

“An Introduction to Philemon: The Hope of Forgiveness”

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Scripture

Philemon

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you -- since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. **For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever**, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

If then you regard me a partner, **accept him as you would me**. 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). Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.

At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Forgiveness

Biblical Forgiveness:

“Forgiveness is the act of pardoning an offender.”

In the Bible, the Greek word translated “forgiveness” literally means “to let go,” as when a person does not demand payment for a debt.

The word picture is a wrestler releasing a stranglehold on an opponent.

Forgiveness is “a process”

I posted a blog on the website last month about forgiveness called “To Forgive, Divine?”
<https://cbcne.org/to-forgive-divine/>

“Forgive and Forget”?

We rarely will be able to forget the trespasses against us as there are too many reminders. We can only hope to see the emotion related to the transgression lessen over time.

The Story of Philemon

The History

Colossae -> Paul writes Colossians to this church near the 7 churches in Revelation



Paul was in prison twice in Rome; these events are in his first imprisonment

Paul did not start the Church in Colossae, Epaphras did while Paul was staying in Ephesus for two+ years (Acts 19:10).

Philemon came to know Jesus under the teaching of Paul and lived in Colossae

Tychicus delivers the letter to the Colossians as well as the personal letter to Philemon.

The Scene

Paul writes the Prison Epistles during his imprisonment in response to issues that others bring to him while he is in prison.

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are the Prison Epistles

Philemon is a personal letter, only 334 words, written around A.D. 60-61

Other personal letters from Paul are Titus, 1st & 2nd Timothy

Slavery was very common at this time in the Roman Empire

Perhaps a third of the population in the Rome Empire were slaves

Slavery was not always under compulsion. Some free men opted to be slaves because they were better taken care of than others (housing, food, medical care) who made a wage and attempted to live on their own

Masters could severely punish their slaves if they chose, even to the point of death

Slaves began to receive rights and privileges in Rome even though they were considered owner property by their masters (A.D. 20)

The Players

Paul

The great apostle: human author of 13 books in the New Testament

He expected to be released from his house arrest in Rome soon (v.22)

Timothy

The young protégé of Paul; taking over for Paul in Ephesus (1 Tim & 2 Tim)

Paul lists him at the front of the letter; his assumed successor in ministry

Epaphras (v.23)

Founder of the church in Colossae, “one of your number” (Colossians 4:12)

He is also a prisoner with Paul in Rome; perhaps voluntarily

Philemon

Owner of a large home and Leader of the church in Colossae that met in his house (no church buildings until the 3rd century)

Came to know the Lord through Paul

Paul calls him a fellow worker

Apphia

Most likely, Philemon's wife

Archippus

Most likely, Philemon's son -> entering into the ministry with Paul

Onesimus

A slave committed to Philemon; potentially a leader of the many slaves in Philemon's house

His name meant "Useful" – a common name for slaves at this time

Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke (v. 24)

Other fellow workers with Paul in the ministry

Tychicus

Deliverer of the letters to Colossae and Philemon

Guide for Onesimus for his return (Colossians 4:7-9)

The Story

The Run

Onesimus, an owned slave, is in Philemon's house

He steals from Philemon (Paul offers to repay) and abandons him

Runs away to Rome to attempt to hide in the large slave population

The journey is a long one: 1312 miles today

30 miles/day for a trained walker: 43 days

20 miles/day for an average walker: 65 days

Slaves had ears pierced, danger of being recognized as a runaway

The Change

He knows of Paul, and potentially his imprisonment in Rome

He finds Paul in Rome and hears the gospel

He stays with Paul for a while, earns his trust, and ministers to him

The Return

Paul cannot see keeping Onesimus with him

Roman law required his return

Brotherhood, in Paul's mind, required Onesimus to return

Onesimus's safety is a concern (a two-month return journey)

Do you wonder what is in Onesimus's mind?

Will Philemon have me killed?

How could he forgive me?

An Overview of Philemon (John MacArthur)

"The Interaction between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus"

The Character of One who Forgives (v. 4-7)

The Appeal for One to Forgive (v. 8-18)

The Motives of One who Forgives (v.19-21)

Key Verse: v. 15 -> "For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back as a brother"

Unforgiveness

Imprisons You in the Past

"Delaying reconciliation always make reconciliation harder"

Mayo Clinic and Johns Hopkins warns against unforgiveness for health reasons

Reliving the history whenever you think of or see the person who wronged you

Produces Bitterness in Your Life

Anxiety -> "The Fear that God will get it wrong..."

Bitterness -> "The Belief that God got it wrong..."

Ephesians 4:31-32

"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."

Hebrews 12:14-15

"**Pursue peace with all men**, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled"

Gives Satan an Open Door

Ephesians 4:26

"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and **give no opportunity to the devil.**"

2 Corinthians 2:10-11

"But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes."

1 Peter 5:6-9

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, **casting all your anxiety on Him**, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. **Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion**, seeking someone to devour.

But **resist him**, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."

Hinders Your Fellowship with God

Matthew 6:12-15

“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 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.”**

Romans 12:18-19

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. **Never take your own revenge**, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.”

Romans 8:28

“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

We do not know, if our forgiveness of someone else moves the person we forgive closer to the Lord.

“You are never more like God that when you forgive another person”

To Forgive is to:

Release the stranglehold on a wrestling opponent

Pound the gavel and say “Not guilty”

Open the cell door, and let the prisoner free

Prayer

Benediction