized form of control and authority. We believe more in local authority. We are skeptical of government having much authority because men's hearts are fallen and evil and they are prone to corruption and to misuse the authority they have."

So based on that one doctrine alone, we would want to say that we don't want the government telling us what we can own, how much we can own, and taking as much as they want of what we own so they can help everybody else with it. Look, can I make this clear: we don't trust them. We don't trust the central authorities because we are like them. We wouldn't want that authority either. You must not give any human absolute authority over your life because they will absolutely abuse it. They sometimes in the liberal mindset want to treat us like children and they are the adult parents. We, the minority elitists, are the parents and we can tell you what you should have, we should tell you how much you should have, we should tell you when we're going to take what you have in order that we can decide what's best and fair for everybody. Well, you do that with small children but that's not a way to run a nation.

We're talking about property rights, personal property and responsibility. Note that two of the 10 Commandments clearly imply personal property rights, "Thou shalt not steal." It means I have some things, somebody else takes it, it's criminal to take it because they are mine. The Bible says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's land or his houses and other things." What's the point there? He owns them. They are personally his. The government doesn't own them. He owns them. The Bible teaches in a broad way that we gain personal property through work, through wisdom, through industry, and as one of those commercials set some time ago, "I got my money the old-fashioned way, I inherited it." We get it sometimes that way, but the Bible teaches personal property rights.

Now, I've been talking about the personal property rights and, first of all, that Christianity does not encourage socialism and communism. I should have given you the first, I'm going to try it. That was A, now B. B, let's note under this our greater motive. In the Christian community the way we govern ourselves, in the Christian community the way we care for others, comes from a superior motive than the world would have. Now, 1, if the superior motive is that it comes from our heart. It comes from our heart. Now, you can go back as far as you like and when you find totalitarianism or authoritarianism, when you find some sort of absolute authority whether you call it a Caesar or a Pharaoh or a king or whomever, when that authority is resided in one person or a small group of persons who control most everything else in other people's lives in order "to bring out an equal outcome," they always seem to resort to legal coercion and to physical violence to support their so-called concern for everyone. In contrast, in the church community, the biblical examples we are given is that the apostles in the early chapters of Acts, found the people giving all their possessions to the church that they might be distributed to those who have need, but this was not a teaching of socialism and it was not a teaching of communism.

Three main points there about those early chapters of Acts that the liberals love to grossly pervert to meet their own positions of socialism and communism. 1. That was clear need. Literally early Christians in the early chapters of Acts as we see it, were literally starving. That was desperate and dire need. They were in abject poverty and in need. It wasn't a matter of everybody ought to be equal, it was a matter of everybody ought to eat today. So it was clear need. The Christian teaching – now listen to me – does not teach guaranteed outcomes for all people. As far as it is possible as Christian people, we would want guaranteed opportunities but even that is something you cannot dictate, because some of the greatest opportunity depends on your parents and we can't dictate that no matter how powerful the government gets. So we can't guarantee everybody's environment will be equal. We can do the best we can but we certainly must not get in the task of guaranteeing everybody in a culture that you're going to have a certain outcome. You're all going to have at least this much money, at least this much healthcare, at least whatever it is, and that's sort of the undergirdings of socialism and communism. The Bible is not necessarily saying that's absolutely always wrong but the Bible does not support or embrace that, or as I said earlier, encourage that. So when the early Christians gave everything they had to help the church, it was literal desperate need.

2. It was entirely voluntary. It was completely voluntary. No one was coerced. No one was forced. There was no church discipline connected with if you did not do it. The Bible says in Acts 5:3 and 4 as Paul is dealing with Ananias and Sapphira, whose sin was lying about what they gave not that they didn't give enough. Can I say that again? Ananias and Sapphira were disciplined by God for lying that they gave everything when they actually didn't give everything. That was the key issue. Peter says to them, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?" Notice the personal property rights here. Verse 4, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?" So he says, "You have control, you have the rights over it, you give voluntarily to the need as you want to but don't come before the church saying you're doing one thing when you're doing something else."

