

Restoring Broken Relationships

by Mack Tomlinson

This sermon emphasizes the importance of reconciling broken relationships among Christians, highlighting the need to choose love, make efforts to mend fractured relationships, and aim for restoration based on the biblical principles outlined in the book of Philemon. The speaker shares personal stories and historical examples to illustrate the transformative power of love in healing and restoring relationships within the body of Christ.

Scripture: Leviticus 19:17, Colossians 3:13, Romans 12:18, 1 Corinthians 13:4, 1 Peter 4:8, John 13:34, John 17:23, 2 Corinthians 13:11

Topics: "Reconciliation", "The Power of Love"

Description

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Transcript

Hold your hand up if you've ever been hurt by another Christian. Hold your hand up if you've ever hurt another Christian. All right, that's what I'm talking about this morning.

Paul is addressing this in Philemon. I want to thank Kevin for reading Philemon. I hope some of you didn't turn to Philippians and miss it.

Philemon is an amazing book. And it calls us to something that we often miss, I think. This July, I will have been a Christian for 50 years.

And I was thinking, how many times have other Christians ever hurt me, offended me, wounded me, or differences kind of shook our friendship? Hold your hand up if you've ever been hurt by another Christian. Hold your hand up if you ever hurt another Christian. All right, that's what I'm talking about this morning.

Paul is addressing this in Philemon. Now, last night, Lee called us back to our Bibles. And that was such a resounding, phenomenal word to us.

This morning, I'm calling us back to this. Loving the brethren regardless of who they are. Not some of the brethren some of the time, but all the brethren, any Christian who's a true professing Christian, loving all

the brethren all the time as much as you can do it by God's grace.

Philemon is about relationships within the body of Christ. Now, if you're not familiar with the story, you don't remember it perfectly. Paul labored in Asia Minor just over about two years.

And at Ephesus at Colossae. And he met a man who was converted there who was from Colossae, Philemon. And Philemon became a friend of Paul.

And the book says a fellow worker with him. We don't know what he did, but he was a businessman of some kind. And so, Paul is in Rome and he meets probably a young man named Onesimus.

Onesimus had lived in Colossae and he was part of the household of Philemon, probably as a slave servant. Well, Onesimus took off and fled to Rome, not knowing that providentially waiting in Rome was an appointment that he was going to have with a man named Paul. He didn't know what was in store for him, did he? And by the grace of God, Onesimus hearing the gospel, he becomes a believer.

And then, I guess as Paul disciplined him, Paul realizes where Onesimus is from, probably Onesimus got very honest with him and told him, yeah, I fled from Colossae and I was in the house of Philemon. Philemon. So, Paul's friends with Philemon.

A young Onesimus, this young disciple, was connected with Philemon and he fled wrongly, so that relationship would have been what? Not on the best of terms, the fractured relationship. And Paul sees this as a problem. But he sees something better.

He sees it as an opportunity to apply the gospel for two now brothers who know each other. One of them, Philemon, doesn't know that Onesimus is now a brother. But Paul now knows both of them are brothers.

Paul sees it as an opportunity to apply the gospel for two brothers to choose, in a difficult circumstance, to love one another. You with me? The fractured relationship is so important in Paul's mind that the Holy Spirit puts a book in the New Testament about it. So, this is important.

So, Paul writes this brief, 25 verses, very moving, personal appeal. And that's what Paul calls it. He calls it an appeal.

The book of Philemon is a personal appeal to one man about another man, about their relationship being restored. Not because a restored relationship is the most important thing, but because love is the most important thing. A lot of relationships believers have over the years, some can be close and then those relationships fall away, and you don't have them anymore.

And so, not that all relationships have to be maintained, not that all will be restored, but in some cases, a relationship being restored, when it can be restored, is the most important thing, because that's what love does when it's possible. So, this book is not just about three men. Really, they're just kind of players on the stage of this life scene.

Philemon is about the gospel love of Christ, eliminating every barrier that can be eliminated between Christians. It's about abandoning barriers of unforgiveness, of alienation. It's about the gospel making things right in relationships.

It's about putting aside differences between two Christians in light of the fact that you are brothers in Christ and you're going to be together for eternity. Smaller things that separate Christians that don't need to

separate them. Now, Philemon doesn't know Paul is sending this letter by the way he would have sent it with Onesimus probably.

