Saturday, October 23, 2020—2021 West Michigan Grace Bible Conference—I Beseech Thee: The Language of Grace

Assignment

- Expound upon Philemon 8-10

- Explain the difference between enjoining and beseeching.

- Discuss how beseeching is consistent with the principle of grace.

- Provide examples for elsewhere in Paul's epistles of him beseeching believers to a particular course of conduct.

Verse 8

- **Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,**

- **Wherefore**—on the basis of what Paul has said in verses 1-7, he is now going to get into the meat of the epistle. Paul's instructions in verse 8 and following are based upon the following:

  o His authority as an apostle (1-3)

  o The character of Philemon (4-7)

- **though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee**—as an Apostle, Paul possessed the authority to "enjoin" Philemon as to the proper course of action. According to Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* the word "enjoin" carries the following meanings:

  o To order or direct with urgency; to admonish or instruct with authority; to command. Says Johnson, 'this word is more authoritative than direct, and less imperious than command.' It has the force of pressing admonition with authority; as, a parent enjoins on his children the duty of obedience. But it has also the sense of command; as the duties enjoined by God in the moral law.

  o In law, to forbid judicially; to issue or direct a legal injunction to stop proceedings.

- The word rendered "enjoin" in verse 8 is elsewhere translated as "command" by the King James translators.

  o Mark 1:27

  o Mark 9:25

  o Luke 8:25, 31

- **that which is convenient**—is not a reference to what is easy, at hand, or nearby in the modern sense of the word. Rather, the word "convenient" in this context is a reference to what is fitting,

suitable, or proper. Noah Webster defines the word "convenient" as follows in the *American Dictionary of the English Language*:

- o   Fit; suitable; proper; adapted to use or to wants; commodious; followed by to or for; usually by for.

- Relevant cross references give insight into how to understand the word "convenient" in Philemon 8.
    - o   Ephesians 5:4—"not convenient"

    - o   Colossians 3:18—"fit"

- After considering all the component parts of verse 8 we understand the verse to be saying that Paul had the authority "in Christ" to "enjoin" or command Philemon as to the "convenient" or suitable/fitting course of action with respect to Onesimus.

- Elsewhere in Paul's epistles we see him issuing imperative commands to the churches. Consider Colossians 3 as a case in point. There are 15 such commands in Colossians 3.

    - o   See PowerPoint

- Philemon 8—by looking at Colossians 3 we can see that Paul was not above "enjoining," commanding, or charging believers with respect to the proper course of conduct. Yet as we will see in Philemon 9, Paul explicitly laid aside his apostolic right to do so and elected instead to "beseech" Philemon.

Verse 9

- **Yet for love's sake I rather beseech *thee*, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ**.

- In verse 9 we learn that instead or enjoining or commanding Philemon as to the proper course of action, Paul beseeches him for "love's sake." In following this course of action Paul was applying the doctrine taught elsewhere in his epistles.

    - o   II Corinthians 5:14—"constraineth" means "to compel or force; to urge with irresistible power, or with a power sufficient to produce the effect," according to Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language*. The love of Christ is supposed to be the motivating power in the life of a believer.

    - o   Romans 12:10

    - o   I Thessalonians 4:9

    - o   Ephesians 5:2

- o Colossians 3:14

- Philemon 9—for "love's sake" Paul beseeches Philemon instead of enjoining/commanding him. To "beseech" means "to entreat; to supplicate; to implore; to ask or pray with urgency; followed by a person," according to the *American Dictionary of the English Language* by Noah Webster. Beseeching is the opposite of enjoining.

  - o II Corinthians 10:1

- Beseeching is the opposite of enjoining. For "love's sake" Paul is choosing to "beseech" Philemon as to the proper course of action with respect to Onesimus. While the Apostle Paul does often command the body of Christ with respect to conduct and action, he also frequently beseeches the body of Christ.

- The word "beseech" occurs 21 times in 20 verses in Paul's epistles. Often, when Paul "beseechs" believers to a particular course of action it is rooted in or based upon the Godhead itself or a particular attribute or aspect of the Godhead.

  - o Romans 12:1-2—"by the mercies of God"

  - o Romans 15:30—"for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake"

  - o I Corinthians 1:10—"by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

  - o II Corinthians 10:1—"by the meekness and gentleness of Christ"

  - o I Thessalonians 4:1—"by the Lord Jesus"

  - o II Thessalonians 2:1—"by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"

- Philemon 9-10—in this verse, Paul's beseeching is based upon his own personal circumstances (age & imprisonment) as well as his personal relationships with both Philemon and Onesimus. It is, therefore, important to note that Paul's beseeching of Philemon on behalf of Onesimus is an intimate person request not an apostolic command.

- To "beseech" someone is the ultimate application of grace. It is a step beyond commanding. As we see in Philemon 9, beseeching is born out of love. Paul seems to use this structure when something of personal, practical, or doctrinal significance is in view.

  - o See table in PowerPoint

Verse 10-11

- **I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: 11) Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me**:

- As we have already seen, Paul's beseeching of Philemon was on behalf of Onesimus. Onesimus was Pau's "son" in the faith. After running away from Philemon, Onesimus heard the gospel and got saved under Paul's ministry. This reality transformed Onesimus from being unprofitable to Philemon to being profitable to both Paul and Philemon.