So it was completely voluntary, they were supporting a dire definite need, and thirdly, it was temporary. This system, this I use the word communal gathering of people bringing all that they owned was a special unique thing during a special unique time in church history right after the day of Pentecost which, by the way, Pentecost was a one time event never to be repeated. Did you hear that? Don't try to make Pentecost happen again because the church can't be birthed but one time. And there was a special economic, if you would, voluntary giving of things to support the church under great persecution but it was only temporary. For example, as you study the epistles, now we are going forward in chronology, you go from Acts and then you go further to the churches being established all over the known world and these are the letters Paul wrote to those churches around the world, and you have not even a hint of anything close to a socialism or communism within the church in those epistles. Like the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 9:7 as Paul was raising and offering for the suffering saints in Jerusalem, he tells the church at Corinth to whom he's going to take an offering up from, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

So he says, "This is completely voluntary." The point is in Christianity when we do something generous for others, when we support one another, it must be voluntarily done out of a heart motive of love for God and a love for the church. You see, it's a superior motive. Where communism and socialism is a top-down coercion, Christianity is a bottom-up love from the heart. Very different motive. It is a superior motive. So this true love in the heart is a high virtue. Believers are so smitten by the grace, the love and the forgiveness that God has shown them so he sees himself, the Christian does, as immeasurably indebted to God and he desires from his heart to show that back to God by supporting God's word and supporting one another in the community of faith. But that's not communism. It's not socialism. It's you with your own property determining from your heart, "I want to be generous and support the work of God and any saints of God who may have need."

The Scripture teaches no coercion, no threats and no demands. You can be a member of this church for 50 years and never give a penny and you will never be disciplined. You probably should be but you won't be because if you're that stingy about the Lord's work, you're probably not regenerate but what will happen is the evidence of your lack of faith

will come out in many other ways. I don't check giving records, never have, never will, except for one staff, well, we used to check staff giving records because the staff had agreed together to hold each other accountable. And we had one issue years ago with a staff member who three times in a row was not tithing and the third time I let him go, but there was plenty of time for him to have gotten that right because we teach our people that they ought to be tithing and giving and if we ministers don't do that, we're hypocrites. But other than that, there has never been even a notion of requiring certain amounts. No, it's got to be from the heart. It's a higher motive. I wouldn't hold you back to some legal standard because under grace many of you want to do more than the legal standard because it's from the heart. We have a higher motive.

Well, we are looking for a true and glorious future. Mark that down. We're looking for a true glorious future. You see, under socialism and communism, they sell a fantasy paradise for all, a redistribution of wealth on more equal terms. I'll never forget, you remember the little video where Barack Obama was in a crowd of people and Joe the plumber came up? Do you remember Joe the plumber? And Joe the plumber came up and said, "Mr. President, why do you want to take more of my money?" And he said, "We want to spread the wealth around." Pure socialism and communism. But the point from Christianity would be, "Why don't you let me decide some of that? We don't want you elitists deciding for us by coercion what ought to happen." So Christian principles while not absolutely saying a communist or socialist system would be evil, far be it from anybody to even slightly suggest that Christianity teaches and encourages such a system. They teach a fantasies paradise of all, spreading this wealth around, equal according to an elitist definition of what equal should be, but as I said to you in an earlier message just a week or two ago, all men are created equally but all men do not behave equally, so all men can't have guaranteed equality because some men work harder than other men, some men save better than other men, some men will invest more wisely than other men, some men just have more ingenuity than other men, and God typically blesses that and that's good as long as you understand the responsibility aspect. If he's blessed you with more, he'll hold you accountable for how you use it. There is a balance there.

