

# It Changes the Heart

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Well, we come this morning to the last installment of the book of Philemon, this little short one chapter epistle. To be honest, I feel like I'm leaving an old friend. I've kind of grown fond of Onesimus and Philemon and the journey they are taking together spiritually, that is.

I do have a correction to make. I have erred in an assumption and I need to clear that up, not that it changes any doctrine or anything I've preached, but Philemon and Paul go back a long way together. You can tell by the way it is written that there is a great spiritual bond, trust, brotherhood between them, and scholars are pretty much conclusive this only could have happened if Philemon journeyed to Ephesus and was there under Paul's ministry and became close to Paul during Paul's three year ministry at Ephesus. I just assumed that Philemon's church was in or around the environs of Ephesus but I do not believe that's right. That's what I've been saying. I do believe the church is in Colossae, and so we don't know the timetable but for a long season Philemon likely lived in Ephesus, maybe he had a lot of business dealings there, we know he's a wealthy man, he's a man of means, he has slaves, but probably he went to Ephesus for a long season, was converted to Christ, matured in Christ under Paul's ministry, and then came back to Colossae and started or was a part of starting the church there.

Now we don't know if it's exactly the church that the letter of the Colossians is written to or not. It likely is. There is one scholar who argues and these guys are amazing, you know, they get paid these high salaries and they've got to study something, I guess, but one guy has pages about whether or not Philemon's church in the Colossae region was actually in a rural area outside the city proper and therefore was a separate local church from the church we have the book of Colossians written to. But say all that to say I was wrong to say it was in the area of Ephesus. It's most likely Colossae, all right? So the infallibility of the pope but not the infallibility of Jeff, all right? So I've made that correction and we're hopefully on good ground now.

Now let's look at these last verses. Let me go ahead and give an introduction in case you are new. The Apostle Paul is in prison. He's actually staying in a little prison hut outside of Nero's palace, something of a house arrest. He's chained to a praetorian guard but he has a lot of openness and access and he has a team of men who are there with him pretty much all the time, and from that setting, a man wanders up, I would assume, named

Onesimus, and Onesimus begins to hear the Gospel from the Apostle Paul's preaching and teaching and Onesimus is gloriously saved. And as Paul gets to know Onesimus, by the way, Onesimus becomes a great associate and helper to Paul there in his ministry, though he is having to minister from the Roman prison, and he learns, Paul learns from Onesimus that Onesimus is in fact a runaway slave. He's run away from his master, Philemon, and so, boy, the light is going off in Paul's mind, "Wait a minute, you're a runaway slave, you've come to faith in Christ, you've become a great blessing to me, but the master you ran away from is also a dear brother in Christ, a man who under my ministry started the church in Colossae, or a church in Colossae, and we've got to get all this fixed. We've got to get the great reconciliation." So Paul writes a letter, he gives it to Onesimus, and he says, "Now go back to Colossae, go back to Philemon, your master and the church that meets in his house, and give him this letter." Now we've known all through this letter Paul with great wisdom and care and deference and grace, begins to appeal to Philemon to receive Onesimus back, forgiving him, and even restoring him into fellowship as now a brother and no longer as a slave. So that's what we're doing, we're studying that very letter that Paul wrote, gave it to Onesimus and was given to Philemon and to the church that meets in his house.

Now we come to the end of it and we begin in verse 21 and we'll go through verse 25.

21 Having confidence in your obedience [this is Paul writing to Philemon], I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. 22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you. 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

I've entitled this last message the same thing I entitled the whole series "The Gospel Changes Everything." The Gospel changes everything. It changes the heart and I want to show you four ways we see the evidence, if you will, or the effects of a Gospel changed heart. Can I ask you as I begin this morning: has the Gospel changed you? I did not ask you have you prayed a prayer. That's important. I did not ask you did you walk to the front of a building. That's fine and good. I've asked you has the Gospel changed your heart? There is a mysterious part to the new birth. There is a mysterious part to Christian conversion that you can't bottle up and put a lid on that can and figure it out. It's beyond us. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "It's like the Spirit, the wind is like the Spirit. You don't know where it's coming from or where it's going, so is everyone," Jesus said, "who is born of the Spirit."