So, think about that. Some Lord's Day morning, Philemon sees Archippus, who the letter is to, and Archippus says, Philemon, Onesimus is back. He's got a letter from Paul.

What would Philemon have thought? Whoa, what's this going to do? What's happening here? Philemon could have been nervous. He could have thought the worst. He could have had all kinds of emotional reactions.

Onesimus is back and he met Paul and Paul sent a letter. That's what's going on here. Though Philemon doesn't know Paul is sending this letter, Paul writes it for two reasons.

Because this problem between two men, originally one a believer, one a runaway slave, we don't know what Onesimus had done to Philemon. Maybe he stole something. Maybe he just bolted and ran.

He wanted freedom. We don't know. But Paul writes the letter because a problem needs to be solved.

These are both believers now. And secondly, because love needs to win. And brethren, in every relationship we have with other believers, if at all possible, love needs to win always.

Four brief observations about mending damaged relationships that are mendable. Now don't let your mind think that this is an absolute. Some relationships from the past are not mendable for various reasons.

So I'm not talking about those that are not mendable. I'm talking about ones of people that are mendable. That they're Christians and there's been some problem relationally and there's a fracture.

There's a damage in the relationship. And what you used to have that was sweet and you still love them, what you used to have was sweet and the relationship was right, but something has damaged it and you lost it. Four brief observations about mending damaged relationships.

Number one, a relational problem. Number two, Paul's appeal. Number three, Philemon's responsibility and choice.

And number four, aim at restoration. A relational problem. Paul's appeal.

Philemon's responsibility. And aiming at restoration. Number one, the relational problem.

Paul speaks to this in verse 10. I appeal to you for my son Onesimus who became my son while I was in change. He formerly was useless or unprofitable to you.

So this unprofitable man, this useless man who had fled Colossae to Rome, once he's gone, Philemon might have felt this. I would never want him back around here again. He was lazy.

He was irresponsible. He was this, he was that. Philemon might have been happy if he never saw him again.

We don't know. We do know the relationship was broken. And in Philemon's mind and probably in Onesimus' mind, it's past history.

It's over. It's water under the bridge. The damage has been done.

And both of them probably had moved on. Could those things I just said apply to any relationship you've had that went sour? And yet you know probably that person is still walking with the Lord. The useless man was gone from Philemon.

The damage had been done. And one or both believers now that Onesimus is a Christian, both of them might have had one another in mind. And both of them might have thought nothing can be done.

But you know what? God and the Gospel see that differently. The two people might feel that they can live their Christian life with that regret and just move on. With broken fellowship with brethren who you used to be close to.

But Christ doesn't look at it like that. What does Scripture say? Scripture tells us that as much as it depends on us, do what? Live peaceably with all men. Especially within the household of God.

Scripture says that a fractured relationship, if it's mendable, should not be left unhealed. If you fracture your wrist, you go get a cast on it as quick as you can so it'll heal properly. But you know, we're not so quick to put a cast on a fractured relationship.

It's not proper though. Scripture would tell us it's not proper or biblical for two Christians to stay alienated if it's mendable. If one is loving Christ and he's worshipping and he's growing, and another is loving Christ and he's worshipping and growing, and they had a fracture in their relationship, why can that relationship not be mended? Tell me why.

Why does Paul match-make between these two men that he loves? Because the Gospel says to all three of them, we must again love one another. So the problem has to be addressed, and the Bible always addresses it. Relational damage happens between true Christians regularly.

And one of my great regrets as I look back over the five decades of being a Christian is the times that I let someone offend me, I let a little difference come between us, and the relationship drifted on, and I could have made it right. I could have said, Brother, I'm sorry that came between us. And I didn't.

People who have flaws have really disappointed some of you. People who have left your church and you felt connected to them, and it so wounded you because they left. Flaws in their lives.

Flaws in their ministries. Flaws in family relationships. Differences often divide.

People's mistakes discourage us, and even can disillusion us. If they're a Christian, how could they act that way? If they're a Christian, how could they have done that to me? How could they have said that? Why didn't they do what they promised they would do? Why didn't they do what they should have done? These three things, brethren, try to rob us of one thing. To keep loving them in spite of their flaws.

It takes a heart filled with the love of God to keep loving when people disappoint you and hurt you. These things try to distance us from God's people and wound us in the fight of faith. But the primary damage that's done is that damaged relationships cause us to stop loving those people.