So the communist and the socialist says, "We'll make everything glorious for you in this culture if you will yield to us power and control over your lives and your property." But the communist socialist paradise is a cloud paradise. It's a cloud that quickly evaporates under the sunlight of reality. Cuba. Venezuela. Check out how it's working with those folks. You know, it's gotten so bad, communism is such a colossal failure that technically speaking it's hard to even say there are any communist, pure communist countries left. Do you know why? They didn't work and while they've kept aspects of their communism and socialism, they've brought in free market capitalism in order so that they could survive with the rest of the world and have some decent economy for their people to live in. But it is true under socialism and communism, people eventually are equal, they are all equally destitute. They are all equally poor.

Communism is brutal. It strips from people the God-given desire of initiative and innovation. It discourages generosity and giving for anything you have in excess is forcibly taken away. It crushes self-worth and self-respect. It weakens the work ethic for

you soon realize your hard work is just so the government can take everything from you and support their own self-serving and corrupt interests. This overarching control of one's life and the requirement of an ever-growing submission to governing authority dehumanizes the individual, and from the top down, these countries who experimented with the fantasies of communism eventually run their course and find themselves in a bitter abyss of disorder, ruin and misery. But contrast that to Christian fellowships. Now, I'm coming out of the world now, I'm down to the Christian church or in a Christian faith environment. In the Christian church, in a Christian fellowship, we are taught not to live for this world for we have a true and glorious future ahead for us. We will one day inherit a true kingdom of righteousness and peace.

You see, all of these efforts to bring paradise on earth if we will trust some elitist authority to do it for us, it's just the spirit of the antichrist. It's a false hope. It's a false salvation. It's a false system because none of them are qualified to lead it. But we're looking for a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells and we will be ruled by a true and righteous King, the Lord Jesus Christ. So while we live down here, we do not put our hopes in man and we remain skeptical of any and all promises that some new leader is going to arise and if we'll give him all authority over our lives, he will heal all of us. Well, he will just need for us to yield everything we have to him, give him all the authority over our lives and our personal wealth. Do you know what I say to that? No thanks. I'll just wait on Jesus and wait on his kingdom and then I will gladly yield all to him. Amen? As a matter of fact, it doesn't matter whether you yield it or not, he's going to take it because he is righteous and worthy to do so. No one else is. As a matter of fact, the whole book of Revelation centers around the Lord Jesus Christ but, secondly, it centers around this antichrist figure who is going to arise and convince the entire world, "If you'll yield all control to me, I'll make it all work." Finally a global paradise utopia for everyone in the whole world will buy in, including the harlot false church. Many people who use the Bible and call themselves Christians will be fully on board with the antichrist. Do you know what I say to that? No thanks. I'm going to wait on Jesus in the totalitarian dictatorship he will establish will be one of truth and righteousness and peace. But until Jesus comes, count me in on standing for and to whatever degree, working for a free and representative Republic based on democratic principles with the conviction of limited power and control given to the government and the government functioning with plenty of checks and balances because we don't trust them, because they are fallen depraved sinners like us. And that's exactly what our forefathers gave us, a Senate and the Congress, and executive branch, the judicial branch. Plenty of checks and balances to keep fallen depraved humans in check. Listen to me: you do not have America without Christian principles. These men, though not all were individually Christians, these early founding fathers were of a strong Christian consensus. They believed that Christian truth was the way you build a nation and so they built a nation understanding the wickedness and the fallenness of men. So they limited government greatly and we've veered a long long way from the limited government they first gave us, and they put in thorough checks and balances.

Well, I'm saying all that to say under property rights and accountability, that we don't function like the world in the Christian community, we have higher motives. We function

from a grateful heart that loves our God and loves one another and we function with our eyes and hopes in a true future glorious kingdom headed by the Lord Jesus Christ, not some fantasy paradise proposed by some greedy, control mongering, totalitarian dictator or socialist.

