



Introduction:

I want to talk about an exchange that took place long, long ago; it's one that God orchestrated; and it was not a mistake. This was a necessity. God orchestrated an exchange to bring about our redemption. And what He did was He had Jesus trade places with us. And this exchange was not some big lie; it was the truth. I want to invite you tonight to see and understand what this exchange was all about. And my prayer is if you understand this, it will change the way you see yourself and the way you see God.

So, I invite you on this journey with me. We will be in the book of Philemon tonight (and over the next three weeks).

[TEACHERS NOTE: I am illustrating this on the screens to help students make the connections and for it to make sense. Think digital flannelgraph. I've included the character graphics for you to use.]

Let me take a few minutes to tell you what is happening in this letter.

[SLIDE] There are three main people in the story: Philemon, Onesimus and Paul. Paul wrote this letter to Philemon. Philemon became a Christian with his interaction with the Apostle Paul, probably when he visited Ephesus. We can assume that he was very wealthy.

Philemon had a slave named Onesimus. And Onesimus likely stole from Philemon and ran away. In time, Onesimus met Paul, who was on house arrest. And Paul led Onesimus to Christ.

So, Paul had led Philemon to Christ. And then, he led Onesimus to Christ. And Onesimus helped Paul in his ministry and was very useful to him.

Paul knew Onesimus couldn't continue to follow Jesus and keep running from his past so, Paul decided to write to Philemon (Onesimus' owner). And he sent Onesimus back to Philemon with the letter. And this letter was all about forgiveness and reconciliation.

So, tonight, we are going to look at this story through the lens of Onesimus who is sought reconciliation. Then, next week, we will look at the story through the lens of Philemon. It's a story about forgiveness. Finally, we will

look at it through the lens of Paul who was the bridge between Onesimus and Philemon.

RECAP:

1-3 — greeting “Paul, a prisoner...” “to Philemon and the church in your house.”

4-7 — thankful to Philemon about all that Paul is hearing about their faith.

8-22 — Paul plea for Onesimus

We are going focus our time tonight, starting in verse 17:

Philemon 1:17-19 (ESV)

[SLIDE]

17 So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. 18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.

As we open this up, notice that first part: **[SLIDE]** *if you consider me your partner*. Remember, Paul was someone who knew Philemon well. He led him to Christ. In fact, if you look at verse 1, it says, *To Philemon, our beloved fellow worker...*

We see in verse 7, Paul called Philemon his brother. So, there was a relationship here. In verse 17, he called him his partner.

17 So if you consider me your partner, receive him (receive Onesimus, the runaway slave) *as you would receive me.*

[SLIDE]

18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

Here is the easiest way for me to **[SLIDE]** illustrate this: they are all connected and what Paul suggested is there is an exchange that will take place. Paul wanted to trade places with Onesimus.

[TEACHERS NOTE: I am bringing the characters back out and illustrating how Onesimus had a deficit (debt) in his account and Paul had a credit.]

Think about it this way. Paul is someone who has a good standing with Philemon **[SLIDE]** (+). He led him to Christ. They were friends. They were

partners. They were beloved brothers. Paul had a good reputation, a good standing. And Philemon loved Paul. There's a credit on his account.

However, Onesimus **[SLIDE]** (-), somehow had wronged Philemon and then ran away. At least in Philemon's eye, Onesimus was in the wrong. There's a debt that Onesimus owed to Philemon.

So based on what we see right now, is Onesimus had a debt (-), but Paul has a credit (+).

So, Paul suggested here, because they were all connected in Christ, that they trade places. **[SLIDE]** (→ ←) There's an exchange. So, what Paul suggested here is that Onesimus receive the good standing that Paul had. And the debt that Onesimus had would be given to Paul.

And here's the point: when Onesimus **[SLIDE]** returned to his former master, he would be received with the same kind of good standing that Paul had. He would be received favorably. But when Paul **[SLIDE]** went back to visit Philemon, what he was going to do was to pay the debt that Onesimus owed. This is what Paul proposed in this letter. Does that make sense?

Paul wanted an exchange to take place. And in Paul's eyes, it would be sacrificial on his part. But from his vantage point, if this was the cost, if this was what it took for reconciliation and forgiveness and acceptance to happen, Paul believed it would be worth it. Paul was willing to pay the price and settle the debt for these two friends to be reconciled.

In fact, notice what Paul wrote in verse 19 (ESV).

[SLIDE]

*I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it
I'll take his debt. I'll pay it.*

Now, if you are familiar with Scripture, you know that Paul wrote most of the New Testament. He is a pretty significant person. They were letters and if you read his letters, a lot of times, he would use a secretary or a scribe to write for him. (Romans = Tertius (Tershius) wrote but Paul was the author). But there were times in Paul's letters where he picked up the pen himself and wrote something.

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