We would say, I still love them, but our hearts aren't loving toward them. This often happens in churches. The problem of fractured relationships.

And it's widespread among the body of Christ, I believe. Any little thing can separate brethren. Damaged relationships between Christians.

This is the problem that revival would change. That getting your heart right with God and made tender would then bring a memory of a relationship. You know, I was not gracious to that brother who I so disagree with now.

I could call him. I could make it right. I could make the effort.

Make the effort. So, the problem is real. Secondly, we see Paul's appeal.

Verses 11 and 12. The appeal, Paul says this, formerly he was useless to you, but now, now he has become profitable, useful for both of us. It's like Paul is saying, Philemon, Onesimus has changed from what he was like I was changed.

Philemon, Onesimus is new like you've been made new. He's now a believer. He's now one of us.

He's a new man. So, I'm sending him back to you. Paul didn't ask Philemon's permission.

He wrote and sent the letter with Onesimus and he said, I'm sending him back to you. Brethren, that is love in action. Love takes initiative.

Love wants to build a bridge, not tear it down. Love wants to take action to see relationships restored. Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon who hasn't seen him since he ran away.

And he would have not sent him back to Philemon if Onesimus had not become a believer. But now he is. And Paul says, you know, Philemon, I could have forced this on you because of my authority.

I could have commanded you to receive him back, but I'm not going to do that. Rather, I'm appealing to you, Philemon, to receive him back because this is my beloved son Onesimus and he's a brother now to you who will be beloved. Paul is saying this to Philemon through this letter because it's telling us the Gospel changes everything and it affects everything.

I'm appealing to you, Philemon, on the basis of love. For the sake of love, he says. So, dear brethren, this message this morning, I'm appealing to you about you living in love toward all people.

Especially relationships that have been hurt a little bit and could be restored. My son Onesimus, I'm sending him back to you with my very heart, Paul said. And he says, if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

What a heart. What a big heart. What a heart that says the past doesn't matter.

So what that Onesimus fled? He was a lost man. That's what they do. They sin.

They hurt. They do damage. But that's over.

The heart of Paul to view all things new and to conduct himself in these relationships with a loving heart. Now brethren, the only approach to ever address or mend relational problems is on the basis of love. Force won't do it.

Finger pointing won't do it. Blame shifting won't do it. Only love.

Only the love of Christ in our hearts can mend a broken relationship. For love's sake, Paul says, we must view this like Paul did because that's how love lives toward others. So the problem is the damaged

relationship and then Paul's appeal.

And on down later, Paul says, Flehmen, God has brought him back that you might have him forever. Forever. Brethren, these relationships with other Christians, you're going to have them how long? Forever.

It might just be some divine humor if a relationship that you can mend that you don't, in heaven, your mansion will be next to that person. And you'll have all eternity to enjoy them because you won't get in without it being made perfect, right? Then you'll be perfect. You won't have any grudges.

You won't have any hurts, any wounds. Praise God for that. But Paul says that you might have him back forever.

Paul's pastoral theology here is for Flehmen to respond like a Christian should respond. Loving others unconditionally is not for the apostles. It's not for your favorite preacher.

It's not for the John Calvin only. It's for you and I if we are believers. Perhaps Onesimus was a lazy servant.

Get over it, Flehmen. Forget about it. Put it behind you.

Paul tells Flehmen, I'm sending him back to you because whereas before he was not profitable to you, now he's profitable to both of us because he's a beloved son and a brother in the faith. By the way, Flehmen, if he owes you anything, put that on my credit card. I'll pay all of it.

And by the way, don't forget that you owe me your own life, but I won't mention that. The dilemma of receiving back someone who is alienated from you. When over there in their heart, wherever they are, they would like to be reconnected to you because they regret it too, and they still love you.

Reconciling at any level, sometimes it's hard. It's challenging. What's Flehmen to do? He's to do the only thing that's right to do, the loving thing.

He's to receive Onesimus back. And I wonder if Paul had this in his mind at the end when he said, oh, by the way, prepare lodging because I'm coming to you soon. Uh-oh, Paul's going to check on me to see if I received Onesimus back.

He would have had that in his mind. But Flehmen is faced with a choice, and it's awkward when Onesimus shows up and delivers the letter, and it's read to the church, and Flehmen is right there. A real dilemma for Flehmen.