Now, a third thing here under property rights and under accountability, notice that Christianity, this would be C in the outline, Christianity requires fulfillment of debt obligations. Christianity requires fulfillment of debt obligations. Pay your bills. We see it very clearly here in verses 18 and 19. Here's Paul in this letter to Philemon saying to him, "But if he [Onesimus, your runaway slave] has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account." Then he says it again, "I am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it." I'm going to take care of it. So Paul, in effect, in this letter has a written binding contract to agreement between himself and Philemon. "I'm going to take care of Onesimus' debt." Which leads me to this conclusion: written contracts even among Christian brethren, are a good thing. Not absolutely and in all cases. Christians ought to be brothers that love enough that in many things a handshake and their word ought to be good enough, but writing things down, the proper documentation is a safeguard against all misunderstanding and that's helpful.

So the loss that this master, Philemon, incurred because of Onesimus running away, was a matter that needed settling. Full reparation is due. Accounts – listen to me – accounts cannot be settled by the expressions of regret however insincere. The only way to satisfy debt is to pay it. That's why Paul says it, "If he has cost you financially, I'll take care of it. I'm putting it in my own handwriting. I'm a legally bound now. I will repay it." It reminds us of in the Christian church we all need to carry our own load, as Galatians 6:5-6 says. Each one shall carry his own load. We are to be responsible for our doings and our obligations. Paul talked about it in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 that, "if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not eat, either." He must pay his own way unless there is some providential hindrance. And of course, the church would step in and help if there was one.

Now, II. We've been talking about property rights and accountability and now II out of this text we learn that our greatest debt is our spiritual debt. That's half of the point. You've got to listen if you're going to sit under my preaching. You've got to think. Our greatest debt is our spiritual debt and that debt is partially satisfied by supporting faithful ministers. Our greatest debt is our spiritual debt and that debt is partially satisfied by supporting faithful ministers. You're not going to get this anywhere else. I'm telling you. This is just, well, the principle is taught throughout Scripture but Philemon is so or Paul writing to Philemon, is so simple and to the point on it.

So let's go back to verse 18 and let's see where he's going. First of all he says in verse 18, "But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything," Philemon, "charge that to my account." So Paul first has said full restitution is in order. I understand that, Philemon. Now, if Onesimus owes you anything, Paul is saying, I'm fully now legally bound for it. I'm ready to pay up. And by the way, Paul had adequate means to do so, probably primarily because of the generous offerings the church at Philippi would send Paul. In

Philippians 4:12 and verse 18, Paul twice says that because of the generous way the church at Philippi supported him, he had more than enough. He had an abundance. He was living comfortably and fine because the church at Philippi had been so generous to support him. So Paul had the funds to do it and in Acts 20:30, the Bible tells us Paul rented what in this day would be the equivalent of a conference center in Ephesus for two years. So he had the financial means to pay for a conference center where he would meet with his disciples and people wanted to hear him preach, and actually run his ministry out of it.

So Paul had at his hands adequate means. The reason I say this is because I used to think this and many people think this today, that to be really spiritual you've got to be like the early apostles and the early apostles had one set of clothes and they literally sat in the dirt and that's all they had, and if you want to be really spiritual, you've got to be like that. The problem with that is the Bible doesn't teach that. Now, if in God's will they had some hard seasons, they welcomed that and said, "Praise the Lord." But at the same time, if they had an abundance like when the church at Philippi helped Paul, they enjoyed comfort and even more than enough.

So Paul had the means to write to Philemon and say... I don't know how long he had been gone, maybe it's quite a bill that's been built up, maybe there is quite a debt financially speaking that Onesimus owes Philemon but Paul said, "I'll pay for it and I've got it. You know I've got it." But then he goes to verse 19 and after he says again, "I'm writing with my own hand. I'm bound. I will repay it." The last half of verse 19, "not to mention to you," that's Philemon, "that you owe to me even your own self as well." So he says, "Onesimus owes you a debt. It's right and true." But here he uses the same word for "owe" in verse 19 he used for Onesimus' debt in verse 18. He said, "Onesimus owes you but, Philemon, you owe me. You have a debt to me." It's as if Paul is saying, "I'm putting it in my own handwriting that I'm a legally bound for Onesimus' debt but, Philemon, I want to go a little bit further. I want to put it down in writing that you legally owe me a great debt because I'm your spiritual father."

