

Yet for love's sake (Quality: Good)

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- [0 : 00] In dependence upon the Lord for all needed help, I will venture to draw your prayerful attention to the epistle to Philemon and a part of verse 9.
- The epistle to Philemon, verse 9, and the first four words, yet for love's sake.
- Our text tonight is taken from this little epistle that was written by the Apostle Paul to Philemon.
- An epistle, as you know, is a letter. And this letter, though a short one, is a very precious one.
- It is so very, very precious because it is full of the love of Jesus Christ.
- [1 : 41] We all receive letters. Some are formal. Some are loving.
- Some express prayerful good wishes to us. Some are spiritual. Some letters are full of gracious counsel.
- And some letters, alas, can be very cruel and can be very unkind.
- I want you, dear children and young people, to try and listen for a moment or two. I want to speak first about letters.
- And God's word tells us that a Christian, a believer in Jesus, is like a letter.
- [2 : 53] A letter that is open. A letter that is read of all who can see it.
- I wonder what the world and what God's people read in us. What kind of a letter is displayed in our lives.
- The Apostle, as he was writing the second letter to the Corinthians, says this. Do we begin again to commend ourselves?
- Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you? Or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men.
- It appears to have been the custom in the early church that where a church sent forth a servant of God, unknown to other churches, that that servant of God received a letter of commendation.
- [4 : 13] Now, Paul, in all humility here, says that he had no need of such a letter of commendation, for surely he was so well known among the Corinthian believers, and indeed that his letters were these Corinthian believers.
- As he said, ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men. In the first letter to the Corinthian church, he says this.
- Are ye not my work in the law? Meaning this.
- He had no need of the letter of authority by any church now, because this had been proved beyond doubt, as these believers, sinners called out of darkness into light from idolatry to serve the living Christ, were now, as it were, the seal of his apostleship, were now those epistles that lives could be read by all people.

People looking upon these true believers could see very clearly the work of God's grace in their heart, revealed in their lives to the praise of God.

[6 : 03] Now, what kind of a letter is our life? Many letters we receive, there's nothing spiritual in them.

Needful, yes. Business, light, yes. But nothing about God. Nothing about Christ. Many people's lives are like that.

They may be, and it's a good thing that they are, open and honest and reasonably, as we say, upright morally. Not sinless, of course.

But there's nothing about God. No word of God. Nothing about God. Is your life like that?

Do people read your life like a letter and say, well, I'm very sad, but I can't see in that life any evidence of the work of grace begun?

[7 : 14] Or is your life a letter that speaks of Jesus, speaks of love?

Is it that life that men take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus? Jesus is seen.

Your life is marked out by the love of Christ, that you follow Jesus, that you seek to serve Jesus, that you put Jesus first.

And in that case, your life will be a life, or should be, of love and of kindness, known and read of all men.

I'm going to spend much longer on this way of introduction now, my young people. What about the first letter that was written in the Bible? Who wrote it?

[8 : 29] What was it about? Was it a good letter? Was it a bad letter? Well, as far as I can judge, the first letter written in the Bible was by King David.

Right, well, what you would say then is this, that, well, I expect that was a good letter. I expect that was a spiritual letter.

Wasn't David a child of God? Wasn't he the sweet psalmist of Israel? Indeed he was. But here's a word of solemn warning. The first letter was a terrible letter.

It was a letter written to Joab, saying, Put Uriah in the front of the army, in the heat of the battle, and then draw back, so that Uriah is killed.

A letter with murder in it. Well, we might put on garments of self-righteousness and say, I'm not guilty of that.

[9 : 46] Wait a bit, friend. Wait. Mercifully, I trust we are not guilty of such a desire even as that.

But you know, friend, what about hating our brother? What about those things that God speaks on in his word likened to murder?

What about fire that may rage in our hearts seeking revenge? The second letter written in the Bible, and sad to say, a very similar letter, written by a very wicked king, in the name of a husband, about Naboth, that they were to bring false accusers, and stone him.

The third letter was a letter written by a king to another king, with an impossibility in it.

