



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## **Redemption, Part 4**

Matthew 19:27, 29, (NASB) "Then Peter answered and said to Him, 'Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?' And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you... everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life."

Reflecting on all that the Christian has received in Christ by grace, Paul said:

Romans 11:33, (NASB), "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

1 Corinthians 2:9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Ephesians 3:20, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."

Each passage proclaims the same message: that accompanying salvation is unimaginable blessings. Most come to Christ that they might not perish but then they discover that they have received far more than just deliverance from wrath!

AMAZING!

And yet, how could everything when it comes to God's kingdom NOT be amazing?

We're dealing with an infinite and eternal Being. Thus if He deigns to bless ones who are finite and temporal, that blessing will necessarily be "abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think!"

Our text could be lumped with the many other passages which speak of God blessing us beyond our comprehension. Paul here has penned a letter to Philemon regarding one of his runaway slaves, Onesimus.

See, God brought redemption to this runaway; a redemption which radically altered his life and his relationships. Now as we have seen, the text before us outlines the many changes which resulted from Onesimus' redemption. And yet, as this passage is inspired by the Spirit of God, we understand that herein also is a picture of the redemption each of us has received in Christ at the cross!

We are looking at this passage with one eye on the consequences which arose on account of Onesimus' redemption \*\*but also with\*\* one eye on the glorious consequences arising from our own redemption in Christ.

Thus far we have seen three consequences which flow from redemption:

- It Turns Criminals into Children, v. 10.
- It Changes "Uselessness" into Usefulness, v. 11.
- It Makes the Enemy into a Close Friend, v. 12.

### Redemption Creates Ambassadors

We will pick it up where we left off last time; notice fourthly: redemption creates ambassadors.

Philemon 1:12-13, "Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels. Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.<sup>1</sup>"

It is not at all apparent in the English, but in the Greek Paul is emphasizing the fact that he himself was the one who wanted to keep Onesimus in Rome; the "I" is emphatic. See, it just wasn't Onesimus who wanted to stay in Rome, which would have been understandable since going back home meant owning up to his past indiscretions and so possibly facing execution, but Paul also wanted him to stay; in fact, apparently it was the Apostle who was the driving force here.

This only makes sense since Onesimus had become "very dear to him." Onesimus was Paul's disciple which meant that Paul viewed him with much the same affection that a father would a child. And Onesimus also was Paul's heart which meant that a part of the Apostle now lived and died with Onesimus. So it was only natural that Paul would have wanted someone so dear to him to stay with him. But then again, maybe not?

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<sup>1</sup> Philemon 1:12-13 (NASB), "I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel."

When we look at Paul's practice, what he does here is an oddity. In fact Paul was quick to launch Christians, in fact much younger than Onesimus. For example think of the Thessalonians whom Paul loved! <sup>2</sup> Paul wasn't in this city but for a moment before he left them. Then there are the Philippians and the churches in Galatia. With each church, Paul was used by God to evangelize the town and then install elders. After this, Paul was on to the next field of ministry. It was indeed rare that there was a disciple who stayed with Paul and so sat under his teaching for any length of time.

But also let us think of Christ. Yes, He spent three years with twelve disciples but the rest of those saved during His first advent (baby Christians in a hostile world) Christ expected much by way of ministry. For example,

Mark 5:18-20, "And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel."

his is not to say that we shouldn't disciple young converts.

1 Corinthians 3:6 (NASB), "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth."

2 Timothy 2:2, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

Ephesians 4:11-12, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

The tendency during the Second Great Awakening to convert a man, anoint him to preach, and then send him out to minister counters these Biblical admonitions and practices. Indeed! Ministry requires discipleship and learning when it comes to a new convert. Yet when it came to Paul's ministry, again this is something he rarely did.

Why then did Paul want so strongly to keep Onesimus there in Rome? Why is Paul emphasizing the fact that it was HE the Apostle who didn't want Onesimus to return to Colossae?

