

Charge That to My Account

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I want to begin this morning in our time in God's word by simply reading the text that is going to be the subject of my message. If you would turn to the book of Philemon, we're going to finish the book of Philemon today and in the providence of God, once again we've come to a text that has good things for us as God's word always does. Philemon, which is just before the book of Hebrews in your Bible if you're not quite sure where to find that, Philemon, beginning in verse 17. The Apostle Paul wrote to his beloved friend,

17 If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). 20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. 22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you. 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message that says that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, died for sinners and rose on the third day to give them life, to purchase for them the forgiveness of their sins. It is our blessed privilege as Christians, as a church, to be able to tell anyone who will hear that Christ will receive them and deliver them from sin if they come to him in humble repentant faith. This is a message that we can proclaim dogmatically to anyone, anywhere, at any time, anywhere in the world, that this Gospel message about Jesus Christ is for you and if you will believe in Christ, you can have eternal life and be reconciled to God. That's a wonderful privilege. That's a wonderful trust to have deposited to you, to be able to say those things.

It's even more wonderful to be a partaker of the reality of which the Gospel speaks. It is the most wonderful thing in life that you could ever have. It is your most precious possession, Christian, is for you to be in full union with Jesus Christ, knowing that he has reconciled you completely to God and he will never withdraw, he will never walk away, he will be with you always even to the end of the age. This is the most wonderful news,

this is the most wonderful message anywhere in the universe. There will never be a better message than that and one day when we are all gathered around the throne, we will simply sing the praises of the Lamb who was slain for us.

What a blessed eternal privilege it is and, you know, being reminded of this, I guess a little bit especially this past week, the Gospel promises forgiveness to the worst of sinners. There is no sin that crosses a line that God is not willing to forgive; that the death of Christ was sufficient for every sin that anyone who believes in him had ever committed. Whether it's a sin of treachery or criminal conduct or simply just having a hateful spirit or the worst sin of all, refusing to love God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind, the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that a loving, gracious God invites you to come to him through Jesus Christ. Simply acknowledge your sin. Repent of it and embrace Christ. Receive him and rest in him alone as your righteousness before God.

There was an old theologian, I don't know if he was old at the time that he wrote it, he's old to us because this is back in the 19th century, who said, "Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die, another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity." That is the message of the Gospel, for you to abandon any sense of self-righteousness and to put your entire trust in Christ alone who lived a righteous perfect life, died a perfect substitutionary death on your behalf, paid for your sins and was risen from the dead. God says, "Believe in my Son and I will forgive all of your sins forever and receive you into my family." That's a wonderful message, isn't it? It's okay to nod and acknowledge that. This is the best news ever. The Gospel is good news.

Now, we are going to tie all of this into Philemon, believe it or not. One of the things that God does when he saves you, is he gives you a new nature. You are born again. You are transformed. You are changed and God gives you a nature that is like his own nature. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." And part of the aspect, one of the many blessed aspects of this new nature and this new disposition that God gives to you at conversion is this: is that he implants in his people a forgiving spirit, a spirit that is willing to be forgiving just like God was forgiving to you. It's not simply a moral persuasion that says, "Oh, God forgave me and therefore I should forgive others." That's certainly very true but God changes your nature, changes your heart in such a way that you are disposed in that direction if you're a true Christian.

Jesus made this explicit in the Lord's prayer. Genuine Christians, here's the thing before we turn over to the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6, genuine Christians are naturally inclined to forgive wrongs that are done against them. It is their bent. It is the direction of their lives. It is the direction of a Christian to be like Christ in that forgiving nature rather than being hard and spiteful and irreconcilable. Jesus made this, as I said, explicit in the Lord's prayer.

Turn over to Matthew 6, if you would. Matthew 6. It even becomes a prerequisite to genuine prayer before God. Genuine prayer before God brings this forgiving spirit on its

knees before God as it prays and makes its requests known. Let's start in Matthew 6:5, Jesus said, "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." So Jesus says, "Here's how you are to pray. Let me start in a preliminary matter," he says, "I'll tell you that you are not to pray publicly in order to call attention to yourself, you go someplace where men don't see you praying and you pray in a manner that only he sees so it's a matter of private devotion before God rather than making a spiritual spectacle of yourself before men." Jesus says, "That's how my disciples pray."