A changed heart. Notice first of all, it changes the impressions. I. The impressions of the heart. I invented a word here in that I said that once you are converted and you have a Gospel changed heart, your heart is now shepherdable. Your heart is now shepherdable. It can be shepherded because it's now a spiritual heart. The Bible speaks of the lost man, the man before conversion, that he has a heart of stone. You can't shepherded a stony heart, you can't guide a stony heart, you can't impress a stony heart, it's too hard, but when God

changes you through the Gospel and the power of the Spirit, your heart becomes flesh, the Bible says, not in a negative sense but it is permeable, it's impressionable. You can guide it and mold it and work it and move it in the right direction. Now, that's what Paul is doing as he's writing to Philemon, he's shepherding his heart. He's making an impression on Paul's heart to move him from viewing his runaway slave now returned named Onesimus as just another slave, but now in viewing him no longer as a slave but as a brother in Christ.

Now the way Paul handled this slave issue between Philemon, the master, and Onesimus, the slave, illustrates powerfully the superiority of the Gospel and the Spirit. I mean, Paul could have walked in and wielded the sword of his apostolic office and in cold authority could have demanded Philemon to emancipate Onesimus. He could have done that. He says it earlier in the letter, "I could order you to do this but," he says, "I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to do it because just ordering you in cold external force to do what's right" – listen – "does not change the heart. And now that you, Philemon, are a Christian and Onesimus is now a Christian, the Spirit of God can impress on your heart and change your heart on these things and then the external will take care of itself." So through the power of the Holy Spirit having already converted the man, Philemon, having already changed him and now through the Spirit's use of the counsel that Paul is giving him in this letter, Philemon's heart can be humbled and it can be won to the proper position. It can be shepherded because it's now impressionable.

Now as fathers and as parents and certainly as small group leaders or pastors in a church, this should be our *modus operandi*: whenever possible, we should try to gently and lovingly shepherd a person's heart to the right position. That's what Paul is doing here. Paul does not desire Philemon to conform to some austere mandate, some external force, yielding to the letter of Paul's instruction. As we know from 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul writes to the church at Corinth and said, "who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." So Paul says, "I'm not going to give you the letter of the law, Philemon. That's not where we need to come from as Christians. I want to be a tool in the Spirit's hands to impress your heart to the right thinking on this. I want you to change from the heart." You see, law keeping can be just simply external hoop jumping. My, have not our Baptist and evangelical churches made a mess with coercing people, if not manipulating people into jumping through hoops. "Jump through this hoop. Do this. Raise your hand. Go there. Now you're in, you jumped through the hoop." Never looking to see has there been a heart change? Has that mysterious work Jesus talked about, being born again, is there evidence of the new birth?

Well, Paul knew Onesimus had experienced the new birth, he knew Philemon had experienced the new birth and so he wants these brothers to get together now in a glorious reconciliation, a former slave, former master now to become equal brothers in Christ, no longer in master and slave relationship. Why? Because their hearts are different and they can be taught. You see, Spirit-born Christians have new hearts. They have new hearts that love God and new hearts that love God's law and new hearts that desire to keep God's law but from the heart. They have new motives for doing what is

right and new power to perform it. You see, the spirit behind our outward obedience is everything. Just because you might teach yourself to jump through certain hoops and do certain things doesn't make you a Christian. There has to be a changed heart and the motive of the heart is what matters to God. I'll be honest with you, there are people in our world who have moral, upstanding, ethical lives, perhaps more moral, perhaps more ethical, and perhaps more upstanding sometimes than a genuine believer, but they themselves are not believers at all because they have just learned to be disciplined, they come from a disciplined family line, they come from a moral and upstanding tradition, not necessarily because their hearts are changed and they love God. There is a huge difference between the two. As a matter of fact, there is an eternal difference.

