

“Philemon: Forgiveness to Restoration”

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Calvary Baptist Church

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Scripture

Philemon

15 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.

17 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.

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, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

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 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

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

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

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

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

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

The Appeal for One to Forgive

1. Paul's Choice to Appeal, Not Demand
2. Paul's Love for Onesimus
3. Paul's Desire for Onesimus's Ministry
4. Paul's Desire for Philemon's Choice

God's Sovereignty on Display

"15 For **perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever**"

God Orchestrates All Events

He is Never Surprised

Isaiah 45:5-7

"I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. **I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, **Causing well-being and creating calamity**; I am the LORD who does all these.**"

Lamentations 3:37-38

"Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that **both good and ill go forth**?"

Romans 8:28

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

How about the Prodigal Son?

The Father allowed him to take his inheritance and run with it. God orchestrated his life to be without all resources in his life (calamity) **so that he has NOWHERE else to turn, except the Father.**

God also **orchestrated Onesimus's steps away from Philemon** and toward Paul.

God allows these events to happen for His purposes.

God allowed what happened here at Calvary Baptist Church for HIS purposes.

If we believe that God is sovereign, we must see everything that occurred as His plan and holding a grudge against this person or that person makes no sense because God caused their part in these events to occur.

Like Jonah, who was called to preach to the Ninevites so there would be revival, you cannot run away from God's plan for His chosen.

So, if I list some names I have heard over the past 5 months now: but you know the names, so I do not have to do that.

When the leadership of a church is more concerned about their own glory than God's glory, God will replace the leadership and split a church.

Relationship with Onesimus -> Redefined

“16 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.”

John 15:14-15

“You are My friends if you do what I command you. **No longer do I call you slaves**, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

We move from the hired hand to the beloved son and daughter in Christ.

From an Outsider, to a Friend, and then to become a brother or sister.

“More than a slave” -> Onesimus was not going to get a new role, straight away. Paul didn't expect him to be treated as a son in sending him back. He was still going to be a slave and work for Philemon.

Added to his labors for Philemon, he would be a brother in Christ.

A work relationship now becomes a personal relationship. I did taxes for my clients for many years. The business relationship was in place, but I always sought to develop the personal relationship alongside the business relationship.

What does that mean **for Philemon**? **Accountability!** He now has a brother watching his actions

What does that mean **for Onesimus**? **Accountability!** He now has a master watching his work.

He was a beloved brother to Paul!

Paul knows that Philemon will get the gift of having both a worker and a brother, as well.

Acceptance with a Christ-like Substitution

“17 If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.”

Paul writes, “If you regard me as a partner” or a “sharer” -> meaning part of the fellowship but a special relationship within the fellowship.

Accept Onesimus as you would accept me!

“Accept” means to “aggressively receive with personal interest” -> to WANT to see, joyously

Some people in the congregation just make you smile broadly when they show up. You're so glad to see them, you go over to them, reach out with a smile and a hug, long to welcome them into the house of the Lord.

Philemon would have longed to see Paul come to his door. **He brought Philemon into the faith!**

What about Onesimus? Would Philemon have longed for him to come to his door?

Paul's Sacrifice -> Paid-In-Full

“18 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).

When someone comes to Jesus in Faith, we say they “Accepted Christ”, right?

Don't we also say that Jesus paid it all, too?

Here, Paul says, “however Onesimus has wronged you, Philemon. Whatever the cost was, I will pay it. Charge it to my account. I’ll cover the debt.”

“Wronged you” -> “to be unrighteous” -> If Onesimus did ANYTHING unrighteous to you, Philemon, **I’ll cover ALL his sins!**

Paul says he is writing this letter in his own hand. It is an IOU, Paul’s commitment to repay the debt personally. It’s more important for Paul to have the relationship restored than it is to have personal wealth.

Do you think that Paul had an example for this action?

Philippians 2:5-8

“Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, **although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped**, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death**, even death on a cross.”

Jesus came from great wealth and glory to us on earth, to be with us, to lead us, by example.

Jesus did not regard his wealth in Heaven as something He needed to hold on to. Jesus paid our debt on the cross.

Neither did Paul seek to hold on to his wealth. He asked Philemon to take away Onesimus’s debt and give him the bill.

Forgiveness is stamping on the invoice, “Paid in Full”

On the cross, Jesus said “It is Finished”

“Not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self”

Do we owe something to the person who leads us to Christ?