Then he goes on and we'll skip over verses 7 and 8. We'll get to this passage within the year. I'm very excited about that. But Jesus says in chapter 6, verse 9, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.'" Stop there for just a moment. Notice that Jesus says, "When you pray, start out by exalting God and exalting his name, praising him for who he is. Come to God with a spirit of submission that says, 'Not my will but thine be done,' and a spirit that says, 'O God, your kingdom come. Lord, let this earth pass away, God, I pray for the coming of your kingdom. I pray for your will to be done. I praise and worship and exalt you.'" And you come in a spirit of dependence that says, "Give us this day our daily bread. O God, sustain our daily existence."

And in that spirit of private devotion of prayer, notice what Jesus says that the nature of prayer obviously in sincerity should be, verse 12, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." Look at verse 14, "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." Wow. Jesus says, "Understand that when you come to God in prayer, that you must come with a forgiving disposition as one of his disciples; that you cannot be in God's presence with a bitter, angry spirit, hostile toward men. No," Jesus says, "that's not the nature of God. That's not the nature of salvation. That's not the nature of life in the kingdom." Jesus says, "No, if you want to pray to God and have full access, unhindered access to him, you check your heart and see if you've been forgiving, if you have a forgiving disposition toward those that have wronged you." Jesus says, "If you have, then ask God to forgive your sins. Ask him to forgive your debts. But if you have in your heart, 'I will not forgive. I will be firm and I am bitter and I don't care,'" Jesus says, "Don't waste your time or God's because if you're praying like that, your Father won't forgive your transgressions." It's very searching actually to realize that Jesus Christ links your forgiveness of sin with a willingness to have a forgiving disposition toward others.

So this sobers us. It's not that we forgive other people's sin so that we deserve forgiveness from God, that's not the point. Jesus is simply saying that the nature of life in the kingdom of God is that you have been granted admission into his kingdom through a

gracious act of forgiveness from God and if you have been forgiven much, then you should be willing to forgive much as well, and that that is the spirit in which you come to God. So in one sense, say, "God, forgive me of my sins," while harboring in our own hearts and minds, "I refuse to forgive that person. I am angry and I don't care." Those two things don't go together and there is a reason why, this is why your prayer life shrivels up when you have a hard and resentful attitude toward someone else. It's because prayer doesn't work in that environment. It's stepping on the air hose of communion with God. Hard and irreconcilable hearts have no place in the body of Christ.

Now, with all of that in mind, that will help frame things as we go to the book of Philemon and finish our study here today. So turn back to Philemon here with that sense of forgiveness laid out for us from the text in the words of Jesus. Today, God has given us and in the book of Philemon, God has given us a word that gives us a real-life illustration of the principle of forgiveness from Paul's letter to Philemon. It's a real life illustration that lets us see without direct didactic teaching, illustrates for us a way and a principle that helps us see this is how forgiveness plays out in the life of the church. It's a very sweet and precious letter for that reason.

For those of you that have been with us, by now you know the story and I'm not going to rehearse it in detail. Here in the book of Philemon, what has happened is this: Paul has sent a fugitive slave back to his master, a slave that has wronged his master, probably stolen from him, and disgraced his master and harmed him in many ways. Philemon is the slave owner, Onesimus is the slave in this picture, and Onesimus makes his way to Rome and somehow connects up with the Apostle Paul and under the influence of the Apostle Paul, he comes to saving faith in Christ. He begins to serve Paul and they develop a close and loving friendship as Onesimus serves him well but now it's time for Onesimus to make restitution to his master. He needs to make things right, especially because it's in his capacity to do so, and so Paul writes a letter to his former master, Philemon, who is a wealthy and godly Christian man, Paul writes a letter to Philemon, a letter of reintroduction of Onesimus and says, "Philemon, I'm asking you to forgive your former slave and receive him back without holding it against him."