So while God's law is always good, we have now a superior approach to serving God. It's not out of law, it's out of love from a changed heart. As a matter of fact, Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount that once you are really changed, you don't just strive to keep the law, from the heart you'll go above the law. Remember how he outlined it? He would say things like, "You have heard that it is said you should not commit murder." That's the law, you should not commit murder but he says, "But I say to you don't even hate in your heart." You are to be repentant and fighting at the heart level, not just on the external behavior level. That follows the heart. You are to do what the law says and then more. Then he said, "You've heard that it said you should not commit adultery." That's true. That's in the law, but he said, "But I say to you if you have lusted in your heart, you've committed adultery already." What's his point? The man of God, the woman of God fights at the heart level, not just to keep themselves out of trouble externally. Lost men can do that but we are changed from the heart. He said, "Someone may sue you for your shirt," he said, "give him your cloak also." Under grace with changed hearts, we don't just do what the law says because our hearts are different, we want to do even more. "If they ask you to carry their pack one mile," which was the law in Rome, if you saw a Roman soldier, it was your duty, your patriotic duty to help carry his pack. "If he asked you to carry it a mile," he said, "carry it two miles." You would do what other folks would do and then some because your heart has been changed. You're not just about the letter of the law. So Paul writes to Philemon and says, "You've heard, Philemon, you know, Philemon, I'm not going to order you in my apostolic authority to get this right. I want to shepherd your heart there because when the Gospel changes you, the impressions that mold your heart have changed. Now the spirit means something to you. Now the things of God means something to you. The truths of Scripture move you in ways you were not moved and were not changed before."

Now in verse 21 he says, "Having confidence in your obedience." Wait a minute, the word "obedience," now we've been saying all the way through Paul is not ordering Philemon to do this, he's trying to shepherd him there, but you see obedience here does not mean obedience to Paul's command. What Paul is saying there is, "I want you to be obedient to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in your heart right now." As Paul gets to the end of the letter, he is in effect saying, "By now the Spirit has spoken to you, Philemon, and several different ways. By now you know where you ought to be on this thing. So obey the Spirit."

You see in Christianity, we don't live as a church under blind submission to pastoral authority or some ecclesiastical authority but we live in intelligent conviction. Did you hear that? You do not live in obedience to blind submission, you live according to intelligent conviction. In other words, the word of God speaks to you. Your mind is informed by the truth. Your heart energized by the Holy Spirit affirms that truth so you say amen to your pastor as long he's leading in truth. Are you hearing me? It's intelligent conviction, not blind submission, and that's where Paul wants Philemon to be. "I don't want you to be a hoop jumper, Philemon. I don't want you to just do it because your apostle, your pastor ordered you to. I could do that," he says, "but I'm not going to. I want you from this new heart to make the change from the heart out."

Now, what's one of my favorite words? Balanced. There is a balance in Scripture. When you are raising children, there is a time when they're of the age when you just have to say, "Daddy said do it." Amen? Sometimes they're not old enough to get it, they're not old enough to understand, but as they grow older and you start seeing they are making wise decisions, they are understanding things, then you start to try to shepherd them from their hearts to make the right decisions. So it is with pastors, even the Apostle Paul. He wrote to the Corinthian church on one occasion and said, "Am I going to have to come and get a rod out and straighten you guys out?" Whoa, that doesn't sound like shepherding from the heart, that sounds like beating them in the body. Now his point was, "You guys are so immature, I'm going to have to forcefully get y'all to do some things until you mature enough that I can shepherd you to do the right things." So there is a balance from time to time. I'm one of those deeply greatly blessed pastors where you are an easy simple people to shepherd. Basically you say, "Pastor, if it's clear in here, we're on board," and that's just the way you are. And like I've told you many times, that's rare but don't get the big head, you're just acting normal. It's just that most churches are subnormal which makes you acting normal seem abnormal, but that's where we are. Intelligent conviction, not woeful or blind submission.

Now the godly wisdom of Paul has been seen throughout this letter as he does some creative and masterful things trying to get Philemon to this point. First of all, we remind ourselves Paul didn't exert his authority, we've talked about that. Secondly, we are watching him shepherd Philemon's heart and Paul uses wisdom and patience and care doing that. Thirdly, he's required Onesimus, the runaway slave, to go back to Philemon and get this right. Brothers ought to get together and figure things out, amen? If you belong to Christ, you ought to be able to resolve any conflict with a true brother in Christ. Period. You say, "Well, I don't know if we can work it out." Then get over yourself for Jesus' sake. That's what the Bible says. Instead of going to the law against a brother, just be defrauded first before you do that.