What is Paul writing here?

There is an implied debt described here between a father and his son. The son owes his father a debt for educating him and leading him on the right path.

We see this in the commandment “Honor your father and mother” so that your days may be long on the earth.

Paul's Benefit and Refreshment

"20 Yes, brother, **let me benefit from you in the Lord**; refresh my heart in Christ."

Paul turns to a church focus from the father-son reference above, recognizing Philemon as a brother in Christ.

Paul asks Philemon for a personal favor – he wants to benefit from Philemon

Paul wants Philemon to refresh his heart. The word "refresh" means "to rest from all labors"

It is the same word Jesus used when He said:

"Come to me all who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...for My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

What does Paul want from Philemon?

Forgiveness for his begotten son, Onesimus.

Paul has been wearying over sending Onesimus back to Philemon. It would give him great joy to know that Philemon has forgiven him and restored him to the household.

Brotherly Confidence

"21 Having **confidence in your obedience**, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say."

Paul writes with confidence that Philemon will do right by Onesimus and forgive him.

Paul says this is a matter of obedience.

Was this obedience to Paul's personal command to Philemon?

No, Paul said that he did NOT want to compel or order Philemon based on his Apostolic authority.

Paul is referring to Jesus's command for forgiveness from the Lord's prayer:

Matthew 6:9-14

'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.
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.'

“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.”

Expectations of Philemon’s Prayer

“22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.”

Paul expected to be released from this imprisonment soon. It was a false charge against him, but it had to play out in the legal system.

He hoped that Philemon would prepare a guest room for him to stay.

He hoped that Philemon would prayer for him to be released and be able to make the two-month journey to Colossae without incident.

Paul’s Co-Workers and Lessons

“23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Epaphras, was a part of the Colossian church who stayed with Paul under a voluntary prison sentence to be with Paul.

Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke were Paul’s coworkers in ministry:

Demas will eventually abandon Paul (2 Timothy 4:10) but Aristarchus and Luke stayed with Paul until the end.

Paul’s Personal Forgiveness Story

John Mark, the Apostle Peter’s childhood friend and Barnabas’s cousin penned the Gospel of Mark and was in ministry with Paul (Acts 12:25).

But something happened between Mark and Paul and Mark deserted Paul during the 1st missionary journey (Acts 13:13)

When the 2nd missionary planning came about, Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John Mark along, but Paul objected...

Acts 15:36-41

“After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are.” Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

And **there occurred such a sharp disagreement** that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

Paul took Silas and Barnabas took John Mark went another way.

Can there be some disagreements in the church?

“A sharp disagreement” -> “a provocation which literally jabs (cuts) someone so that they must respond” -> it got physical...

Yet, this relationship was eventually restored because Paul counts Mark here as one of the faithful who is with him.

Mark also shows up in Paul’s last letter before the Lord called him home.

2 Timothy 4:9-11:

“Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Only Luke is with me. **Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.**”

Paul asks for Mark and says he is useful to him.

Mark was once useless to Paul but now he is useful to him.

This is the same description that Paul describes to Philemon about Onesimus: “he was once useless, but now Philemon, he will be useful to you” (Philemon 11).

Paul KNOWS about forgiveness and restoration personally...and he calls Philemon to do the same.

What do you think Philemon did with Onesimus?

The Onesimus Future?

According to the writings of the Early Church Father Eusebius of Caesarea (270-340 AD), he did. Eusebius wrote in his Church History Chapter 36 of Book 3 that **Onesimus became a pastor of a church**, which shows that that Philemon did receive him back, but not as a slave but a brother in Christ Jesus.

Some traditions state that the church he served at was Ephesus:

“A Christian martyr by the name of Ignatius was being transported to Rome to be executed. He wrote letters to a number of churches. In writing to the church at Ephesus – a city about 100 miles from Colossae - he praised a certain Christian leader there named Onesimus who had visited him. In his letter, he even used the same pun on Onesimus' name that Paul had used. It's likely – but not certain - that Onesimus, the runaway slave, ultimately became the leader or the pastor of the Christian community in Ephesus.

How about that story? -> from a slave, to a runaway, to a brother in Christ, to service to Paul, to a pastor of the leading church in the area!

Can the Lord restore His chosen or what?

Prayer for the Church

Benediction