I'm sending Ahab, I'm sending to you Naaman, that you might cleanse him of his leprosy. Shall not enlarge, I'll leave the thought with you. But the fourth letter, again, with murder in it, fulfilling the word of God, and the cause, and the answer to that letter, and I'll leave you young people to find it out for yourselves, were that 70 men were beheaded, and their heads were put in a basket.

[11 : 24] Letters. This is very solid. And I will not pursue this point further, in respect of Old Testament letters, but for the most part, as far as I can view it, and as far as my memory will take me, without going closely into the matter, most of those letters were threatening.

But we ask ourselves, you know, what kind of a life am I living?

Am I being kind or unkind? Is my life governed by Jesus and his love? Or do I put myself first?

What great questions these are. But we must not tarry longer on this subject, generally, of letters. Here we have a vastly different letter.

A letter that's just full of Jesus Christ and of his love. I hope our older friends will bear with me if I'm speaking a little more simply tonight.

[12 : 41] I don't think the sheet will be starved. I hope not. There are three things we may consider at least about a letter. Four things, perhaps.

There's somebody who writes it. And where it was written. To whom it was written. And about whom it is written.

Let us look at these four points just briefly. The writer was Paul. And as you know, in those days, they put the name of the writer comes first.

We put ours right at the end of the letter. They put theirs first. And so this little letter starts with the writer, Paul. Now we know, of course, that Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit in that which is written.

But let us just think for a moment of this man that's writing such a beautiful letter. Such a letter that's so filled with love.

[13 : 51] And yet, though it's so filled with love, there's justice in it. There's justice in it. Just think of this man in his early days who so hated the name of Jesus Christ was determined to stamp it out and to kill all these early disciples.

Went forth with letters, mark that, of authority. He got them and letters in his hand that gave him the authority to take anybody, man or woman, that dared to believe in Jesus Christ and to either put them into prison or even to put them to death.

And he was so angry, so bitter against Jesus Christ that he breathed out threatenings and death against any such that should dare to believe in or name the name of Christ.

Oh, wondrous grace, how in the moment appointed outside Damascus war, this dear man is called by God's grace, is a chosen vessel unto God, is one that shall be raised up to go forth and to preach the name that he so hated and determined not to know anything among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

He himself now to be persecuted, he himself to be hated and derided by men because of his faith in Jesus Christ, because of his courage and humble boldness in going forth and proclaiming the glorious gospel.

[15 : 41] And it is this dear man that is writing this letter. Where was it written? From a prison. What has he done wrong?

What crime has he committed? Why is this minister in prison? Oh, he has committed no crime whatsoever, but he is there in bonds for Christ's sake.

He is not ashamed of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And there, my friends, he suffers in the name and cause of Jesus Christ.

What an example is before us here. Have you ever thought of it? Have you ever thought of these epistles written by the apostle, particularly in prison?

How many he makes mention of by name? You know, I'm afraid if I was in such a state left of myself, all I would think about was myself.

[16 : 44] I wouldn't have time to think about others in my sufferings and loneliness and perhaps being afraid of suffering and of death itself. No. The apostle's heart is so full of love.

Our little text says, for love's sake. Now, is your heart filled with this love? If it's filled with the love of Jesus, you will think of others.

Self will grow less and less. Jesus will become more dear. Jesus will become more precious and you will love all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth.

To whom, then, is this letter written? It is to this dear man, Philemon. Who was he? Well, we do not know a lot about this man.

It would appear later in this letter that he was brought into gospel liberty under the ministry of the apostle Paul when Paul says, Orbeid, I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self beside.

[18 : 01] It would seem that he was a convert under the apostle's ministry by the power of the Holy Ghost. And this man is spoken of here as a one dearly beloved and a fellow laborer.

He would appear to be a man of wealth. It would appear that he had a considerable household. Maybe a large family and many around him including servants.

But this man with his wealth and with all that he possessed had something else. and that is a church in his house.

There in his house God was worshipped. There the word of God would be read. There prayer was offered. There doubtless the word was preached.

And doubtless all would be called to gather together for this purpose of the worship of God. What about our home?

[19 : 07] I don't doubt that in your home there's a Bible. I expect with you young people you have your own Bible. Now is that read?