Paul is emphasizing the redemption of Christ, Onesimus became something he wasn't before because of this redemption.

Philemon 1:13, "Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered<sup>3</sup> unto me in the bonds of the gospel."

Do you see it?

It wasn't the love-tie which had clearly developed between Paul and Onesimus which made it difficult for Paul to send this man back to Colossae. It was on account of what Onesimus had become through

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<sup>2</sup> Compare 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

<sup>3</sup> διακονεω diakoneo

redemption; a minister!

The Greek word for *minister* is the same word from which we get the word *deacon*. However, this term goes way beyond our understanding of the word *deacon*. The concept of *ministering* is expressed in the Greek by many words each with its own emphasis.

- δουλεύω means to serve as a slave, with a stress on subjection.
- θεραπεύω emphasizes a willingness for service and the respect and concern thereby expressed (esp. towards God).
- λατρεύω was used of the service of a priest.
- λειτουργέω of the work of service in the Kingdom of God/worship.

As distinct from all these terms, this word rendered *ministered* has the special quality of indicating very personally the service rendered to another. In other words, it emphasized the concept of a service of love;<sup>4</sup> in contrast to what is commonly understood today as the emphasis of this term being that of physical labor/the waiting on of tables. Now certainly a focus of this “service of love” was attending to the physical needs of an individual.<sup>5</sup> However the word is not so narrow in its use in the Bible:

- The exercise of any and every spiritual gift- which would include such things as preaching, evangelizing, shepherding, and the like is said to be a work of service/διακονέω (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 12:4ff).
- The work of Timothy (who was a pastor), Erastus, and Onesiphorus was the work of service (Acts 19:22; 2 Timothy 1:18).
- The prophetic work as well as the apostolic work was described as a work of service (1 Peter 1:12; 2 Corinthians 3:3).
- Preaching was and is a work of service (Acts 6:4) such that our ministry/διακονία is the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

From all of this we conclude that housed in the word Paul used here for *minister* is all that is implied in gospel ministry; including diaconal care, pastoral oversight, the building up of another, discipleship, and encouragement.<sup>6</sup>

With this we understand why Paul wanted Onesimus to stay in Rome. The man was an effective tool in the hand of God when it came to encouraging, helping, and attending to the needs of Paul as the Apostle labored in the Kingdom of God. In other words, it wasn't a selfish motive that firmly held Paul's grip on Onesimus; and it wasn't even love for the man (though Paul loved him). Rather it was that Onesimus had become a vital member of God's Kingdom work in Rome. Again, look at Philemon 1:13. Paul wished to keep Onesimus with him in order that

Philemon 1:13, “Whom I would have retained with me, **that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.**”

If you think about it, this is amazing! Our world and church culture tends to keep children as children... for a long time. Yet such was NOT the case in the first century church. Converts were expected to

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Geoffrey Bromiley, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> Compare also Luke 17:8 and Acts 6:2

<sup>6</sup> That's not to say that the word couldn't just reference someone who attended to the physical needs of another, as in the case of Phoebe, Romans 16:1.

- Serve.
- Minister.
- Evangelize.
- Encourage.
- Build up and strengthen the body of Christ.
- Build up and strengthen apostles and elders!

Such was the expectation and exhortation of the early church. And such is what is expected of every one.

- Who here in Christ is disqualified from this calling?
- Who here ought NOT to endeavor to encourage another brother or sister?
- What chain is there to hold you back?

One of my favorite verses when it comes to the pastoral ministry of the church is Galatians 6:1. Listen to the text:

Galatians 6:1 (NASB), “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

What qualification does this text prescribe for the ministry of caring for one another?

The only qualification is that the child of God be, “spiritual.” The word in the Greek references NOT a spiritually mature individual BUT one who at that moment is submitting to God in His word. In other words, it doesn’t matter how long you’ve been a Christian, provided you yourself are submitting to the word, you NOT ONLY are qualified, BUT it is expected that you minister.