So Onesimus has got to get things right. Paul requires that. Another thing is, Paul brings to bear on Philemon's mind that Philemon owes Paul his very life. Remember as Onesimus is coming back, he's got the letter and in the letter Paul says, "Now Philemon, if Onesimus owes you anything," he probably owed him a lot by being a runaway slave and he probably robbed him when he left, he probably actually legally owes Philemon a lot materially, financially, but Paul says, "Now if Onesimus owes you, Philemon, I'll pay

for it. I'm writing with my own hand. I'll take care of it." Then Paul says, "But not to mention, Philemon, you owe me even your own self." What he means is, "You owe me, you yourself." His point is the idea, "Philemon, whatever other debts you have in life, you may have a house payment and a chariot payment, you may have a line of credit against your business, you may have a number of debts but beside all those as a Christian you've got a debt to your spiritual father, me, the Apostle Paul." What does that do? Here's what that does: when you realize the great debt you owe God and you owe to God's servants who faithfully give you the word of God, it brings a Gospel humility to bear in your heart that makes you real easy to get along with. Are you hearing me? It's just humbling. It's just, "How can I strut around, how can I stick my chest out about what I want and what I think is right when so much has been done for me that I don't deserve?" So he reminds Philemon, "Philemon, you're powerful, you're wealthy, the church meets in your house, you're able to own slaves." Not all of that is wrong. The slavery thing certainly was but you've got to understand these men were being disciplined out of their culture. It took a while for the church to get this right. "But nevertheless, Philemon, all that's true about you but you need to be Gospel humbled because whatever Onesimus owes you, it's not as much as you owe God and God's servants who have helped you."

Then also Paul addresses this not only to Philemon but to the whole church family so the whole church family can watch the working out of this glorious reconciliation between the runaway slave, Onesimus, and his master, Philemon. But one other thought and I want you to get this, one other thought here: Paul is not just wanting to emancipate Onesimus from his slavery to Philemon, he wants to emancipate Philemon from the slavery in his heart. I believe it's highly likely Paul with the wisdom he has, is a wise pastoral counselor and he says, yes, Onesimus has done wrong; yes, Onesimus robbed his master; yes, Onesimus ran away and that thing's got to get worked out and Philemon needs to forgive him and take him back as a brother now that they are brothers in Christ, but Philemon may have some pride, control and profit issues in his own heart, some strongholds in his own heart he needs to deal with. So in doing all of these things the way Paul is doing it and writing and counseling in these ways, yes, he wants to emancipate Onesimus but he wants Philemon to overcome the slavery in his own heart, the strongholds, the blind spots he may not be seeing. How many times do you counsel someone if you are a church leader, and they'll come in and maybe a brother and sister, it may be a family, it may be a married couple, and yes, this partner clearly outwardly is wrong, but in the counseling you find that there are some sins in the hearts of the other one that are not so apparent that are just as wrong and the heart issues need to be dealt with.

Well, what's the whole point here? He knows, Paul is writing to Philemon, he knows he has a changed heart because of the Gospel, the impressions of the heart are changed. "I can shepherd him. He's shepherdable. He has a spiritual heart." Now II. The Gospel changes everything, it changes the affections concerning the heart. The affections of the heart. Our affections after we are converted begin to be changed. Our heart passions, our warm feelings, our attachments begin to go toward other believers.

Notice how this comes out in verse 22, he says, "At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers," and here's the phrase that really jumps out, "I will be given to you." This whole thing just bleeds with deep intimacy, care and fellowship. "I hope I'll be given to being with you again. I'm coming to visit you," is what Paul is saying, and he's quite forward here. "Philemon, by the way, after all that I've said to you about all that you need to do and how you need to forgive Onesimus, and how you need to receive him back as a brother, how you need to view him as a partner in the Gospel now, and by the way, I'm coming soon and I'm going to stay at your house." Do you ever have a relative call and say, "Hey, I'm coming to town and by the way, I'm staying at your house"? That's what he does.