Does it only come out on a Sunday? What about our older friends? The word of God.

But then let us ask this is Jesus in our home? We do not mean that we see him but is he loved?

It was noise that Jesus was in the house. Is our home like that home of Bethany where Jesus loved to come and was found?

You may say well how do we know? Well is the love of Jesus there? Do you speak about Jesus? Do you think about Jesus?

[20 : 10] Do you pray to Jesus? Do you ask Jesus to help you to fight your battles? Do you ask Jesus to be your helper? Ask Jesus to be your friend?

Ask Jesus to be with you when you're at school? To keep you from wrong things and wrong words? Ask Jesus that you might be like him.

That you might be more loving. that you might be obedient to your father and to your mother. That you might have in your heart this joy and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church in thy home. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you. Now I just pass on to another thought here.

Here was a true servant of God. Here was an example. Here was a real Christian. Here was a man that just didn't believe in his head and just didn't love and didn't mean it.

[21 : 17] I knew two little girls that when they really met somebody and really loved that person they used to say I love you and mean it. I know that's very simple but it was very real because I knew those two little girls very well.

And here as we may say it with reverence was Philemon. He loved Jesus and he meant it. He believed in Jesus and that faith was real. It wasn't just something that he believed because it's written but it's something in his heart.

And it drew him to Jesus Christ and made him love Jesus Christ. And that love and faith that he had toward the Lord Jesus made that love and faith to be poured out to his people and made him willing to give to open his hand and so that the dear people of God in that particular part were often refreshed by him.

That is he used his wealth to minister to those that were in need. He just didn't say to these dear people that love Jesus now I love you and his hand was closed and wouldn't give them anything at all.

That wouldn't be love would it? He says now I love you. I love Jesus. I believe in Jesus. Jesus has been good to me. Now I will seek not by any way of merit not that I want the praise of men but he would refresh.

[22 : 55] He would be kind. He would give of his substance to the dear people of God and written over it all of the words of our text. For love's sake.

How do you give? You know sometimes we give very unwillingly. We give because we've got to give. The Lord loveth a cheerful giver and I believe here I'm sure of it this dear man was a cheerful loving giver.

And so the testimony this is the letter that you could read if you think of Philemon you could read this letter it was written clearly about him that he was kind and that he was loving and that that love that he had to Jesus Christ bore fruit in that love to others.

Yet for love's sake we may use the word in respect to Philemon. But now about whom is this letter written? Now we've got to be very careful haven't we?

How are we going to talk about others? Doesn't mean to say that we shouldn't talk about others but are we doing it right now? Are we doing it in the fear of God?

[24 : 18] Are we being kind or unkind? We must be very careful how we speak about others.

This letter concerned Onesimus. Now who was Onesimus? He was a slave or a servant of Philemon.

I am sure of this by the testimony of this letter that these servants or slaves would have been most kindly cared for by this Christian master and minister of God.

I am sure that this home would be a contrast to the heathen homes that were around that area where the Lord Jesus Christ was not loved and where the servants and slaves were dealt with very harshly and cruelly.

Onesimus then was a favoured young man to be in such a house as this with such a gracious influence as this to hear such a ministry as this I don't think I am reading more into the word of God than I should.

[25 : 36] Now you my dear younger friends and older friends too how favoured we are how blessed we are to have God's word to have the house of God to have our homes and so forth but and I don't know why this word should be laid on my mind tonight but could it be no one has said anything to me about any young friend or older one come to that today but is there anybody kicking kicking oh I must just you must bear with me my dear older friends I'm afraid this may be milk tonight and not strong meat but you know I was down in Wiltshire some just over a year ago and my farmer friend said to me he said I've got to get rid of a cow this morning I said oh dear and I know how careful they are with their cow what's wrong what's wrong with the cow he said kicker a kicker what do you mean by that oh he said well we've tried everything we can but this cow all of a sudden it might be alright for two three days and then suddenly it will kick it may hurt somebody it may kick another cow and beside that it unsettles all the rest of the hurt it's got to go