That brings us here to the point of the story. Paul now in the text as we pick up the text in verse 17, Paul is about to make the request which is the point of the entire letter. It's quite interesting and it's in keeping with the nature of the style of the Apostle Paul, that he has said many many things in order to build up to the real point that he wants to make. Sixteen verses now in our English text, 16 verses have been leading up to verse 17 and we won't rehearse everything prior to that but I'm just going to assume that you've been with us and if perhaps you missed it, you can pick them up from downloads at our website.

In verse 17, Paul says to Philemon, "If then you," Philemon, "regard me," Paul, "a partner, accept him," Onesimus," as you would me." Paul has explained Onesimus' conversion. He has explained how he loves this man and how Onesimus is coming back and has a spirit to want to make things right. "I know he was a fugitive, I know he ran away but, O Philemon, if you only knew how much the grace of God has changed him

and transformed him. He's a totally new man, Philemon, and so I'm asking you as a friend to receive him just like you would me; to accept him as you would me." It's a powerful request. "Accept him" has the idea of "Welcome him. Treat him with hospitality. Receive him with kindness." That's what he says when he says, "accept him." What he's saying is this, he says, "Philemon, don't hold his prior offense against him. Don't hold that against him, receive this fugitive slave in the same way that you would receive me myself."

How would Philemon receive Paul if he showed up? The great apostle, if he had showed up instead of Onesimus, you know, with the rust from the chains still dripping from his wrists and all of a sudden Philemon opens the door and there is Paul, what would he do? "Paul!" And throw his arms around him and bring him in and hold him close and, "Paul, come in! And whatever you need, I'm going to take care of you. I am so glad you're back, brother!" kissing him on the cheek and hugging his neck. "O Paul, I've missed you! O Paul, how are you? O Paul, let's share together." Paul knew that's how Philemon would receive him if Paul showed up. Paul says, "Philemon, I want you to receive Onesimus just like that."

In terms of what Paul has expressed about the relationship, what has Paul said about how he regards Philemon here? Look at verse 1 of Philemon, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker." Paul says, "Philemon, you know what you are to me, you're a beloved brother. You're a fellow worker in Christ. We are partners together for Christ and I'm so glad to know you." Look at verse 7, he says, "I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother." And here in verse 17, he says, "If you regard me as a partner." So just in this short little span of space, Paul has said, "Philemon, you're my brother. I love you. Philemon, you're a fellow worker. You're a partner in the Gospel. We are joined together at the hip. We are united and there is no way that I can fully express the appreciation that I have for you and I know you feel that way about me also." That's the nature of the relationship that they had and so if you view it from that perspective, you see what a daring statement, how bold, how far-reaching it is for Paul from prison through a letter to say to Philemon, "Philemon, I want you to receive Onesimus just like that. No hesitation. No qualification. Receive him like you would me. Philemon, receive him like you would me, even more, Philemon, I ask you to receive him" – watch this – "I ask you to receive him as a spiritual equal in Christ because he has been converted. He bears the fruit of genuine salvation. He is a beloved brother to me. Philemon, I ask you to receive him just like that, just like you would me."

So notice, listen, remember that Philemon has genuinely been wronged by this man that is in front of him. Genuine theft, genuine economic loss. Perhaps, we don't know at all, this is pure utter speculation, perhaps there's a sense of personal injury that he felt as well, that this was an insult as well. Perhaps he had to go and purchase other men to replace the lost work from Onesimus. Great loss in the midst and in that context of loss and sin and injury by the man standing in front of him, Paul says, "Philemon, receive him like you would me." This is something that is trans-human by which I mean this transcends human motives. This goes beyond human expectation. This brings us into the realm of the power of the Gospel of Christ to view men differently because of the work

of Christ in their hearts; to no longer view them according to their past sins, to no longer hold those things against them even when it's been a personal loss, to say, "Yes, I receive you and I welcome you." It's the nature of forgiveness in the body of Christ when you are dealing with true believers who are truly repentant. There is no reason not to receive them.

