

Philemon – *The Grace to Forgive*
Philemon 19-25
Reading: Genesis 3:17-24

Bethany Baptist Church
July 25, 2021

...pray...

Join me in the NT *Letter of Philemon* (read; point out we conclude w/19-25).

Philemon is about *forgiving*. Forgive *others* because God has forgiven *us*.

Do you remember the story?

Paul had a *friend* named Philemon.

Paul was *prisoner* in Rome; Philemon was a *wealthy Christian* in Colossae.

Philemon had a *slave* named Onesimus.

Onesimus *stole* from Philemon and *ran away*.

The slave made his way to *Rome* and ran into *Paul* and his fellow workers.

Onesimus *heard* the gospel from Paul, *trusted* Jesus, and was *born again*.

Paul *sent* Onesimus *back* to Philemon.

Philemon opened his door one morning to his *slave* and Paul's *letter*.

Perhaps Paul's point can best be summed-up in **v.17**: *If then you regard me as a partner, **accept** him as you would me.*

Philemon is about *forgiving*.

Paul concludes his *appeal to forgive* with three persuasive reminders.

- 1. The reminder of a *warm friendship* (vv.19-22).**
- 2. The reminder of a *good testimony* (vv.23-24).**
- 3. The reminder of *all-sufficient grace* (v.25).**

The persuasive reminder of a *warm friendship* (read vv.19-22).

1. We pick up Paul's letter with his reminder to Philemon of **two debts**; one that *can be paid* and one that *can never be paid*!
 - a. Paul's letters were dictated to a secretary (*amanuensis*; Lat – *hand*).
 - i. But Paul has *taken* the pen from his secretary and personally *scribbled* his signature on the letter.
 - ii. In v.18 he promised to *make restitution* for any damages Onesimus has incurred against Philemon.
 - iii. His *signature* (19) makes that promise a *signed IOU*. If Onesimus has a debt, Paul will pay it (v.18 – *anything*).
 - b. But then Paul immediately reminds Philemon (19) that *he* is in the apostle's debt!
 - i. ...*you owe me even your own self*...
 - ii. Apparently, years earlier, Philemon had *heard* the gospel from Paul, and *turned* to Christ and *trusted* in His death/ resurrection.
 - iii. His sins were *forgiven* and God *saved* him!
 - iv. So there is a sense in which Philemon owes Paul for his eternal life – "*even your own self*"!
 - v. The Greek verb for *owe* is in the *present tense* – the debt is still *unsettled*. I think the point is, Philemon owes Paul a debt that can *never* be repaid!

2. And so Paul *appeals* to his friend for this *benefit*, this *refreshment*.
 - a. Paul (7) has praised Philemon for a love that *refreshed* the hearts of the saints (*refresh* is the picture of a weary column of soldiers, who stop just long enough to *take five* and drink from their *canteens*).
 - i. Now the words *heart* & *refresh* appear again in v.20.
 - b. Paul asks – *can you refresh my heart too, beloved friend?* Paul’s point, of course is, will you *accept* Onesimus?
 - i. “**Me**” & “**my**” (20) are *emphatic*. As if to say, *you’ve refreshed others, now it’s my turn...refresh my heart!*
 - ii. The *back to back* references to “*in the Lord*” and “*in Christ*” remind us that *forgiveness* is a **Christian** *virtue - duty*.
 - iii. And that even our *friendships* (Paul & Philemon) should be lived/enjoyed in the framework of the *gospel*.
 - iv. Beloved, “*in the Lord,*” “*in Christ,*” should be at the heart of every relationship/friendship you have!
3. *Forgiving is the right thing to do*. In v.8 Paul referred to *forgiving* as the **proper** response when a brother *offends you* and *seeks reconciliation*.
 - a. So Paul is *confident* that Philemon understands and will *accept* his slave. It is the *proper thing* for a Christian to do.