I said well what name is that cow because as you know farmers give most of their cows it was strange enough it hasn't got a name I said well we'll call it kicker and then I had some solemn problems I turned to the farmer and his wife I said what oh I can see so much in this am I a kicker I might be kind might look alright for three or four days and suddenly woof I kick bad temper something selfish unkind hurt somebody else disturb everybody and our older friends will understand you know I had to apply it even in our churches we have kickers I'm not thinking of any church nor my own but you know there can be such a person in a church as a kicker may be alright for a few days and all of a sudden oh what a disturbance well you need much patience for kicker is there a kicker here as soon as I get old

I'm not going to chapel anymore as soon as I get married I'm going out to the world away with all this oh my dear young friend perhaps you will go will you this young man did and it would seem he did something terrible not only did he run away but he robbed he stole took something that wasn't his a double sin and you know my dear friends isn't this true of sin you know if there's one sin there's so often another one attached to it do you tell a lie something that's not true well you know what's going to happen you've got to tell another one to cover it all up it is like a little snowball the more you roll it the bigger it gets and sin is just like that it is well I'm sure Philemon must have been very sad and very distressed and maybe very angry too might have thought well now I've been ever so kind to that young man and look how he's rewarded me and he might even have felt like some of us would have felt well if I get my hands on him

I'll really punish him oh we've got to be careful haven't we our text says for love's sake and yet I said there's justice we'll try and examine it a little more closely what happened to that young man well the scripture doesn't give us any detail not great detail but it does it is quite evident that this young man went to Rome and it seems to me and I've often wondered as to whether he was like the prodigal son that we read of perhaps he had plenty to start with and then he spent it all well we don't know for sure but spiritually I feel that was true in any case and in a most wonderful way oh my dear friends if there's anyone here heart aching over young people children or those that have wandered from our chapels I say we cannot entirely give up hope who can tell we are assured that if there's a purpose of God's grace to such it will be manifested come what may however black it may seem even if that young person is quite over the other end of the world yes

I read recently of a woman that was handing some tracts down and she went to a man's house and he said she said would you have a tract oh yes and he took the tract and tore it up in pieces and put it on her head and all the bits fluttered about in the room and off the poor soul went at least some time after some years after it happened a long time ago and she went back to that house and I think somebody told me I'm sure my friend here told me this and there was she found this man and I gathered a vast change what had happened he'd been shipwrecked and so forth but what had arrested him was on one of those little bits was one word eternity you see friend we do not know God's ways are wonderful glorious grace a young lad that my pastor knew was in bad company and going off for a Sunday night and one of his friends said where are we going and the Lord the Holy Spirit used it where am I going

[31 : 46] I'm going to hell and it stopped him there and there so pray on dear friend here was this young man and he was brought now it may seem you may ask you young people may say well now how could it be that Paul a prisoner was preaching surely if he was in prison there'd be no congregation there'd be no opportunity to preach now this is answered that in the early days of his imprisonment he was allowed a measure of liberty he was bound to a soldier and he was permitted to receive his friends in his own hired house he sometimes thought that the love gift of the Philippian church was the means whereby the apostle had this provision but that we must leave but we are clearly assured that he could receive in the early part of his ministry his friends and speak to them because he speaks of Onesiphorus who was not ashamed of my chain but when he was in Rome he digitally sought me would you have been bold enough would you have had love enough to go to a city because your minister was in prison would you be bold enough to go and find him out despite all what other people might say it's a big question we might think and wonder how we'd answer however there was this apostle and under the ministry of the apostle this man is a changed man you see

Saul of Tarsus was a changed man when God began that work of grace outside how often I thought dear Paul must have seen the reflection and the reality that that same work of God's grace was in his own heart as seen in the others oh that Philippian jailer oh this dear Onesimus and Saul now here was one and he says to it was one that was so wicked and had done so much wrong that now he's a believer in Jesus Christ now this is why this letter is written Paul would dearly have loved to have kept Onesimus he would have been a very great comfort to him in his bonds but no Paul yet for love's sake is justice something's got to be put right Onesimus is to go back Onesimus is to confess what he was wrong and Philemon is to receive him it's a great test and this is the the reason of the letter for love's sake for love's sake he says