Quite forward here but I don't think so. This isn't very forward for someone to call or contact a man and say, "I'm staying at your house when I come to town," if that man owes you his very life. Are you hearing me, church? You see, Paul really believed Philemon owed him his life because Paul brought him the Gospel. Philemon really believed that he had that kind of debt to his spiritual father. So I'm convinced Philemon would have been offended to have ever even had the thought that Paul wouldn't feel welcome in his home, and if Paul had any hesitancy about thinking he was welcome, Philemon would have been offended by that. Why? The affections of the heart are changed by the Gospel. These men loved each other in Christ. They cared for each other in Christ. Nothing was too big, nothing was too much to ask to help the man of God, the Apostle Paul, when he came to town. "Staying in my house, no big deal. Sure you can."

So it speaks of how the affections of our hearts are changed toward the brethren when we are saved, but also I think there is something else going on here when Paul says, "Philemon, now I've told you all of these things and I'm shepherding your heart," he didn't say it that way but we're saying it that way, "I'm shepherding your heart to this right viewpoint of Onesimus that now that he's back to you, and by the way, I'm coming to town," and Paul is saying, "I'm going to be there personally kind of to check out and see if you did this. I expect when I get there you will have, Philemon, you will have handled this whole case biblically, spiritually, correctly, satisfactorily." And he says, "Pray that we'll get together soon." You know, it's kind of like, this happens and it aggravates me when it happens. It really does. I'll walk up in a setting and somebody will say, "That's the preacher, act right. There's the preacher, don't do that," as if God's not omnipresent and he doesn't know everything you're saying and doing and thinking about before I walk up. By the way, I'm not God. Do you know what I'm thinking? "I'm the preacher, I better act right." That's what I'm thinking. We're all sinners saved by grace, amen? Now that's not all bad. There is a balance here, amen? There is a goodness to your spiritual leader, small group leader, deacon, whoever it may be, to remind us we all ought to be serving the Lord. It's not all bad and I think Paul by going there is kind of giving a little accountability to Philemon to say, "I hope this is all satisfactorily handled by the time I get there." But more than anything, you see the sweetness of the bond that only spiritual men have together. "I hope I will be given to you. I hope we can have that sweet fellowship with you and the church in your house that we've all longed to have together."

Here's what you need to think about: if you were in a destitute situation where strong, clear, biblical preaching is rare and it's getting more more rare, and you had that for years and then you didn't have it for a while, you'd be thrilled if whoever was your pastor came back and was with you again. It would be a sweet and blessed thing. So we see the affections of their hearts so strongly here, how sweet it is when brothers dwell together in unity, the Bible says. That means the unity of the Spirit. Not just getting along. Football teams can get along. That's not the unity the Bible talks about. It's deeper than that. It's greater than that. It's more powerful than that. It's men whose hearts have been broken and humbled and they are grateful that God would save them and they find that bond because they are all together in this. The affections of the heart are changed but even sweeter when a spiritual father, Paul, is reunited with his spiritual children, Philemon and his family and the church that meets in his house.

III. The Gospel changes everything, it changes the protections of the heart. There are protections that God gives us to hold our hearts up, to keep our hearts from being downcast, to keep us from being too discouraged, and to keep us from coming to total despair in our pilgrimage for Christ.

We see this in Paul's chain gang. Paul had a chain gang. Here they are, verse 23, Epaphras. Verse 24, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. "Wait a minute, fellow workers, where are you working, Paul?" Well, I'm working in jail right now. These guys hung out with Paul in jail. They were those like 2 Timothy 1:16 speaks of, "the house of Onesiphorus," because why? "He often refresh me and was not ashamed of my chains." They are not ashamed of my chains. Paul said, "I found as I go in ministry that how some guys come along and say, 'Hey, we're with you, Paul. Let's get this work done. Let's preach the Gospel. Let's plant churches.'" That's probably when he was staying at maybe Gaius' house or Lydia's house or wherever he stayed when the church at Philippi gave him such abundant love offerings. But then that changed and his next stay was in Nero's prison and some began to fall away.

So Paul was very grateful. He had these faithful, what I'd call, pillars of the heart, these men that came alongside and ministered to him. This was the inner circle of the band of brothers who stayed by Paul in his imprisonment. These men likely stayed with him, taking different shifts, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, just to love and encourage the man of God. Paul's chain gang. Certainly, they all got together during the daytime and probably many others. We know Onesimus was impacted probably there and many others come and hear Paul preach and teach though he is chained up there to that Roman praetorian guard.