- b. In fact, Paul adds this: *I know that you will do **even more** than what I say.* ... What could Paul be *alluding* to...?
- i. Some have guessed *freeing* Onesimus. But that's unlikely.
 - ii. Some have guessed *sending* Onesimus back to Paul in Rome.
 1. But Paul (22) will soon *leave* Rome and *visit* Colossae!
- What is *more* likely...
- iii. Perhaps Paul is asking that Philemon *restore* the runaway to his former duties.
 - iv. Perhaps he is asking that Philemon *receive* his slave as a *brother in Christ* (**read vv.15-16 w/ me**). ...*pause*...
- 4. Read v.22.** When I began to study Philemon, I thought v.22 was a *final turning point* in which Paul politely turned his focus *away* from forgiving Onesimus. Kind of tactfully *turning down the heat* after making his point!
- a. But *smarter Bible students than me* point out that while Paul is wrapping up his letter, *forgiveness* is still on his radar! There's still some *heat in the kitchen*.
 - b. The Apostle Paul is about to be *released* and is coming to Colossae!
 - i. He entrusts his arrangements to Philemon – *prepare for me a lodging*.
 - c. What will Paul *hope to find* when he visits the household of Philemon...?
 - i. **Onesimus**, *accepted, received, forgiven, restored*.
 - ii. That Philemon has done *even more than Paul has said*.
 - d. So Paul's promise to visit Philemon is a *subtle warning* that the apostle will hold his friend *accountable* to do as he says...to *forgive, and even more*.

5. Paul writes (22) “*I will be **given** to you,*” “*through your **prayers***”.\
- a. While “*Philemon*” is **not** a letter about *prayer*, Paul sees everything through the *eyes of faith*. Paul prays about *everything*.
 - b. His release is not simply a *judicial decision*, it is a gift (*given*) from God.
 - c. And God has *moved* the legal system of Rome in *answer* to the prayers of the saints in Colossae (*your prayers*, plural).
 - d. Dear brothers & sisters, we serve a *prayer-answering* God!

Philemon and Paul are *dear friends* with a *long and deep* history. Paul is *confident* that Philemon will forgive Onesimus. In fact, he expects to *soon see it for himself*!

Paul concludes w/subtle reminder of a maintaining a *good testimony*.

1. Do you remember the connection between the NT's *Letter to Philemon* and the *Letter to the Colossians*...?
 - a. The church at Colossae met in *Philemon's house*.
 - b. One of the *elders* from Colossae was in with Paul in Rome.
 - c. Paul wrote these **two** letters together, *while incarcerated*, and sent them to Colossae (and Philemon) by the same courier Tychicus.
 - d. And he *also* sent Onesimus back to Colossae, escorted by Tychicus.
 - e. So the same names that appear here in vv.23, 24 of *Philemon* can also be spotted in the closing greetings of 4:7-14 of *Colossians*.

2. Let's *survey* those four names...
 - a. *Epaphras* (23) – Is held to be the man who *planted* the church in Colossae, the congregation that now *meets* in Philemon's home. He is likely an *elder* in the church. He is with Paul in Rome, perhaps as a *prisoner* (literal or figurative).
 - b. *Mark* (24) – John Mark. He is author of the *Gospel of Mark*. He is the cousin of *Barnabas* (Acts). After a rough ministry start (young), Mark has been a useful coworker of the *Apostle Peter*, as well as *Paul*.
 - c. *Aristarchus* – A Jewish believer from Thessalonica. Aristarchus and Paul have been through a lot together: *riot* (Ephesus), *shipwreck* (Mediterranean), and *prison* for preaching Jesus.

- d. *Demas* – Here is a man who will turn out to be a *caution* for all of us!
- i. 2 Tim 4:10 – By the time Paul reaches the end of his life, Demas will have been *wooded away* by his love of the world; he will *desert* Paul and *flee* to Thessalonica.
 - ii. Calvin writes of the deserter Demas: *If one of Paul’s assistants became weary and discouraged and was afterwards drawn away by the vanity of the world, let none of us rely too much on our own zeal lasting even one year, but remembering how much of the journey still lies ahead, let us ask God for steadfastness.*
 - iii. God has promised to *preserve* the saints, but the saints are commanded to *persevere in well-doing*.
- e. *Luke* – The beloved physician (*first medical missionary*). Author of the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts* (~ 28% NT!). Often with Paul. Luke was with Paul in the apostle’s *final days* (2 Tim 4:11).
- f. Paul simply refers to these men (23) as “*my fellow workers*.” And look at **v.1**, that’s how he initially referred to Philemon. Paul has just placed Philemon in some *lofty company*!
3. But is this list of companions just *convention*, ... a Pauline *custom*?
- a. **No!** Paul is *intentional* right-up to the final words of his letter!
 - b. Philemon will undoubtedly see that Paul has placed him in a company of these *mighty men of the gospel* (like David’s *mighty men*).
 - c. And Philemon will *understand* that all of these men were with Paul when Onesimus *arrived* in Rome and then *came to faith* in Christ. Including his own *pastor* - Epaphras!
 - d. He will further *understand* that all these men were with Paul when the apostle *dictated*, *signed*, and *sealed* this letter.
 - e. And they will all know *why* Paul wrote.