Now, let's follow along here. There is something else to be said and Paul is very mindful of it. The fact of the matter is that there was a debt of some kind, there was an injury that had been made and Onesimus is a fugitive slave, probably had squandered whatever he had stolen and he had no means to pay it back. So the Apostle Paul recognizes that he's asking Philemon to do something while there is an existing debt still on Onesimus' account and Paul in his grace, in an illustration of the Gospel of Christ, removes that impediment to reconciliation as well.

Look at verse 18, he says, "But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well)." What is Paul doing here? He's saying, "Philemon, I realize that there is a matter of unsatisfied restitution here here, whatever it is, whatever it may be, I realize that that's a problem and, Philemon, I'm not asking you to bear that loss personally." He gives him a handwritten guarantee that Paul himself will fully make restitution on behalf of Onesimus. He guarantees the debt from his own personal resources. Paul bears the loss. Paul says, "I'll bear the loss so that there is absolutely no barrier between you and Onesimus. I want you to feel free to receive him freely." Paul covers the debt personally from his own resources.

Time out. We talked about this in the first message that we taught from Philemon. We'll go back here again. What you're seeing here is a most profound illustration on a human horizontal level of the nature of salvation between you and God on a personal level. This is a picture of what Christ has done for you if you are a Christian. It is a picture of what he offers to you if you will receive him if you're not a Christian. Paul, think with me here, Paul had no responsibility whatsoever for the crimes that Onesimus had committed. Paul was not a sharer in that. Paul had not benefited from whatever theft might have accompanied that. The debt was all on Onesimus. The guilt was all on him. Paul was innocent and yet because he wanted to see Onesimus reconciled to Philemon, he says, "Philemon, I'll take personal responsibility for everything that guy has ever done to you. I will satisfy the debt so that you can be made whole. Just receive him back."

Beloved, do you see that that is exactly what Jesus Christ has done for you? Christ had no share in your sin or guilt. Christ isn't responsible in any way, shape or form for your guilty nature, your guilty actions, your guilty words, your guilty thoughts. And what did he do? Out of a great desire to see the eternal redemptive plan of God fulfilled, loving his Father deeply and having love on an unworthy sinner like you, what does he do? He steps into the breach and, as it were with his death on the cross, as it were with his righteous life, he offers it to the Father and he says, "Father," speaking to God the Father, he says, "God, my Father, I will personally guarantee their debt of sin against your justice. I realize the debt is great, O God, I realize that the guilt is eternal. I realize that it is

infinite." And yet what Jesus Christ did is that he went to the cross as your representative, as your substitute, and says, "I will pay the entire debt myself so that there is no barrier to reconciliation between you and a holy God."

That's what Christ did for you. He paid your debt of sin out of the resources of his own righteousness and out of his own precious lifeblood. He paid for it all, a debt that you couldn't pay. Why? Because he loves you. Why? Because he loves his Father and he wanted the two of you to be able to dwell together in eternity forever and ever and ever, amen. That's how great the redemptive love of Christ is. Isn't it sweet? Isn't this like the most wonderful thing to imagine? That you with no resources to satisfy the justice of God at all, and guilty and condemned and helpless, Romans 5, "While we were still helpless, Christ died for us," to realize that in that helpless condition, a gracious, loving surety came to your rescue and said, "O God, I will pay their debt in full." And now as a Christian, you have full, complete, unhindered access to God. Your sins are completely forgiven. The righteousness of Christ has been charged to your account. Your sin has been charged to the account of Christ and he paid it, and a free gift of righteousness was bestowed on you that satisfies the demands of God and entitles you to enter into heaven without fear. That's what Christ did for us. You love him, don't you? I know you do. You should if you don't because no one has a friend like Jesus.

Go back to verse 19 with me, verses 18 and 19. Here's what I want you to see. That's the reality of salvation. That, although it is not fully expressed in the terms of the letter of Philemon, it is explained in great detail in the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians which were written at the same time. The letters of Ephesians and Colossians are informing and showing us what the mind of Paul was engaged in as he wrote this letter to Philemon. And what is it? It's a great redemption in Christ that's informing his mind. So with that saturating his view of guilt and forgiveness, Paul writes to Philemon, and so saturated with the Spirit of Christ, he says, "Philemon, if he has wronged you, I will pay it. How could I not? Christ paid my own debt. I'll be like Christ and I'll cover that debt as well." It's sweet. Even though Paul was not personally responsible.