We don't know what Onesimus might have done, but what do you think Flehmen's choice was? How did this play out? You know, it'd be wonderful if we had second Flehmen to tell us the rest of the story, but we don't. But you know, we really don't need it. Why? You think the book is given to us just like it is because we can presume? We can think the right choice was made? We're left with the impression, probably, that it worked out.

That's why Flehmen, as it is, is in the New Testament. My point is this. Flehmen had one choice if he was going to please Christ, and that was the choice of love.

Unconditional love toward this once useless man who now is a beloved brother. Flehmen was a man of love. Paul starts out talking about his love.

Flehen's love for all the saints and how Flehen's love had deeply refreshed and encouraged Paul. So Flehen was a lover of men. He was a lover of the saints.

So what do you think Flehen did? Do you think he took courage and grace? Maybe his heart rejoiced when he saw Onesimus coming. And when he heard there's a letter from Paul, maybe his heart rejoiced more because Flehen saw God has done something here. This is going to be awesome.

And his heart was open to this reconciliation. So what does he choose? Only love. Simply put, Flehen's choice must be gospel love.

Love's choice made. We find that in Paul's two statements here. Verse 9, I appeal to you on the basis of love.

And again, his heart of love in verses 15 and 16. That you might have him back, no longer as a slave. That's old.

That's over. But better than a slave, even as a dear brother. That's the language of love.

For he is very dear to me, even dearer to you now, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. That's love language. Gospel love language.

Any Christian in your life where the relationship is not right, but they are still dear to you. And you probably suspect, they still love me. We just had a little falling out.

The only way Flehen is to view Onesimus now is through the new commandment of love Jesus gave. And Paul is reminding Flehen of this. That all things are new.

This useless man is now a new man. Not to be viewed as a slave from the past, but as a beloved brother. Love is the law of the kingdom, is it not? Love is the new commandment.

Love is the greatest. So in all relationships, brethren, we have to learn to love the brethren, all of them, even if we don't like them. We're called to love them.

We're called to choose the higher path. In verse 1, Paul actually expresses faith and confidence that Flehen is going to receive him back and do even more than what Paul has asked. To welcome Onesimus back with welcoming arms.

Paul is confident that the Holy Spirit will do this in Flehen without apostolic force. Because that's what the gospel does in people's hearts. And that's the choice Christians are always to make.

Because how have we been loved? Lavishly by Christ. Lavishly. And now that love is within the Christian's heart.

The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. You have a heart now that loves. We forgive because we've been forgiven.

We treat others the way Christ has treated us and the way He wants us to treat them. To look past the faults and still love. To not hold anything against anyone in the past.

To throw the grudges in the garbage where they belong. Because there are weights that hold you back. To be willing to put the past behind.

To face that person in your mind with a kind heart who would be reconciled to you very possibly. And to choose to love that person and make the relationship right. Paul speaks about this love.

He said to the Thessalonians, concerning brotherly love, I don't need to write you again. Remember? Because you have been taught by God to love one another. Every Christian has been taught by God to love the brethren.

It's in their hearts because God has made it real. And brethren, if you love Christ today, it is in your heart still to love those even though there might be a fracture, a crack in the relationship. You still love them because Christ loves you.

But if you have no real love for the brethren ever, if you can't forgive, if you willfully won't throw away the grudges, if you despise them who've hurt you, if you want nothing to do with the brethren who've wounded you, it probably means you've never truly been among the brethren. We love because we're His child. And love cares.

Love has a heart warrant to it. Love is other-centered. Love makes the hard and higher choices.

And this love is in every Christian. You know, one of the most remarkable prayers Jesus ever prayed for every single Christian is in two single separate phrases in John 17. The first one, verse 23, listen closely to this.

Jesus prayed, Father, you have loved them even as you love Me. So the Father has loved you even as He loves His Son. Isn't that remarkable? The second prayer, verse 25, that the love you have for Me may be in them, that the love the Father has for the Son may be in us.

It is in every Christian because we have the Holy Spirit, the Giver of love. And because of this, you and I can love others, these relationships, as Jesus does. Because the love of God is within us and it will never dry up.

Love is the only choice in relationships, in any relationship, especially in relationships that need mending, just a little mending, just a band-aid even maybe, of an apology. It's the only choice for a Christian. And I believe Philemon made this choice.