- f. *Everyone is watching Philemon!* His family and church will be watching at home in Colossae (1,2); these Christian heroes will be watching from Rome.

And as Philemon reads the letter, and scans these names, he will feel the *holy weight* of his fellow-workers' expectations. His *testimony* hangs in the balance.

The reminder of all-sufficient *grace* (v.25).

1. *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*
 - a. What a beautiful *benediction!* That would work on a *Hobby Lobby* wall hanging!
 - b. And that's kind of a *problem*. If we aren't *careful*, we are tempted to *reduce* Paul's closing words to nothing more than a *lovely formalism*.
2. But I maintain again that Paul is *intentional* up to the last words of his epistle!
3. *The **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*
 - a. *Forgiving* is the right thing to do, *forgiving* is a costly thing to do, and forgiving requires *grace*.
 - b. Let's remember what *grace* is: "*Grace is God giving you the **desire** and the **ability** to do His will. First in **salvation**, and then for every **step** of the Christian life.*" **2X**
 - c. *Forgiving* demands *grace*.

4. *Did Philemon forgive Onesimus...? Yes!*

- a. Do you remember (1, 2) that Paul carefully crafted the **greeting** of *Philemon* to be read *first* by Philemon, then by wife *Apphia* and his son *Archippus*, and then in front of the *entire church*?
 - i. *...to Philemon...to Apphia...to Archippus...to the church*
- b. Letters from the apostles were *read* in public (church), then *copied* and *sent* to other churches.
- c. Soon, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, a select group of *inspired letters* was gathered (*canonized*) into our **NT**.
- d. If Philemon had *hardened his heart* against Onesimus this letter would **not** be in your Bible this morning!
- e. It would have gone *straight* from Philemon's *hands* to Philemon's *fire*.

Forgiving is *hard*. Forgiving requires *grace*! Our study in Philemon proves that Philemon got *grace*, and Philemon *forgave* Onesimus!

Let's sum up Paul's *principles of forgiveness* from his letter to Philemon.

1. The need for *accountability* (2). Paul put a *spotlight* on his *private appeal* – Philemon's *family* and *church* are waiting to see what their friend will do.
 - a. Then (23,24) Paul closed by reminding Philemon of all these *Christian rock stars* who knew what Paul was asking Philemon to do!
2. *Forgiveness is the fruit of Christian character* (4-7). Our willingness to forgive is a measure our *godly character (faith, love, obedience, mature understanding)*.
3. *Divine reciprocity. Forgiven people forgive (2X)*. I.e., If you won't forgive me, *God* won't forgive you! All over the **NT!**
 - a. **Mt 6:14,15** – “*For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*”
4. Forgiveness is the *right thing to do (“proper”)* (8).
5. Forgiveness is the *fruit of love* (9). 1 Cor 13:5 *Love does not take into account a wrong suffered.*
6. Forgiveness is especially extended to *other believers* (10). Paul *upped the ante* by announcing that Onesimus had become a Christian!
7. Forgiveness is *fueled by hope* (11). When you forgive a Christian you have hope that he/she has truly *repented* and will *bear fruit* for the Kingdom.
8. Forgiveness *touches many people* (12, etc.). Forgiving *one* can encourage *many*.
9. Forgiveness *may* involve *restitution* (18,19). It will **certainly** involve *confession* and *repentance* (Onesimus returned to Philemon).
10. Forgiveness is *hard* – forgiveness requires *grace* (25).

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit ...pray...