Now the first pillar here is Epaphras. He said, "Epaphras is my fellow prisoner." There is speculation that it could have been that Epaphras hung around so much the Romans finally got aggravated about it and said, "We're going to lock you up too. You like being around this guy in chains? We're going to lock you up too." Now that could have happened. We don't know for sure but one thing is for certain, we do know Epaphras was a primary player in the planting of the church in Colossae. He probably was assisted by Philemon in that work, to some degree one to another, but the point is Epaphras is a long



time faithful servant. He speaks of the pillar of steadfastness. The pillar of steadfastness. Paul said, "I'm here in prison. It's tough. I get discouraged. I get down but I've got this pillar of steadfastness named Epaphras who's with me and it holds my heart up from despair."

Epaphras, a pillar of steadfastness and then there is Mark. You remember him, John Mark? This is most likely the John Mark whom the Apostle Paul said at one time, "You can't go with me on any more missionary journeys. I can't count on you. You're not dependable and you're not faithful." So Paul and Barnabas separated from John Mark, but now John Mark has been reunited to Paul. Reunited and it feels so good. Do you know why that song rings a bell? Because it does feel good. It was a great pillar of encouragement to the heart of Paul at how John Mark showed back up humbled and repentant and saying, "I've grown. I've matured. I'm not so wishy-washy. I'm not chasing this and that and this and that. Paul, I know you're preaching the truth. Can I join back in?" And Paul said, "Yes. You're back in." And he was the pillar of renewed fellowship.

I can't tell you how many times through the years that I've had folks who went AWOL on us, or maybe on me personally, and in one form or fashion, not that they all rejoined Grace Life Church, but you just wouldn't believe the people I contact, I should say contact me, and we've built a fellowship and there is a reuniting and a reaffirming of what we're about here at Grace Life through that and it's a pillar of encouragement, a pillar of strength in a man's heart. Of course, that's true in your family, is it not? You have a wayward son or a family member and they come back home and they get things right, is that not a pillar of encouragement holding up your heart? You say, "Man, I was so downcast but now I'm lifted back up in my heart."

John Mark is a pillar of strength, a renewal of fellowship. Then there is Aristarchus. Aristarchus was the man in Acts 19:29, I think we'll have it on the screen, "The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia." Here's the point here: these guys were mad at Paul because he had hurt their business. He had been preaching that you don't worship idols and they made fortunes making little idols, metal idols principally of the Temple of Diana or of Diana herself, an idol they worshiped in ancient Greece and in Rome, and when Paul would preach, people would start throwing their idols away and wouldn't give these men anymore business so they were enraged and mad. They weren't just trying to run Paul out of town, they were trying to kill him and Paul says, "This Aristarchus guy, threw fear to the wind, threw the preservation of his own life to the wind, and he stood with me to protect me." Aristarchus for the Gospel and for the man of God was a pillar of courage. As Paul is sitting there imprisoned, his mind probably wandered to what's going to happen, but then he'd think about Aristarchus and think, "Well, I don't know what's going to happen but I know one thing, that brother is going to stand with me. He's going to be with me." He's a pillar of courage. What a strengthening, what an uplifting to the heart of Paul to have a man of courage with him like that.

Then there is Luke, Luke the beloved physician. How important Luke was to Paul spiritually, emotionally and of course physically. Now we know quite clearly that Paul's health was failing due to the stress and the rigors of ministry life, but he had this faithful physician there to give him personal care and personal encouragement. Luke was a pillar of personal care. My goodness, isn't it good to have that soul around that is just gifted with the gift of mercy. Not everybody has it but some have a great gift of mercy and it just doesn't drain them and they are fulfilled in caring for others. This beloved physician stayed with Paul and was there to help him and care for him personally. So as Paul's heart would tend to be downcast, he'd remember, "I've got a pillar of personal care," the beloved physician, Luke. By the way, Luke wrote Philemon as Paul dictated it to him.