He elaborates in verse 19 and says, "even your own self as well." The Greek scholars say it has the idea of "to owe besides." What he's saying is, "Philemon, you have common debts like all men have. You have a chariot payment." They didn't have cars. "You have maybe a business payment on your business expense account. That's common to all men, but besides that, Philemon, you've got another debt and you've got a greater debt, you've got a spiritual debt to me, your pastor, your spiritual father." And he says, "You owe me even your own self." The Greek, it's a real emphatic emphasis. It's kind of a double emphasis. It literally means, "You owe me you, yourself. The very core of your being is owed to me, Philemon."

Now, Paul has been gentle, he's been tactful, he's been careful, he's been gracious, but – are you listening to your pastor – we're to be all of those things but also always truthful and Paul is telling Philemon the truth. You see, Paul is writing to Philemon when he says, "You owe this debt to me, you owe even you, your own self to me. What other common debts you have in life, you have a greater debt and that is your spiritual debt. So your core

being having been revolutionized, your core being having been transformed, your core being having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit within your heart and I'm the human instrument God used to bring you to that revolution, that transformation that regeneration." God never allows you, church, to separate your gratitude to God and your debt to God for your salvation from the human instrument he used in bringing you to Christ. Did you hear that? I know we all use the terms, "Well, it's all grace. God gets all the glory. God just gets all the credit." True but that's not all the Bible says. How would you like your teenage child to look at you and say, "I don't have to honor you, support you, or respect you. God gets all the glory." Whoa, time out. You're perverting the doctrine. And that's the principle here. Paul says, "Philemon," now nobody preached God's grace more than Paul. He gave us Romans and Ephesians and Galatians. I mean, goodnight. But he also taught that you can't separate your debt to God from your debt to God's instrument. That's what Paul is writing to Philemon.

In 1 Corinthians 4:15, Paul writes to the church at Corinth and says, "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." So in another way of saying it to the Corinthians, he said, "Just as you have a natural father and a natural mother and you're always indebted to them, so you have a spiritual father and as spiritual children you always have a debt to your spiritual fathers." He elaborates on this in writing to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:13. He says to esteem your pastors and "esteem them highly in love," now here it is, "because of their work." Their spiritual work for you puts you in a position of honoring and esteeming them. 1 Timothy 5:17, Paul is writing to Timothy as to how to set up the churches. He's telling Timothy how the churches should run and he says, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." The word "honor" here is "times" and "times" is the Greek word that was commonly used in this culture for "payment." It's payment of debt. And it was common in this culture for soldiers to receive double pay when they had an unusual or special assignment by their military commanders.

So here Paul in several different ways says there is a material indebtedness to God's ministers that you've incurred if they've been faithful to you. They have spiritual benefited you, you are to materially help and support them. And as I've told you many times, you guys function that way. I am, like Paul as he writes to the church at Philippi, well taken care of. I have more than just my needs because of your generous support and I'm here to tell you that's biblical good and right. I'm not going to stand up here with some false humility and say that it's wrong for you to somehow do this. No, in every case in the New Testament, that kind of heart and support for God's church and God's pastors is commended.

One scholar when he writes about 1 Timothy 5:17 where Paul says, "consider faithful ministers, especially those who work hard in preaching worthy of double honor," he says eight hours work for eight hours pay is not double honor. Now, you pretty much get these principles and you understand that this is not a woeful obligation that from your heart you want to take care, not just me but you take care of the whole staff in an excellent way and I thank God for that, but I'm going to tell you, you're the exception. Don't get too proud

about it, you're just normal. But I work with churches almost every week with pastors who are struggling because their churches don't get this. They put their pastors on kind of a salary and a support level that none of you would want to live under but because "he's spiritual, he's supposed to be okay with that." That is so foreign to Scripture. I'm in my 37th year and some time back if you had not chosen to take care of me financially the way you had, I would no longer be your pastor. I couldn't have taken that load and the other loads at the same time and I think that's the point. Faithful preaching and teaching has such a warfare, so many opposers, so many strife-spreaders, the last thing you need is to worry about is can I send my kids to college. So the point is, you've got to take that burden off of the man of God if you want him to be faithful long term because your soul's on the line if he doesn't preach faithfully. If he's burdened and stressed and discouraged, he doesn't do a good job in the pulpit. But it's the hardest thing.

