

Be Forgiving
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The book of Philemon

Group 1

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— 2 also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home:

- Look at verses 1&2:
 - Who wrote this letter?
 - Where does verse 1 indicate he is as he writes?
 - Who was with him?
 - To whom was it written?
 - If someone has a study Bible with notes, what does it say about who Apphia and Archippus probably were? Wife and son of Philemon.
 - What do these verses tell us about Philemon? Especially the last sentence of verse 2?
 - What does verse 2 and verse 16 further down indicate about Philemon's economic status?
- We just finished Paul's letter to the church at Colossae...Philemon was the host for that church that met in his home.

Group 2

3 Grace and peace to you[a] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. 7 Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

- Look at verses 3-7
- What things about Philemon and his family were Paul thankful for?
- Verse 6: How did Paul pray Philemon would grow in his faith?
- Verse 7: What do you think Paul meant by "refreshed the hearts of God's people"?
- What was Paul trying to accomplish in these first verses as he started this letter to Philemon?

Group 3

Paul's Plea for Onesimus

8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, 9 yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— 10 that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,[b] who became my son while I was in chains. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

12 I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. 13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. 15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— 16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

- What do you think Paul means in verse 8? How is it like a parent of a young adult or adult child?
- Who was Onesimus? Hint: look ahead to verse 16.

Onesimus was obviously a slave that had run away from his master Philemon. He had escaped to Rome, no doubt to try to blend in and disappear among the hustle and bustle.

Apparently God orchestrated circumstances such that Onesimus crossed paths with Paul who was imprisoned in Rome.

- What does Paul mean when he calls Onesimus his "son"?
- Based on verse 11 and verse 16, what do you think has happened to Onesimus since Philemon has seen him?
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- What is Paul asking Philemon to do?
- When two parties are apart they need to do what? Reconcile
- In order to reconcile what must the injured offer to the one who did the injury?
Forgiveness
- For the whole class - Considering verses 15 and 16: Why was Paul saying Philemon should reconcile with Onesimus?

John MacArthur writes:

...for a Christian, a failure to forgive is unthinkable. I don't care what the issue is, I don't care what the offense is, a failure to forgive is a blatant open act of disobedience. We have been told as explicitly as we could possibly be told that if anybody offends us we are to forgive them. How many times? Seventy times seven, or that is an endless number of times. And that the reason we are to forgive is because our Father in heaven has forgiven us and will continue to forgive us as we are faithful to forgive others.

- Paul is saying to Philemon, because you are a Christian and especially because Onesimus has become a Christian you need to reconcile and forgive.
- There were some big issues at play in that culture of slave and master...let's look at these next verses 17-22.

Group 4

17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

22 And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

- Verse 17 gets to the heart of the issue. What is Paul asking Philemon to do and why would that be a big request?
- Why do verses 18 and 19 indicate it might be hard? Onesimus didn't just run away, apparently he stole something from Philemon.
- Paul was willing to personally make restitution in order to get Philemon and Onesimus reconciled. By the way, sometimes we have to be willing to pay a price to help others reconcile.
- If Paul was willing to pay the price for what Onesimus had done...What is that a picture of?
- Verse 19: What do you think Paul means by "not to mention that you owe me your very self.". Clearly Paul led Philemon to faith in Christ.
- If Onesimus had not only run away but had stolen what did he deserve?

Warren Wiersbe writes:

The law permitted a master to execute a rebellious slave, but Philemon was a Christian. If he forgave Onesimus, what would the other masters (and slaves) think? If he punished him, how would it affect his testimony? What a dilemma!

- We have a word for someone giving someone else what they do not deserve. It's the same word we use for God giving us what we do not deserve. What is it?
Grace.

Ray Stedman writes:

If Paul had been writing this on a legal basis, he would have said: "Philemon! As the Holy Apostle of the Holy Church, I command you to receive back this young man and to give him back his job!" That is as far as law could go. And Philemon would probably have had to obey it, or else get into trouble with the church. But grace goes much

farther. It not only has restored Onesimus to his place in the household, but it has restored him to his place in the family as well. (Grace) breaks down all the barriers, smoothes out all the friction that has developed, and creates a better situation than ever existed before.

- As Christians why are we told to forgive others ? Because God forgave us.

Ephesians 4:32 - Paul writes:

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- Martin Luther said, "All of us are Onesimuses!"
- He's saying: We've all rebelled and runaway and deserve death but God has given us both mercy and grace.
- What do verses 20 and 21 say about how Paul is making his appeal to Philemon?
- Paul could have "pulled rank" but he didn't....remember verses 8 and 9? (read them)
- Why do you think Paul made a request rather than a demand?
- He was confident that Philemon would do the right thing out of Christian love and obedience.
- What are some of the negative consequences for a Christian who refuses to FORGIVE?

John MacArthur gives us four negative consequences for a Christian's failure to FORGIVE

1. Unforgiveness will imprison you in your past. A failure to forgive will imprison you in your past. Like an open sore.
2. Unforgiveness not only makes you a prisoner to your own past but unforgiveness produces bitterness.
3. Unforgiveness gives Satan an open door. Ephesians 4:26 and 27 says, "In your anger do not sin, do not let the sun go down while you're still angry and do not give the devil a foothold."
4. Unforgiveness hinders your fellowship with God. Unforgiveness hinders your fellowship with God. Jesus said if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

What's the Takeaway?

- If we're a believer in Christ the command to forgive others is clear:

Matthew 18:21-22

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times

Matthew 6:14-15 - Jesus said:

14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

- Are you and I harboring bitterness toward someone who has injured us?
- The question this week is not "**should** I forgive?"
- The question this week is will I **be obedient**?