I believe it would have been a sight to see Philemon and Onesimus in fellowship in the church meetings together. Love's choice, Philemon's choice was that of love. Paul's appeal, I believe, worked.

Final point. How do we choose this kind of love practically? How do we go from here and make a phone call, send an email, drop by a house? How do we go and practice this love where we need to practice it? We aim for restoration. We aim to be a doctor that mends the wound.

And I borrow words from Paul from 2 Corinthians 13 here. Verse 11, he says to the brethren, Aim for restoration. As much as it depends on you, go be at peace with all men.

That's how we choose love. We not only aim for it, we are to do all that's in our power to see that it happens. So Paul says to Philemon here, here's what you're to do.

Welcome him back. Welcome him back. Aim for restoration.

Welcome him back as you would welcome me. Brethren, this is the choice of love to obey Scripture. Now, the old you wouldn't do it.

You'd get revenge. You'd spread rumors. You'd gossip.

You'd slander. You'd hold bitterness. The old you would not mend a relationship.

But guess what? If you love Christ, you're not the old you anymore. You are Philemon. You're a saint of God who now loves the church and loves other believers.

And you have an opportunity from Paul to mend a relationship. So aim at restoration. We're to love them all, even the Onesimus who has hurt us.

But we have to do this work first. We have to receive them back in our heart before the Lord before you ever receive them back with a hug. Because you won't welcome them back with a hug until you welcome them back in your heart.

It'll be hypocrisy. So we need to make restoration of that fellowship our specific aim. Well, I suppose if I saw them in Walmart sometime, I'd just go up to them.

Well, if they write me a letter, it'll be a sign from God. Here's the only sign you'll get. You've got a Bible.

Obey it. You've got a broken relationship that's mendable. You be the doctor.

You take the initiative. What do you have to lose? You're obeying the Lord. Go be reconciled to your brother if you want to walk in love.

And I believe it's true. We must be as serious about broken relationships as Paul was when he wrote this epistle. If those relationships are restorable, restoring a right relationship with another Christian is morally right.

It's a biblical command. I want you to think seriously for a moment. And answer these questions in your mind.

Is it morally and biblically right to have integrity at your job? You think that's right? Is it right to do good to those you can help? Is it right to help a brother move to a new home if he doesn't have enough help and you can do it? Is it right to take a meal to a sick family? Is it right to care for widows and orphans? You would all say, of course it is. Obvious. Well, brethren, you know those things are right not because you have some feeling about it.

Likewise, it is just as right to reconcile with another Christian if possible. It's just as right as all those other things I mentioned. That's as right and absolute as anything else you believe is right.

Every Christian you know personally today, can you have a heart of love toward them? Could you be kind toward them if you happen to see them tomorrow? Or would you shrink away in fear or pride to avoid them? You won't be able to avoid them in heaven. This is why Paul says, as much as it depends on you, as much as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. You know, one of the burdens of my heart over these recent years, it's astounding to me that even serious-minded Christians think they can have relationships with true brothers destroyed over disagreements, and then everybody just walks away.

Leaves the relationship behind without any effort of restoring it. Paul didn't leave it alone. Presuming that flehmen and onymismus could just go on with God because the Scripture is plain that one cannot please Christ while they still have broken relationships that can be mended by us.

It doesn't mean we agree. The New Testament puts direct responsibility on us to do whatever we can to restore in men any fixable relationship. Are all fractured relationships restorable? Of course not.

Because some Christians won't be willing to reconcile with you. The angry and judgmental ones. The legalists.

The carnal ones. Those fractured relationships can't be restored until true repentance changes that person. But let's not worry about those we cannot mend.

Let's focus on those we can mend. Any in your own church. Any from your past churches.

Any past friendships. There were wonderful times of fellowship early on in your Christian life. And you were close to those people.

And then offenses happened. Misunderstandings developed. Hurtful words were spoken.

Sin happens and suddenly you're gone from one another's lives. The relationship is over and you're just left shaken and wounded and numb. What happened? That is so hurtful and so wounding and so heartbreaking.

And yet, here you are. You still love them. And you presume that they're hopefully still trying to follow Christ.

But your fracture has crippled your relationship and now you're stuck. Just stuck. Tuesday, Jeff Thomas and I drove to Graham, Texas where he could speak to a group of pastors.

So, the address is Timber Ridge Road in Graham, Texas. 700 blocks. So, it's in the GPS.

