

# Apologia Talks

## Helpers: The Tenth Commandment

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### Introduction

There is a time honored cliché that states, “Good help is hard to find.” This adage seems to be proven true time and time again. What also seems to be the case, is that when we do find the kind of helper that we are looking for, someone else has laid claim to him or her. What is a Christian to do when temptation whispers in our ear that we need to do whatever we can to persuade that helper to leave the person they have already made a commitment to?

### Scripture Connect

The Apostle Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. Not even life in prison could stop Paul from sharing with others the amazing love that is found in Jesus Christ. Paul knew that if the Gospel message was to be shared with everyone, he and the other Apostles were going to need helpers.

One such helper was a man named Onesimus. The Bible does not share the exact details of how Paul and Onesimus met. What Paul does share with us is the change that God has made in the life of this man. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans (10:5-7), that hearing the word of Christ creates faith. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, we read that, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) Paul's words show us that the Gospel created faith in Onesimus, corrected the direction of his life, and generated in him a desire assist in the work of God. Let us read again this personal letter that Paul had written to his friend Philemon about Philemon's slave, Onesimus.

*Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,*

*To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you. Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.*

*(Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you. (Philemon 1-22, ESV)*

How easy would it have been for Paul to keep Onesimus and use him to continue the important work of sharing God's Word with others? Instead, Paul serves as a great example to us what it means to live by the Tenth Commandment. Onesimus rightfully belonged to Philemon. Paul was giving back to Philemon what was his. By returning Onesimus to Philemon, Paul was obeying God's commands. Paul acted in fear and love of God to

not entice, force away, or turn Onesimus against Philemon, but urged Onesimus to stay with Philemon and do his duty. (Paraphrase of Luther's explanation to the Tenth Commandment.) In so doing, Paul's actions also encouraged Onesimus to obey the Fourth Commandment.

### **Doctrinal Quotation**

In this day and age, it is increasingly frowned upon to own a slave, and therefore some can misinterpret or overlook the general premise of what God is trying to teach us in this commandment. Martin Luther had another way of looking at the Tenth Commandment.

*"Thus it was done formerly also with respect to wives: they knew such devices that if one were pleased with another woman, he personally or through others (as there were many ways and means to be invented) caused her husband to conceive a displeasure toward her, or had her resist him and so conduct herself that he was obliged to dismiss her and leave her to the other. That sort of thing undoubtedly prevailed much under the Law, as also we read in the Gospel of King Herod that he took his brother's wife while he was yet living, and yet wished to be thought an honorable, pious man, as St. Mark also testifies of him. But such an example, I trust, will not occur among us, Because in the New Testament those who are married are forbidden to be divorced, except in such a case where one [shrewdly] by some stratagem takes away a rich bride from another. But it is not a rare thing with us that one estranges or alienates another's man-servant or maid-servant, or entices them away by flattering words." (305-306, Luther's Large Catechism)*

While slavery may be a thing of the past, God still provides and surrounds us with the helpers in our lives. These helpers can take on the role of a spouse, an employee and so on. In this commandment, God calls on us to honor the gift of individuals that He has placed in the lives of others. Those people serve as helpmates to our neighbor. Any enticement or trickery to take them away from the commitments they have made to our neighbor only serves to hurt those we are called to love as ourselves.

God places helpers in our lives as well. While we may sometimes have difficulty seeing how they can assist our work in God's kingdom, every person placed in our path can benefit from the example of God's work in our own lives and help us to be stronger in our service to our Lord. The key is seeing them the way that God sees them, and that is through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. God looks at us the same way as well.

### **Application**

We started with a cliché, so let's end with another one. There may be times that we encounter a situation where someone is unhappy with the person they are teamed with. We have the opportunity to support those people in their time of need. "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." To me, this means finding out what is at the heart of the issue by listening and asking questions. In these situations, encourage them or help them to find a solution to the issue that will allow all parties to continue to accomplish the task for which God has given them. And during those times that you discover an amazing person who is helping your neighbor, give thanks to God for the gift of that person and pray that you would be considered as wonderful of a helper in God's kingdom as well. The last thing is to trust that God has provided Christ, our refuge and strength, an ever present help in time of need. (Psalm 46)