Do you know why I think – are you listening to me – do you know why I think this is such a hard truth the church has to grasp? Are you listening to me? Because church members love money. It's their idol and they don't want the preacher to have any of their god, they want it all for them. You show me the verse in the New Testament that warns you not to be generous to your pastor. Show it to me. But I can show you many verses that warn you you'd better be generous to the man of God. Now we're not talking about Jimmy Swaggert and Jim Baker and air-conditioned doghouses. But be generous and joyous.

"Your spiritual debt," Paul says to Philemon, "is your greatest debt and, Philemon, you owe me even you yourself. Part of your spiritual debt, Philemon, is to be generous to the man of God who's been faithful to lead you to Christ and preach and teach and grow you in Christ." Now III. Christians should strive to be a benefit and a blessing to their ministers. Christians should strive to be a benefit and a blessing to your ministers.

In verse 20, Paul just very straightforwardly as if he's not been to the point very clearly already in verse 19, he says another thing in verse 20, "Yes, brother," that's Philemon, "let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ." Straightforward request, "Philemon, would you settle this whole thing right? And Philemon, here's what I want you to do: I want you to settle this with Onesimus for my benefit." For my benefit. Now understand, Philemon and Paul go back a long way. Philemon and Paul are tight. Paul knows he can trust Philemon's heart and so he doesn't have any problem with saying, "Philemon, I know you're dedicated to support my ministry." There is no telling how much financially Philemon's done for Paul's ministry already. So they've got a track record together. So he says, "Philemon, if somehow you're struggling with forgiving Onesimus, then take care of forgiving Onesimus for my benefit."

He uses the word "let it be a refreshing to me." It means, "give me rest." He's almost saying, "I'm under enough burdens, Philemon, can you not take this off of me? If you'll just take care of this. Yes, I know as far as the legal justice is served in this case, I know he owes you. I know all of that but would you just take care of this and take the burden off my shoulders? Help me in my ministry by taking care of this? Let it be a benefit to

me. Let it refresh me. Let it give me some rest," Paul says. Then he says, "refresh my heart in Christ." That's just my innermost being.

So by forgiving Onesimus' debt, recognizing that Onesimus is now a partner with Paul and receiving Onesimus as a brother, will lift a great burden off of Paul and will benefit Paul and his work greatly. How much thought and how much energy do you put into trying to be a benefit and a blessing to your pastors? Do you do that? Do you have any notion that you owe faithful ministers? Not just me, perhaps, others who have been in your life. You owe them even you yourselves. "Yeah, but if we start being too generous, if we start blessing them too much, you know, they might misuse it." You trust me, God knows how to humble his pastor. God knows how to bring him to his knees a lot better than you can do it. A lot better than you can do it.

My middle daughter is having twin baby girls. Pam and I this morning talked about going and getting B12 shots at the clinic. Literally, we did, didn't we, Pam? B12 shots. She might need to have three of them. I just need to go hunting for a couple of months or do something. No, I'm teasing, but do you know what? I saw the ladies of our church just jump at the chance to be a blessing to my little girl and it's been that way for decades. Anything and everything in my life and in my family's life, I saw a small army of people rise up and say, "We want to benefit and bless you, pastor." Now you listen to me: that will be charged to your account for good at the judgment seat of Christ. You've been good to your pastors. Now a lot of churches will say you're too good, but they don't know the Bible like you know the Bible. Then you get on your knees and say, "God, you keep that preacher right. We're going to do our part. We're going to do what you said, now you keep him right for us." I want you to pray that way. I might add on the end there, "But, Lord, as he's been at it almost four decades, don't be too hard on him in his last quarter."