You know, usually that works. GPS works. Well, we come to the 100 block dead-end street and it says, You've arrived at your destination.

And I said, No, we haven't. We're in the 100 block. And we had no clue where to go.

And so, thankfully some of the brothers in cars one of them saw me, knew me, waved at me. I said, Look, I'm just going to follow you. Get us help.

And we got there. But we were stuck and we couldn't move on. But we finally got there with help.

Brethren, are you stuck with a past relationship that can be mended and you can't move on? Both the Old and New Testaments clearly affirm the immediate responsibility to truly forgive and settle our differences. Leviticus 19 Do not bear a grudge against others, but settle your differences with them. The enemy will lie to you that it won't work, that they won't settle, that they don't want to talk to you.

And it can happen. He'll lie to you and to keep you from obeying Scripture. Colossians 3 Forgive one another.

If anyone has a complaint against you, just as the Lord has forgiven you, you also forgive. So if it does depend on us as much as it depends on you, what can we do to mend that relationship? Love says, Philemon says, I'll make the effort. I want this to be right.

I want this to be better. Because love chooses the higher. Love chooses the eternal.

Love chooses the gospel lifestyle. Just listen to these words briefly. From 1 Corinthians 13 What true love looks like in a believer.

Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy.

It doesn't boast. Love is not proud. It does not dishonor others.

It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. Love keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects. Always trusts.

Always hopes. Always perseveres. Love never fails.

Because the greatest of these is love. It was about 2010. I was in Romania with HeartCry.

And there was a large Christian workers, missionary pastors evangelist conference. And several of us were there. In the closing session at night, Paul Washer was preaching on the family.

And he was about an hour into his introduction. And something started happening. I began to see couples leaning over while he was preaching and hugging one another.

I began to see them get down on their knees in the pews. They were praying together. All over the room it was happening.

And it became a divine moment. And suddenly, we realize the Holy Spirit is applying this message on family relationships being right. And it was glorious.

It was moving. It was wonderful. Love does not quit if a relationship with the brethren can be made right.

And listen, I'm not talking about it being restored like it used to be. Just made right. Not where you stay connected necessarily.

Just make it right. Well, they're not making any effort, so I don't have to. As much as it depends on you.

They're not here hearing this message. You are. As much as it depends on you.

Love acts. Love is intentional. Love chooses the good.

Hearts surrendered. Lord, this is a hard one to face. But I could have done better in that relationship.

And you brought it to mind. I could take steps. Lord, I surrender my heart.

I'll take courage to make the effort. Effort is made. Apology made.

Words expressed in humility and love. And suddenly, things are made right. And your conscience is clean.

And freedom is gained. Brethren, if the Word is so clear, if this applies to us at any point, what are we waiting for? Why is obedience so hard and disobedience so easy on matters of relationships? Because of our pride. Because we think I was right and they were wrong.

Therefore, they have to get right with God. We always think we're right. And it ought to be the other way around.

Obedience, if we love Christ, ought to be our natural response. And disobedience ought to be hard. The Bible is God's voice to us here this morning saying I'm sending you back to that person.

I'm sending you back to that couple. Just as I sent Onesimus back to Philemon. Receive them.

Go back to them and get things right. But you know, we often love so conditionally, don't we? If they agree with me, then I'll be loving to them. If we're completely like-minded, then I'll be gracious.

If they don't disappoint me, if they don't hurt me, if they're there for me, if they'll meet my needs. But brethren, that's loving when it's easy and beneficial. But that's not the love of Christ.

Do we live in light of how Jesus loved as His follower? He loved His enemies. He loved His persecutors. He loved those who hated Him and abused Him.

Love's choice says I will walk in love and be gracious. I'll go out of my way to be courteous. I'll take the initial steps to mend the relationships.

I'll not withdraw from them because of the mistake they made. I'll not forget how they once helped me and disciplined me and encouraged me and taught me. I'll not forget that.

I'm not going to let little differences rob me of this gospel connection. I'm going to tell you a story about a man named Rudy. The Rudy relationship.

And I called him this week and I asked him, can I tell our story? He said, brother, you go right ahead because I've told this to many others. Rudy. I've known Rudy since the early 80s.

And good friends in the Lord. Priest for him. Priest with him in the prisons.

Attended conferences with him. And a few years ago, I don't know, I don't know when it was, in the 2000s, we were in a meeting together. Some of Rudy's preacher friends were there.

