

“Philemon: Betrayal to Appeal”

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April 10th, 2022

Scripture

Philemon

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.

The Story of Philemon

The History



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

Philemon found Jesus under the teaching of Paul in Ephesus and lived in Colossae

The Scene

Slavery was very common at this time in the Roman Empire

Perhaps a third of the population in the Roman 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

The Players

Paul

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

Philemon

Owner of a large home and a leader of the church in Colossae

Came to know the Lord through Paul

Paul calls him a fellow worker

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

The Story

The Run

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

He steals from Philemon and leaves for Rome

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

The Character of One who Forgives

Philemon 4-7

"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.

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1. Paul's Continual Prayer for Philemon

Colossians 1:3-4

"We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **praying always for you**, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints"

Philippians 1:3-5

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now."

Paul always prayed for the church, all the saints, and specific individuals (Timothy, Titus, and now Philemon).

Paul probably had several moments of prayer with Philemon in Ephesus when Philemon came to faith in Jesus.

The People Who Forgive are **Committed** to Prayer for the Saints

2. Philemon's Love toward **All the Saints**

An *Agape* love – A Selfless Love

Not just to specific people in the church, but ALL members

John 13:34-35

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Philippians 2:4-5

“Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, **but also for the interests of others**. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus”

The People Who Forgive are **Seeking the Best Interests** for the Saints

3. Philemon's Faith in Jesus

A consistent faith in Christ – Paul remembering how Philemon came to faith in Jesus.

Paul may have known Philemon's life struggles and how he overcame them in faith.

Paul has seen Philemon's faith on display.

An unwavering faith –

What has he been thinking after Onesimus's betrayal?

How has the church reacted to this crime by Onesimus against Philemon?

Paul knows this was another test of Philemon's faith.

The People Who Forgive are **Completely Dedicated** to the Lord's Mission

4. Paul's Prayer for Philemon to have an Active, Sharing Faith

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.

This is not a “quiet or silent faith” but an active, visible one. It is easily seen by others.

Philemon is not one of the “Frozen Chosen”

“May Become Effective” → *Energes* – Energetic faith

“Fellowship” → *Koinonia* – “The Church” would be affected by his faith – **Not just those in Colossae but everywhere** the knowledge of the Lord exists. Every Bible recounts this story for the world to see.

You know those people in the church whose faith charges you up. Philemon was one of those individuals.

Paul was probably affected by Philemon’s faith.

The People Who Forgive have a faith that **Powerfully Affects Other Saints**

5. Paul’s Personal Joy in His “Son” Philemon

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.”

Philemon came to faith under Paul’s teaching. **Paul viewed him as his son.**

Paul experienced Philemon’s love for him, most likely through gifts as well as being hosted in Philemon’s house.

“Refreshed” – “to provide rest from labor” – **Philemon’s service both to Paul and the Church** was well known – a broad impact.

Paul calls him “a brother” signifying a deep, personal love for Philemon

The People Who Forgive have **Joy in Seeing Faith in Action**

The Appeal for One to Forgive

Philemon 8-14

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**.

6. Paul's Choice to Appeal, Not Demand

"Enough Confidence in Christ" – Paul has been given Apostolic authority. He had the authority to order believers to act.

2 Corinthians 10:8-9

"For even if I boast somewhat further about **our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up** and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters."

2 Corinthians 11:5-6

"For **I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles**. But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things."

2 Corinthians 12:1-5

"Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago-- whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- **such a man was caught up to the third heaven**. And I know how such a man -- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows -- was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses."

"To do what is proper" -> **What is the proper act for Philemon to do?**

Forgive Onesimus, of course!

"**For Love's Sake**" – On account of my deep, personal love for you...

"Appeal" – *Parakeleo* – "To come alongside" - to encourage Philemon

Paul **doesn't want to be seen as the militant dictator**, but instead as a fellow brother, one who has been through the trenches in ministry for the Lord, and now His prisoner.

7. Paul's Love for Onesimus

Onesimus, like Philemon, came to faith under Paul's teaching

Onesimus means "useful", a common name for a slave

Onesimus was useless to Philemon for a significant period of time, perhaps 6 months

Paul says that Onesimus has been useful to him, personally, and that he WILL be useful to Philemon in the future

How does Paul know that? He has personally witnessed a change in Onesimus.

8. Paul's Desire for Onesimus's Ministry

"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"

Paul **has to** send Onesimus back (Roman Law, Koinonia Brotherhood)

"Sending his very heart" or "mine own bowels" -> **"a gut level compassion"** – a gut-wrenching decision

Why? Even with Tychicus as an escort, **this is a treacherous, 2-month journey back through the Empire.** Onesimus is a known runaway slave by this time; an APB has been put out on time

Slave catching was a prosperous, freelance business; lots of bounties on runaways.

"I wished to keep with me" -> **"If it were Paul's decision, he would have kept him"** – If it was Paul's determined will, Onesimus would stay.

Onesimus was providing great service to Paul, ministering to him as well as in the ministry.

9. Paul's Desire for Philemon's Choice

"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"

Paul wanted Philemon to choose Onesimus's future.

"Not by compulsion" -> not a "forced" decision but a determined hope in the right decision

A free-will decision -> "spontaneous consent" – **"Ok, sure. I'm good with that!"**

Summary

People Who Forgive

- Committed to Prayer
- Seeking the Best for Others
- Dedicated to the Lord's Mission
- Positive Affect the Faith of Others
- Have Great Joy in Seeing Others Grow in Faith

How do you rate yourself in these areas?

Paul rated very highly in these

Paul believed Philemon did also

Prayer for Our Church

Benediction