So when it is all laid out like that, Paul says to Philemon, "Receive him like you would me. I'll pay his debt." There is no barrier to forgiveness and reconciliation at that point. How could Philemon refuse? How could he refuse an appeal grounded like that? But notice this, Paul reminds him of something else in verse 19. Paul reminds Philemon in verse 19, "not to mention," I've always thought that was kind of an interesting way to do it. He's about to say something and he says, "but not to mention what I'm about to mention, not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well." He says, "Philemon, remember how in a prior time even further back, I shared Christ with you. I was the instrument of God in your conversion. Do you remember? You owe your own self, your own salvation came through my instrumentality. God used me in your life." And he just kind of adds and augments and supplements this total appeal with the remembrance of their prior relationship and the prior role that they had with one another.

So here's Philemon faced with this letter that says, "He is a converted man. Receive him like you would me. I'll pay the debt. You remember how I led you to the Lord?" And all

of this is put together in a way that Paul puts it all on the table and now he gives the opportunity to Philemon. Remember that as Paul writes this, we talked about this in the first couple of weeks on our series on Philemon, remember this, beloved, Paul is not commanding Philemon at all. He could have commanded him as an apostle but he's not doing that. He is appealing in love. He says, "Oh, I appeal to you on the nature and the basis of love. On the basis of the love of Christ, I appeal to you and ask you to receive what I have to say favorably."

Now he says in verse 20, "Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ." Look over at verse 7, Paul has acknowledged that in the past Philemon has been the instrument of refreshing the hearts of many saints through his generosity and his love. Verse 7, he says, "I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother." "Philemon, what a joy it has been to me to understand that the wavering suffering people of God have found in your love a refuge that has encouraged them and has manifested the love of Christ to them. What a joy that is to me. Philemon, what you have done with the people of God has refreshed my heart. It has encouraged me. It has given me strength to go another day and I love you for it." And he goes through the process of the letter. He makes his request, "Accept him as you would me." Now in verse 20, he appeals to that godly character of Philemon and he says, "Yes, brother, let me benefit now from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ." "Philemon, do it one more time. Go and not for my sake but be generous in your forgiveness of Onesimus so that you can be a refreshment to my heart in my chains."

Now, Paul goes on in verse 21. The truth of the matter is that Paul had no doubt about what Philemon was going to do. He asked but he knew the outcome before it even happened. Why? Because he knew the character of this man. He knew the godly character of this man and he respected it and affirmed it and knew that he would act in consistency with the character that he knew that man to have so that he could say in verse 21, "Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say."

Oh, put yourself in Philemon shoes. This is kind of the way we've approached this, our teaching on this letter. We could do it from different perspectives, we've kind of put ourselves in Philemon's sandals. Here's Paul, and just step back with me, stay with me here just so you get the full spirit of everything that is being said here. Going all the way back, Paul has got a long history with Philemon. He'd led Philemon to Christ and so there is a natural attachment there. They have grown together. They have served Christ together. Paul writes to him and affirms his character and says, "You're my brother. You're my fellow worker. You're my partner. You have refreshed the hearts of so many." Paul offers to pay a debt that's not his in order to make sure that Philemon doesn't suffer loss in the midst of it. Paul says, "Receive this man like you would me and, Philemon, I know that you're going to do more than even I ask. You'll go beyond everything I have asked. I know that because I know your character." Put yourself in Philemon shoes. There weren't rockets at the time but if there were rockets, he would have strapped one on his back to supercharge his response in response to this gracious and loving appeal to what

Paul has said. Philemon is in a position to deepen the unity of the church, to protect Onesimus and help him, to satisfy Paul and to manifest in a personal illustration what the forgiveness of the Gospel looks like. That's a great opportunity. Paul knows Philemon and so he knows the result. "Philemon, you're going to do more than what I say. I need say no more. I leave it in your hands."