So

- Young person, you have no excuse.
- Old person, you have no excuse.
- New convert... man... woman... visiting brother or sister... YOU HAVE NO EXCUSE!

The expectation when it comes to caring for the local body of Christ is that ALL are involved. This was the case with Onesimus in Rome. God used him as a buttress or support in the outworking of Paul’s ministry. And yet the text doesn’t stop here. Paul indicates that the ministry of Onesimus had one more characteristic, a characteristic which reveals the fourth consequence of redemption.

Philemon 1:13, “Whom I would have retained with me, **that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.**”

This is another interesting statement. See Paul is fantasizing here; notice, “whom I wished...” or “...whom I should have liked to keep with me.” Truly, for a time Paul found himself dreaming<sup>7</sup> on account of the claim that Philemon had on Onesimus. As a slave owner, Philemon could have sent Onesimus to do any number of things *in his stead*.

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<sup>7</sup> Such is the nuance of the tense of “wished”- as an imperfect it describes a wish which Paul felt for a time.

- He could have brokered a trade agreement.
- He could have established a merchant contract.
- He could have called the terms of a debt.
- And a thousand other things. All he'd need is Philemon's seal and Onesimus, though a slave, would have been accepted as Philemon himself.

In light of this and Paul's close relationship with Philemon, whence Onesimus was converted and Paul learned of his relationship to Philemon, Paul knew that if Philemon were in the know he no doubt would have commissioned Onesimus to serve in his own behalf when it came to the work in Rome. That is what Paul is fantasizing about here; Onesimus laboring out of love<sup>8</sup> with the Apostle in Rome as one commissioned by Philemon.

That this was Paul's dream is clearly seen in the next statement.

Philemon 1:14, "**But without thy mind would I do nothing**; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly."

Paul's dream was just that, a dream. It was not a reality and could not be a reality until Philemon and Onesimus first were reconciled. Then and only then, could Onesimus fulfill any desire that might be lacking in Philemon.

Yet for our sakes and purposes, I want you to notice that the mere fact that Paul dreamt of a situation where Philemon had commissioned Onesimus to serve in Rome as a part of Paul's ministry team illustrates/demonstrates the glorious possibility that Onesimus' conversion presented both to Paul and Philemon. Onesimus could have served as Philemon's Ambassador! Such is another glorious consequence of redemption!

You say, "Wait a minute! Onesimus could serve as Philemon's Ambassador NOT because he was redeemed, BUT because he was his slave!"

This is only *partly* true. It was due to his slavery that Onesimus could serve in Philemon's stead. Yet it was due to his redemption that Onesimus could serve in Philemon's stead when it came to the outworking of the Kingdom of God in Rome. We have an imperfect picture here!

Yet I want you to notice that the picture is NOT imperfect when it comes to the Kingdom of God.

What by virtue of your Redemption have you become by grace?

You have become SLAVES and so SERVANTS of God! Paul revealed this to Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:6, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister [servant, slave] of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained."

Paul also gave this truth to the church in Rome; that all in Christ are slaves.

Romans 6:16, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are

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<sup>8</sup> Again, think of the connotation of διακονέω/διακονία.

to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"

Truly in Christ we have become slaves of righteousness, and so slaves of Christ! So the question is this: Would God ever send us in His behalf unto the establishing or building up of His Kingdom? As Paul dreamt of Philemon using Onesimus as an ambassador, would God ever use us as Ambassadors in His Kingdom?

Indeed! He not only has in the past, but this day He still has His ambassadors! Paul appealed to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 6:19-20, "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

To be sure, the title as used by Paul here references the fact that he had a formal calling by God as an elder and an apostle to serve in Christ's kingdom and such is the case for any preacher of the gospel. Yet is this expression limited only to an ordained man?

Hardly! For Paul turned right around and used this very same term quite broadly<sup>9</sup> in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 5:20, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

What has Redemption made you this day?