Then there is Demas. I saved him for last. Demas. Demas, unfortunately, was a memorial of disappointment. Jesus had his impostor in his inner circle, Judas Iscariot, and Demas was the Apostle Paul's Judas Iscariot. Looked great. Looked upstanding. Sounded spiritual. Looked like a warrior for God. Committed. Faithful. Then betrayed. In 2 Timothy 4:10 Paul writes to Timothy and says, "for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia." I call Demas the pillar of confirmed abandonment. "What do you mean, pastor, confirmed abandonment?" Are you listening to me? In anything that's real, there will be those who join in only to be exposed as not with you. How many of you men have had a business up and running and you had an employee and you just thought this guy is solid, and you disciplined him and you trained him and you blessed him and you helped him only to find out he left on you? He just bailed out on your business and then some things come out on his life and his character and you think, "Aha, it was a good thing he left." Well, that happens in ministry and that happens in churches where there are those who bail out on you and you think, "What's wrong? Why would they leave? What is the problem here?" Only to realize later, as John wrote, "they went out from us because they were not really of us. Had they been of us, they would have stayed with us," John writes, "but they went out from us that it might be shown that all are not really of us." Here's what I'm saying: the confirmation of a true work of God is an occasional abandonment by one who looks solid.

Now this is old news to Grace Life Church. Woe to that minister who tells me and I counsel with a bunch of them these days, "Pastor, it's all great. They all love me. They're all with me." How long have you been there? How long have you been preaching the word? How long have you been functioning in your church life on the word? Six months? Call me when in your 37<sup>th</sup> and tell me how it has gone. Look, every faithful minister will know what I'm talking about. When some leave you, it's an affirmation God is with you. Judas would have never left Jesus if Jesus was a phony and a fraud but he was the real thing and Judas couldn't stay with him. Demas would have never left Paul if Paul were a phony and a fraud but he was the real thing and Demas couldn't handle it very long. True ministry and a true church, a Gospel ministry eventually exposes everything.

But all of these men were Gospel changed men, except of course for Demas. All of these men, these pillars who supported Paul, had known worldly prominence but then the Gospel had changed them and one distinct change in these men's lives was that they

threw reputation, they threw pride, they threw self-preservation aside and they devoted themselves to serve the Apostle Paul while he was incarcerated in Nero's prison. Jesus taught us that Christians will care for each other and true believers are shown to be true believers by how they care for one another in times of severe persecution. We're getting there in America. We're going fast, are we not? I read an article this week on how long can I still be allowed to be a Christian. Would we have ever thought we would come to that in America? Well, when persecution comes and believers probably spiritual leaders, pastors are really persecuted, true believers will be shown to be true believers by whether or not they stand with and support those persecuted brethren.

And that's exactly what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 25. I'm going to read it quickly. In Matthew 25, a text that the liberals pervert because they want this text to mean that we are to be ministering to all people equally in the world and when we care for all people equally in the world, then we are pleasing to Jesus. That's not what is being taught here. This is a teaching about how you care for true believers during times of severe persecution. Verse 31, Matthew 25, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom,'" don't miss this next phrase, "prepared for you," when you believed in Jesus? No. "Prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Verse 35, "For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat," that means hungry from being persecuted and not being able to get a job and not being able to find food, but when you saw a Christian that way, you gave him something to eat. "I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink," thirsty because of the persecution. "I was a stranger, and you invited Me in," you had nowhere to live because of the persecution but you let me in your house. "Naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me." Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers,' not people in the world, Christian brothers, "brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." Christians are shown to be real in times of persecution because they will care for their brothers who are persecuted, or sisters.

Paul's persecuted. He's in a jail and he said, "I have these brothers, these pillars of encouragement with me. They are the real deal. Well, there was one, Demas. He didn't hold out but the rest of them have been solid." God gives you encouragements in the journey. Now some of you are sitting here this morning and you say, "Pastor, I'm right at the edge in total despair. I'm right at the edge of complete discouragement." You listen to me: you love Jesus, you sing to Jesus, you read his word, you come to church, and right around the next corner God has for you a pillar of encouragement. I don't know what it's going to be like but he has one for you. For Paul it was these dear men but he has them for his dear children.