Thank you that I can preach a text like this and I'm not going to back up on what it's saying. I'm not going to do it. You can call it what you want, I'm not going to back up. It's what the word of God teaches and we stand on it, amen? Period.

Real quick and I'm done. Can you listen to me for just a little bit longer? Sort of a summary here. Christianity does not require any specific form of government for it to flourish. Christianity does not require any specific form of government for it to flourish. We do believe and we know the Bible teaches personal property rights, we do believe and we know the Bible principles support a limited central government, but we also know that we can have the most ungodly, totalitarian, difficult, communist dictatorship and Christianity can thrive under it. Thrive under it. Go to communist China. They may be approaching 100 million Christians in the underground church in China. The more the communists try to stomp it out and rob people and control people and steal their personal property rights and take away their liberties, the more God's church has thrived in China. The church is more powerful than any form of government.

Now, while Christianity does not require a free market, capitalist society based on democratic republic principles, listen, Christian principles aid and bring virtue and success to a free market, capitalistic, representative democracy. In fact, there is no

freedom, there is no free market system that sustains very long without Christian virtues in the culture, and as a people lose Christianity, they will lose their liberties and freedoms. Every single time because there's not the inner restraint in men's hearts to make them behave, so then the people begin to put great emphasis on the government's control to cause people to behave right. When I was a boy, would you have ever thought that the federal government would get involved in bullies at school? Do you know what you did with bullies at school when I grew up? You whipped them and you got somebody to help you and it just kind of figured itself out. My point: yes, we need to get involved, some of you mommas need to stay at home and hush and let the men take care of some of this. We can fix some of this stuff. Some things ought to be dealt with the old-fashioned way. The government doesn't need to be involved in all this. I don't need to get on that again.

But a free market capitalistic system that functions under a representative democracy needs Christianity to flourish but Christianity does not need it to flourish.

2. Christians should be skeptical of governments gaining too much control over our lives and our properties. It's not their property, it's our property.

3. Christians have a responsibility to honor God's church and God's ministers and help one another with their wealth and this should all come from the heart.

4. Christians should pay their debts and not be freeloaders and carry their part of the load in the Christian community. That's really what Paul's saying here. He's saying to Philemon, "Philemon, do you not realize, yes, Onesimus owes you a debt but you ought to forgive him because you know you ought to carry part of this load here because you've received so much he hasn't received yet. You've been a Christian a lot longer, Philemon. So, Philemon, this is part of your load here. I'm putting part of it back on you.

5. Christians should strive to be a benefit and a blessing to their faithful ministers.

Now teach what I've just taught out in the world. Go teach it out there and see what you get. See what the reaction is. People would say, "Are you serious? Would you people really seriously believe that and live like that?" Yes. Do you know why? Because the Gospel changes everything. It's changed my heart. It's changed my viewpoint. Listen, it's changed what I love. It's changed who I want to love and who I want to support and how I want to support them. The Gospel has changed everything and here Paul is writing to Philemon, his old buddy, his old supporter, his friend he's known forever. He can count on Philemon and he says, "Philemon, the Gospel has changed you, the Gospel has changed Onesimus, the Gospel's going to change all of this and y'all can work this out in beautiful reconciliation and oneness and unity and let the whole church see how truly indeed once again the Gospel changes everything."

Are you listening to me this morning? Are you Gospel-changed? I didn't ask you did you join a church. I didn't ask you did you walk to the front one Sunday. I did not ask you did you repeat a prayer after an evangelist. That's all okay but that's not necessarily being changed. You can do that in your own human energy and never have a changed heart.

Have you been Gospel-changed because these truths are only lived out by Gospel-changed people. Charles Haddon Spurgeon used to say, "You know, there are people who come to our church unhumbled. They stay with us a while unhumbled and then they leave again unhumbled." Have you ever been humbled under the Gospel that, "Yes, I'm a sinner. I'm unworthy. God's wrath is all I deserve and I've received Jesus Christ to forgive me and become my Lord and my Savior." If that's happened, then these kind of truths start making sense to you.