I rather beseech thee being such an one as Paul me aged and now a prisoner of Jesus Christ I beseech thee for my son Onesimus whom I have begotten in my bonds that means Paul says I'm a prisoner and I'm preaching in bonds but the word of God isn't bound here is a wonderful example of God's grace here's a sinner born again here is one before now that was as far from God a sheep can run and now here is one gathered in in the arms of a shepherd a sinner called by graves and dear ministers know what it is to preach in bonds and yet may we know sometimes and I believe we have a little that in those bonds has been a blessing strange and mysterious as it is even to us now he says whom I as he says which in time passed to thee was unprofitable he was a bad servant he was a thief he was a runaway unprofitable but now says Paul profitable how could he be sure of that because of God's grace in him because of the work begun because this man now is brought to love Jesus and the love of

Christ is in his heart and that love will control and direct his life and he says whom I sent again I'm sending him back to you thou therefore receive him that is mine own but receive him just as though it was myself and he says whom I would have retained with me that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel I dearly would have loved to have kept him but without thy life what instruction there is here it does teach us my friend that we should think of others as we act not to be I was going to say pick headed if you'll pardon such a blunt expression work with us churches will be stronger with this before us without thy mind would I do nothing that is let's pray together let's seek the Holy Spirit in this matter let us seek divine guidance in this and he says that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity but willingly for perhaps he therefore departed for a season that thou shouldest receive him forever not now as a servant but above a servant a brother beloved especially to me how much more unto thee both in the flesh and in the Lord if thou account me therefore a partner receive him as my servant you know friend there's much instruction here you know I do hope our doors of our chapels are ever open to receive the wanderer the one that returns you know

Philemon needed much grace here I do think that he might have determined if ever that young man turned up again he would deal with him punishing it doesn't mean to say for love's sake that justice isn't done of course it must be done but here I see for love's sake I see pardon I see here something far greater the work of God's grace I see Philemon besought by the apostle Paul to receive this young man that has given him all this trouble I remember in the war years in the air force hearing a dear old man tell us that he lived in Newcastle and how that when he was a boy he ran away from home but he said he just soon became that the prodigal there was nobody loved him nobody cared and eventually thought I must go home but I expect the door will be closed I don't expect they'll have me in my home when I go back and how well I remember that the man said yes he said

[38 : 28] I turned my way home and he said I got to the gate and I opened the gate and mother knew those footsteps they were her boy and the door was open not the width of father and mother the open arms of love friend while he was yet a great way off that's where I be tonight but for the grace of God all this wonderful love of Jesus Christ to a poor sinner he saw him had compassion ran fell on his neck and kissed him just one more thought or two and I must close the love say beautiful is a beauty of love in our lives this love that speaks of

Jesus doesn't bring glory to ourselves this love if it's real will humble ourselves to nothingness it will but there's something else that's so very beautiful here so very attractive to me the apostle here says that if he hath wronged thee or o'eth thee ought put that on mine account I Paul have written it with my own hand I will repay it now here you may say it was clear proof you may know you may have you may have written by Paul's own hand saying that whatever that young man owns you that Paul will repay I've written it in my own hand whatsoever he owes he's wronged you he owes you something now what do you see the love say do you see yourself do you see the holy

God do you see my friend how by our sin we've come short of that glory all the wickedness of our life all the evil that is within us all the robbery have not we robbed God have not we sought for those things that are wrong we could enlarge but time would not permit do not we deserve the prison do not we deserve the wrath of God do not we deserve my friend that punishment for eternity that someone else has come someone else has said I'll pay it you charge it all to me you put that account on my account I'll pay it how could it be paid he hath laid on him the iniquity of us all and the dear Lord Jesus upon that cross paid the debt paid the price written if we may so put it with reverence across this great debt is paid it is finished it's in his precious blood my friend here is love the love same and what about the sinner oh on such love my soul still ponder love so great so rich so free say whilst lost in holy wonder why oh

God such love to me and you know I'm sure of this that if I have no doubt he received this young man I'm sure that now there was a union and love between those two as never before which

Amen■■ into merry Carnage Remedately■ above ■■■■ beings on 1914 sculptor part rising and explained time you know from phi and