Now, he closes the letter with some final greetings, look at verse 22, he says, "At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you." Paul at this point is expecting release from his imprisonment and he is anticipating a reunion and so he says, "Philemon, I'm going to be coming. Have a place ready for me to stay." And then he adds the greetings of those that are with him, verse 23, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers." Then he adds this sweet closing brief benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

Now, what did Philemon do with this? What did he do with this letter? All we see is the close of the letter that is given to us. That's all that we have now. There weren't contemporary news reports of what happened afterwards. What did Philemon do with this letter? There is no direct testimony in Scripture to tell us but, do you know what? There is also no doubt about what happened. The fact that this private letter survives, tells us that Philemon forgave Onesimus exactly as Paul requested, that he received him graciously, that he did everything and more that Paul requested. We know that that has to be the case because if he hadn't, if he had hardened his heart and said, "No," the letter never would have survived. It would have been an ongoing testimony to the fact that Philemon rejected a tender apostolic appeal and it would have been a testimony against his godliness; that Philemon's response if he had not done what Paul requested, would have testified against everything that was in this letter. To the contrary what happened is we know that Philemon did what Paul asked. We know that he forgave this man and because he forgave this man, the church saw fit to preserve this letter in the providence of God and included in the Canon of Scripture.

That's what Philemon did with this letter but there might be, in fact there is, a more important question to ask rather than what did Philemon do with this letter. There is a more important question today for you and the question is: what are you going to do with this letter? "What am I going to do with it? Are you kidding? This was 2,000 years ago. These men aren't even here. They are not in front of me. This has nothing to do with me. This is about them." No, it's not. It's about you. In the first instance, my friends, have you gone to Christ yourself in repentance and faith for forgiveness of your sins? Because that forgiveness is the underlying premise of this entire letter. Have you repented and turned to Christ and humbly received him, forsaken the world, forsaken your sin, repented thoroughly and said, "Jesus, I come to you alone. I give myself completely to you. Forgive me of all of my sins. Save me and keep me." Have you come to Christ like that or has religion just been a game to you? That's the first question.

For those of us that are in Christ, there is an equally pressing question for us as well. Those of us that know Christ: how does the forgiving disposition that underlies this letter,

how does the forgiving disposition of God himself in Christ, how does the forgiving disposition of New Testament Christianity play out in your life?

Look over at Ephesians 4. I said that Paul wrote this letter to Philemon at the same general time that he wrote Ephesians. Look at Ephesians 4:30, those of you who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, those of you who have been born again, whose sins have been completely and irrevocably forgiven at the throne of God. Go to chapter 4, verse 30 of Ephesians and see what God says to you in that condition. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." How would you grieve him? How would you grieve the Holy Spirit? Paul explains, "Don't do that therefore do this." Verse 31, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Do you see it? Do you see it? God has forgiven you, go and forgive others. God has been tender-hearted to you, Christ has loved you greatly, go and love the body of Christ in like manner. Go and love each other in that way.

Look over at Colossians 3:12, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." You say, "But you don't know what that person has done to me." Well, let's not go there. Verse 13, "bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

Friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, would you receive forgiveness vertically from God and then deny it and withhold it horizontally from men? Or would you be the noble Christian like Philemon, quick to set aside a wrong, quick to put it away for the sake of expressing the nature of the Gospel, expressing the harmony that belongs to those who are in the body of Christ? Beloved, this is your opportunity as you respond to this kind of truth that is so practical in its ramifications. On this your life testifies to the reality of the Gospel. My friends in this sphere, let your life be a good testimony.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, thank you for our salvation in Christ. Help us to live it in a way that is fitting and keeping on a horizontal level as well. Father, there is bound to be in this world of sin multiple wrongs that are committed against us, some major, some minor, some of action, some of word. Lord, before we determine how we would respond to humans who have wronged us, let us remember how you responded in response to our wrongs against you. You loved us and you gave yourself up for us. Lord Jesus, we thank you for that loving, forgiving, gracious nature of you and the loving, gracious, forgiving nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and now we ask that we might manifest that in the sphere of life that you have given to each one of us. Thank you for this brief time in the book of Philemon over the past few weeks. Father, may we carry it forward in a way that brings glory to our forgiving Savior as we go. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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