And one of them got offended over one statement that one of us made. Just one statement. And an argument tried to ensue.

And it was over, I think it was over, had a view Romans 7 or something. And it became hard. And a division came.

And all communication was cut off for years. And then I heard that Rudy's wife had cancer. And it was bad.

And they're driving to Dallas for treatment. Regularly. And I happen to have known that providentially, they weren't in a good church anymore.

They were floundering a little bit without a good church. So I knew, I said to myself, you know, they're alone. And Rudy's sitting up there in the hospital days at a time alone.

When his wife has cancer. I said, I got to go. I got to go see him.

I got to go be with him. Forget Romans 7. This is love. She's dying.

And I called him and in tears, he said, please come. And we had lunch. And all barriers dissolved.

And the closeness and the sweetness of that relationship was restored so wonderfully. And I saw him a few days ago. And we had a big, big hug.

Brethren, that's what's got to happen. In relationships that can be restored. And that's what I'm calling for today.

And you know, it's simple to use five words. If you are the initiator. To talk to them and say, I'm sorry.

Please forgive me. Forgive me for not loving you back then. Forgive me for misunderstanding.

Forgive me for anything that I did. I love you in Christ. And I want our relationship to be right.

That's all it takes. Often. 80% of the time, that's all it takes.

Is that step to be taken. And brethren, think of these glorious encouragements in the New Testament. That are motivated by the new covenant reality of love.

And think of these in light of those brethren you love. Whose relationship is not mended. Let us pursue what makes for peace.

And for mutual upbuilding. With all humility and gentleness. Bearing with one another in love.

If one has a complaint against another. Forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must forgive.

Live in harmony with one another. Keep loving one another earnestly. Since love covers a multitude of sins.

Love can cover those sins and make them gone. That were in the relationship in the past and they are gone. Just love will cover a multitude of sins.

Have brotherly love. A tender heart. A humble mind.

Let love be genuine. Love one another earnestly from a pure heart. With brotherly affection.

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good. May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another. Dear ones, Philemon teaches us to choose 1 Corinthians 13 lifestyle of greater love.

So if you're stuck, you're in the hundred block. And you need to get to 700. You're stuck.

Ask Jesus to get you there. Get help. Seek counsel.

Restore that rooty relationship. Learn to say those words that are so hard to say. That they're harder to say in English sometimes.

I couldn't say them in Romanian. But sometimes they're hard to say in English. I'm sorry.

Please forgive me. I wonder if Philemon spoke at Onesimus' memorial service when they buried Onesimus. Or Onesimus at his.

If so, they had no regrets that day that things were made right before standing at one another's graves. Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus also remind me of another trio of men in church history. In August 1688, one man took a one-way trip to help two other men.

Their problem was their relationship was fractured and not getting any better. The third man, the outsider, was asked if he would help the two men to reconcile. Well, he was a long horseback ride away from London.

This man in Bedford, England. And these other two men were in London. But the outsider did something very unusual that proved to be very costly.

He rode his horse at least 60 miles to help the two men sort through their differences and reconcile. John Bunyan rode his horse to London to help a father and a son reconcile their relationship. On the trip, Bunyan caught pneumonia in a storm and died days later from that ride.

Why was he willing to ride for several days to help those men? Because it was a loving thing to do. It was love's choice. Love is always the right choice, even if it's costly.

Bunyan did it because he knew it would be worth the effort if those men chose to love each other again. So John Bunyan, he wrote Pilgrim's Progress. He wrote 59 or 60 other books.

But he died providentially by loving two men enough to help them love each other again. It is said that the Apostle John, when he was very old, in one of his last times in a church meeting, was asked in the meeting if he had a message. It said that he stood and simply replied, Brethren, love one another.

Love one another. And I say this morning to us all what Paul said to Fleeman. I appeal to you for the sake of love.

Receive that one back. Receive that couple back on the basis of love. Amen.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the book of Fleeman. What a word it is to believers.

Apply it to our hearts. Work in us to will and to do of your good pleasure. Help us to walk in obedience.

Help us to obey this as it fits our life and situation. And encourage every heart. We thank you that you do call us back to the Bible.

But you also this morning call us to love the brethren, whoever they are. To love all the brethren all the time. Receive our thanks in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/LWN9iZbePsU.mp4>

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