Nothing less than an Ambassador of Christ! Christ taught this to the early church:

John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

Referencing the relationship the child of God has in Christ, or Lord made this statement:

Matthew 25:40, "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Truly brothers and sisters

- We are Christ's hands.
- We are His eyes.
- We are His feet.
- We are His heart.

As such, we serve mindful of the fact that everywhere we go, we bring Christ!

2 Corinthians 2:15, "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in

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<sup>9</sup> N.B. the context, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. Paul's use of "we" throughout Corinthians largely included the Corinthians. When he wanted to speak only of himself he used "I" (cf. 2:1-4). Otherwise, Paul's "we" clearly had the Corinthians in mind.

them that perish.”

And thus resting on each and every one of our shoulders this day is the calling given to the church.

Matthew 28:18-19, “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

Brothers and sisters, redemption has made us ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ which means our business this morning, this day, and every day is NOT leaving a great impression, BUT leaving Christ. It is NOT climbing up the ladder of success, BUT having the mind of Christ who humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross. It is NOT being

- Noticed.
- Loved.
- Fulfilled.
- Exalted.

BUT being all things to all people that through us Christ might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Don't miss it, by definition an Ambassador represents the one(s) who sent him and so speaks on their behalf. The goal never is to advance their own agenda, but that of the agency that sent them.

It is sort of like preaching. When I was in seminary the last class I took in Homiletics was on the *delivery* of sermons. And what I was taught is that great delivery disappears. When a great sermon is delivered well the people walk away having gazed upon the face of Christ and nothing else.

In contrast, when a congregation walks away having noticed the preacher, his cadence, his dress, his humor, and the like, a cardinal violation has taken place. He preacher got in the way of the people's line of sight! Rather than gazing upon Christ, they gazed upon the messenger!

As Ambassadors we ought also to share the concern of the preacher. It is not our agenda that ought to be seen and heard, but that of Christ's. It is not our glory that ought to be seen, but that of Christ's. Never do we want to upstage our Lord. He is what we are after; He is what we are about!

I love John's response when his disciples said that the recent Nielsen Ratings showed that the Baptizer's popularity was sagging.

John 3:29-30, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

In other words, you don't go to a wedding to see the attendants; in fact, good ones aren't even seen. They stand on the side and privately rejoice. In light of what we have seen this morning, what ought we to do? How do we apply this text?

As Ambassadors we must live so that others might know the peace of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:20, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us:



we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

The calling of an Ambassador of Christ is to do God's work in God's way. As such they understand that their purpose and place in the kingdom of God revolves around the blessing the body of Christ; bearing each other's burdens, engaging culture; sharing of the hope that lies within them. Evidently it was that in which Onesimus participated in at Rome on behalf of Philemon. And it is that in which we must participate as ambassadors of Christ! As ambassadors we also must know that to us belongs the greatest privilege the world has ever known! James Meikle (1730-1799) put it this way:

"He who bears a commission from his king, that is, a noble, an ambassador, or a minister of state- is accounted a great man. Now, if being near the throne, and conversant with the king, makes a man great, clothes him with renown, procures him reverence and respect, loads him with popular applause, and clothes him with splendor and pomp; with how much more divine and durable honor is the saint aggrandized, who, though alone from the world, dwells with God; and though not known among the busy crowd, resides near to God's throne! The high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, gives his royal assent to their petitions, and will not deny them. Yes, 'his secret is with those who fear him, and he will show them his covenant.' This is greatness indeed, to be in favor with him who is a terror to kings; with him to whom kings and their subjects are less than nothing, and vanity."<sup>10</sup>

As redemption makes us Ambassadors of Christ, so it also has given us the greatest privilege the world could ever know. We have access to God through Christ such that we can know His mind and enjoy His glory, grace, and love. Indeed! The world may have its superstars, but our inheritance is none-other than Christ Himself!

Such is the glorious calling and Consequence which results from our Redemption in Christ.

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in his sermon titled, "Solitude Sweetened."

## **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

### **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 25, 2008. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church