

# THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;  
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,  
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God  
IN CHRIST JESUS.**  
(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)*

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## ***On Account of Love***

June 10, 2009

**(8) For this reason, having much boldness [or, confidence] in Christ to be commanding you [to be doing] the proper [thing], (9) [yet] on account of love I rather appeal, being such a one as Paul, an old man, but now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.** (Philemon 1:8-9 ALT)

The book of Philemon is unlike Paul's other letters in that he addressed a domestic affair involving two men, Onesimus, a slave, and Philemon, the master. Evidently, the slave defrauded his master, fled to Colossae, and made his way to Rome, where he met Paul while he was under house arrest. Subsequently, Onesimus was saved and began to serve Paul. Although Onesimus, who became a beloved brother to Paul, was free in Christ, he, nevertheless, was still a slave under Roman law and belonged to Philemon.

Paul knew Philemon's heart. He was a good brother, a beloved brother. Paul was comforted by his love, knowing that the brethren in Colossae were refreshed through this brother. On the basis of knowing the faithfulness and love of this brother, Paul could say that he had confidence in Christ to order Philemon to release Onesimus and receive him back as a brother in Christ. He knew that Philemon was filled with the life of Christ and that if he ordered Philemon to receive Onesimus, he would obey because the Christ in him would respond. He would do the righteous thing. Thus, Paul could state: **"Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you"** (Philemon 21).

We find that Paul had the same heart towards the believers in Corinth, a church that had many problems, and yet he was confident in them because they were in Christ. In spite of great conflict, Paul could even rejoice and overflow with joy. **I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you** (2 Corinthians 7:16). What a heart we see in Paul; he never condemned. He did not condemn the Corinthians nor did he condemn Philemon. Great was Paul's confidence in Christ that was in them. He fully trusted that the life of Christ in them would lead them to do what was right.

This is a lesson for all of the Lord's people, particularly for leaders who might be tempted to think that they must demand things of the brethren, that it is their right to make people do things. Christ was Paul's center, not the flesh of man. When we see love and faithfulness in a brother or sister, we are to respond to them in the same way of love, trusting that their hearts will respond to the righteousness of Christ. May we know the joy and peace of following such an example! When our center is Christ, all problems melt in His presence.

As disciples, do we seek to build up the Christ in one another? Do we seek after the Christ in one another? When we touch the life of Christ in another, do we trust that life, have confidence in that life?

In Christ, Paul gives us a more excellent way. Paul showed the Corinthian believers the more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13; 14:1), which is love, and he exercised this way with Philemon. **"On account of love"** (ALT) or **"For love's sake"** (NASB). Paul would tell us that we can have all the gifts operating in our lives, and yet if we do not have love, we are a noisy gong. If we do not have love, we are nothing. If we do not have love, it profits us nothing. The greatest gift is love. We are exhorted to pursue love.

It was on the basis of love that Paul could appeal to Philemon. Why? Because he knew that Philemon was a man who loved. Paul had heard of his love toward the saints. Paul had comfort in Philemon's love. It was on this basis that Paul could appeal in love. It was love responding to love.

Do we relate to our brothers and sisters in this way? Do we encourage the saints in love and serve as an example of love to all the brethren? We are commanded to love God and to love one another. Love is very practical. It covers a multitude of sins. It casts out all fear. It endures all things. It never fails.

All that we do must be for the sake of love. After all, **God is love!** If we do not love, then we do not know God (1 John 4:8). If we love, then God abides in us and we love one another (1 John 4:12). As we abide in God, His love is perfected in us.

As an apostle, Paul had authority to order Philemon, but notice that Paul did not exercise this authority. On the basis of love, Paul appealed; he persuaded in love. Paul had the credentials to give an order. He was aged. He had the experience of being an apostle for many years. He had the marks of suffering for Christ. He was imprisoned. Paul could have told Philemon: "I am in prison for the sake of Christ. You must listen to me and follow my order. I have the authority." This was not the heart of Paul.

Paul had authority given by the Lord. He could deal with things in a severe way if needed, but Paul saw this as the last resort. His heart was always to build up the saints and not to tear them down.

Paul serves as an example to us, one which we need to follow, especially those in some role as a leader of the Lord's people. Severity with the saints can inflict great damage and tear them down. In love, our goal must be to build up and never tear down.

True spiritual leadership persuades a brother in love rather than uses a hammer of authority. It is persuasive not lording; gentle not harsh; confident in Christ, not arrogant in the flesh; loving not hating; building up not tearing down.

Paul appealed to Philemon for Onesimus, who was like a child to him. He had begotten him in prison. He was formerly useless as a slave to Philemon, but, in Christ, he was now useful both to Philemon and Paul. Although Paul still had great need for this brother, he was sending him back to Philemon. He appealed to Philemon that he would receive Onesimus back, not as a slave but as a fellow brother in Christ. Paul was even willing to take all the wrong that Onesimus had done and put it to his account.

Paul's heart was to restore Onesimus back to Philemon even though it would be a loss for Paul. It was of more value to see a brother restored than to hold onto the brother for personal reasons. Again, this is the heart of love. Love desires to restore a brother or sister. It is willing to suffer personal loss now in order to gain in the coming kingdom. Paul could have kept silent about Onesimus. After all, slavery was wrong and Onesimus was now saved. But this was not enough. Full restoration was needed. Love demands this. Love demands forgiveness.

Dear brethren, do you have a heart of love that seeks to restore brothers and sisters?

In Philippians 4:2-3, Paul urged the saints to help two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to live in harmony. Evidently there was some dispute between them that was causing some problems in the assembly. These women were good sisters who had shared in Paul's struggle for the gospel. There was need to help them through their personal struggle with one another. This is a vital lesson that we learn from Paul. Live in harmony. Love one another. Do not hold accounts against one another. Settle the issues between and among us so that we can live in harmony, in peace.

What is the lesson we are to learn? Love restores! We have no record of Philemon's response, but we must believe that he obeyed Paul's request, and Onesimus was restored back to Philemon as a fellow brother in the Lord.

Finally, Paul wrote Philemon that he knew he would do even more than what Paul said. In restoring a brother, it is not merely forgiving, settling the account, and moving on to something else. It is embracing the brother or sister back into fellowship and allowing the gifting in that brother or sister to begin operating. It is not holding the past over one's head but letting the past go. After all, is this not the very heart of our Lord? Through His death on the cross and the shedding of His blood, our past sins are blotted out, forgotten. God does not hold them over our head but fully forgives us, even to the point of not remembering them anymore. Love demands that we forgive and forget.

True brotherly love is when one fully restores a brother or sister, and they begin to take up their gifted responsibilities in the house of God. This is the heart of our beloved Lord Jesus.

For love's sake, let us appeal to one another. Let us refresh one another's heart in Christ (Philemon 20).

May the love of Christ become known through us to the world so that Christ is exalted!