I wrote in my notes how that even Demas was a Gospel changed man. You say, "Wait a minute, Demas was an impostor. Demas abandoned Paul. Demas was shown to be something that he's not. What do you mean Demas?" He was changed. You see, all the other guys were changed forward, they are changed to be more Christlike, to have new hearts that are shepherdable by the Spirit, to have new hearts that God can work in and grow them, but Demas was changed not forward but backward. He was changed back to what he really is. He was exposed to be the pretender that he really is and really was. Demas was a self-made Christian, not a Spirit-made, born-again man. He in his own strength put on an outward façade of Christianity and like a cheap paint job, it washed away and faded. Yes, he was changed back under Gospel ministry. The counterfeits are always exposed, the mask is removed and they are changed back to what they really are. You see, the Gospel changes everything, even the pretender is exposed and he is changed by being unveiled as a confident.

4. The Gospel changes everything, it changes the heart's direction. One final word and this is brief, back to Philemon, verse 25, it changes the heart's direction. That is, we now are going in the direction of progressive sanctification and that's what the apostle says in verse 25 when he says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." What he's saying is, "May you be wherever you are in Christ, may God's grace continue so you'll continue on from the spirit man out. Grace be with your spirit from the inner man out but you continue to be changed and then your life will be changed, and specifically Philemon, the old slave master is going to be changed from the heart out."

Now my question to you this Sunday morning is this: have you been Gospel changed? John Wesley, the great Methodist evangelist and church planter, about his favorite phrase was, "You must be born again." Do you know why he said that? He was preaching to people who in the Anglican church had all been sprinkled as babies and all felt they were okay and John Wesley, his brother, George Whitefield and other associates, went around the continental United States and all over Western Europe preaching to people saying, "That's not enough. Have you been born again? Has there been a spiritual change?" Have you been Gospel changed like Epaphras was Gospel changed? Like Aristarchus was Gospel changed? Like Luke was Gospel changed? Like John Mark was Gospel changed? Like Onesimus, the slave, was Gospel changed? And like Philemon, the man Paul is writing to, was Gospel changed?

"Pastor, how do I know I have been Gospel changed?" Two clear things: there has been wrought upon you a deep awareness of your sinfulness before a holy God, that you are undone, you're unclean, you don't measure up, and that by any righteous standard he ought to crush you in wrath. Only the Spirit can bring a proud man to say, "That's true of me. That's me. I'm not a self-made man, I'm a self-made failure. And standing alone, I stand crushed before a holy God. And I know that's true of me, pastor. I know that's true." That's the work of the Holy Spirit. No man can do that, only the Spirit can do that. And then equal to that, even greater than that, I've come to put my total confidence in Jesus Christ and his death for me alone to give me that right standing before a holy God.

You listen to me, you don't come to God with promises, you don't come to God with good works or a new start or a new ethic – listen to me – you come to God bankrupt. "I come to you, the wretch that I am, and I put all my confidence in this expiring Savior on the cross, and Jesus if you don't save me, I'm lost forever." But I'm telling you, are you listening to me this morning, I'm telling you: he who believes in him will not be disappointed. I don't care where you've been, what you've done, how far down, how long, how ugly, how vile, how wicked. If we could put on this screen your thoughts this past week, you'd never come back into town. But God will forgive you completely, permanently, for time and eternity through the merits of his precious Son Jesus Christ.

Have you been Gospel changed? I've see my sin and I know I'm undone but my confidence is in Jesus Christ. "Oh, come ye sinners, seek his grace whose wrath you cannot bear. Flee to the shelter of his cross and find salvation there." He will save you. Look, look, look to Jesus. He will save you. Maybe you're like John Mark, maybe you've drifted around and piddled around and been full of yourself and you say, "I need to come home. I need to get back to serving God. I need to get back to being faithful." We had a family who left us years ago and went to a cool church, literally this is what they told me, literally, they said, "One weekend we were out with our buddies riding motorcycles, drinking long neck Budweisers, and we looked at each other and said, 'What are we doing?'" And they came back to Grace Life Church. I'm not saying everybody is supposed to come back to Grace Life Church, God's got other churches, but here's what I'm saying: God is the God of the second chance and the third chance and the 100<sup>th</sup> chance.