

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Please take your Bible and turn to the letter of Philemon.
2. In our last time together, we looked at the first 9 verses.
3. And in those verses we saw the kind of person who forgives.
4. We said first and foremost he is forgiven because of his conversion to Christ.
5. Next we said he is friendly.
6. He is loving.
7. He is humble.
8. He is sacrificial.

9. He is all these things but we also learned that sometimes we need help forgiving.
10. That's the purpose of this letter.
11. To help Philemon forgive.
12. And to assist him in this was Paul, Timothy, his family (Apphia and Archippus) and the church in his house.
13. We also said he needed the grace and peace to carry it out.
14. And he had that too.
15. It came from God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
16. And as one who has received grace and peace, he also had "every good thing [in him] for Christ's sake" (v.6).
17. And Paul wanted him to be an example to church by forgiving Onesimus.
18. Now all this is to set up his appeal for Onesimus that begins in verse 10.
19. Read Philemon 1:10-25

20. As we have been looking at this passage, we have been discussing the subject of forgiveness.
21. Though the term is not used in this letter, related terms and phrases are used:
22. The phrase “what is fitting” is used in verse 8; “receive him” in verse 12; “your good deed” (v.14); “receive him forever” (v.15); “receive him as you would me” (v.17); “let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord” (v.20); “your obedience” (v.21); “do even more than I say” (v.21).
23. Paul went further than just saying, “You need to forgive him.”
24. He appealed to him “for love’s sake” (v.9).
25. He could have told him what to do (cf. v.8), but he wanted Philemon’s response to be “voluntary” (v.14).
26. When you “voluntary” forgive it is genuine; it comes from your heart and permeates your actions.
27. But when your response is forced the heart’s not in it.

28. Though you are doing the right thing by forgiving, God wants you to forgive from the heart not just with your actions.
29. He is after the spirit of obedience.
30. The subject of forgiveness is addressed 108 times in the Bible:
31. The word “forgive” occurs 53 times; “forgiven” 43 times; “forgiving” 4 times, and “forgave” 8 times.
32. The work of Christ on the cross was for the purpose of God forgiving sinners.
33. Now as we look at verses 10-25, Paul gets to the heart of the letter.
34. Now if you look back at verse 8, he begins with a very familiar word, “therefore.”
35. It’s the word *diō* which means “on account of” or “for this reason” (Fri).
36. Because of Philemon’s faith and love, Paul gives **the appeal, the request, and the accountability.**

# LESSON

## I. THE APPEAL - Paul Appeals to Philemon (vv.8-11)

Notice that...

### A. His Appeal is Based on Love (vv.8-9)

1. He could command Philemon to forgive and receive Onesimus (v.8)

#### a) Because of his apostleship

He hints at this in verse 8 when he says, "Though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting."

"Bold" is the word *parrhesia*, a compound word which consist of *pas*, "all," and *reheis*, "speech." It primarily means "freedom from speech."

Lenski says it is "frank open speech, without hesitation or holding back due to a fear of offending the other person's susceptibilities."

Paul is saying, "I could be very frank and

open because of my apostleship in Christ.”

The word “command” is *epitasso*, another compound word which comes from *epi*, “over” and *tasso*, “to appoint.” It means “to appoint over, put in charge, to put upon one as a duty.”<sup>1</sup>

He could also command Philemon to forgive and receive Onesimus...

b) Because of the principle of forgiveness

(1) It is our duty to forgive

“Fitting” Gr.*aneko*, “proper.” This word “came to denote what is due to a person, one’s duty” (Vine, 99).

(2) It is our duty to forgive because Christ has forgiven us

Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”

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<sup>1</sup> W.E. Vine, Vine’s Expository Dictionary, 201

So Paul says he could be very frank and open because of his apostleship in Christ and make forgiveness a matter of duty but he doesn't do that.

2. Instead he makes his appeal to Philemon on the basis of love (v.9)

a) It is "for love's sake"

(1) Paul desired from Philemon obedience motivated by love

(a) Love is what motivates our obedience to Christ

Jesus said in John 14:15 to His disciples, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

(b) Our love and obedience to Christ motivates our love for the brethren

The Apostle John made that clear in 1 John 5:2-3 when he said, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

- (2) Philemon’s ability to love the saints was due to his love for God, so Paul makes his appeal based on this love that Philemon had

Not only is his appeal to Philemon on the basis of love but...

- b) It is from a veteran in Christ

- (1) “Paul, the aged”

“Paul was older than his years. In his case the aging process had been accelerated by all that he had suffered (cf. 2 Cor.11:23-30).

The years of imprisonments, beatings, poor food, illnesses, difficult journeys, persecution, and concern for the churches had taken their toll.



He had packed five lifetimes into his threescore years.”<sup>2</sup>

He was also...

(2) “A prisoner of Jesus Christ”

“Prisoner” is *desmos*, “a captive in bonds.” He makes 6 references to his imprisonment in this letter (vv.1, 9, 10, 13, 22, 23).

One commentator says, “The further description of his position as ‘now a prisoner of Christ Jesus’ would make an even stronger appeal to Philemon. The very man through whom Philemon had come to know the gospel (v.19) was now in bonds because of his services for that gospel. It reminded him of the fact that ‘the weakness of age was aggravated by the helplessness of bonds’” (Moule).

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Colossians and Philemon*, 221

B. His Appeal is Because of the Usefulness of Onesimus (vv.10-11)

1. He deepens his plea (v.10a)

He says, "I appeal to you"

"Appeal" occurs also in verse 9. It's the Greek word *parakaleo*.

It means "to beg, entreat" (Thayer);  
"to ask for earnestly [serious and intense] (Webster).

This word was "used for every kind of calling to a person which is meant to produce a particular action" (Vine).

2. He wants him to understand that Onesimus is a different person now (vv.10b-11)

William MacDonald says, "By the time Philemon reached the name of his derelict slave, he was completely disarmed. Imagine his surprise when he learned that the "scoundrel" had been converted and, even more surprising, had been

led to Christ through Paul, the prisoner!”<sup>3</sup>

- a) He refers to him as “my son...whom I have begotten while in my chains”

“Philemon is (again) made to hear the clanking of the prisoner’s chain” (Hiebert).

- b) He is now “profitable to you and to me”

Paul plays on the meaning of Onesimus’ name which means “profitable, helpful” (Thayer).

(1) He was one “unprofitable” (achrestos - “unserviceable”)

(2) He is now “profitable” (euchrestos - “useful, serviceable”)

## II. **THE REQUEST - Paul Requests a Reception for Onesimus (vv.12-21)**

It begins by giving:

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<sup>3</sup> William MacDonald. Believer’s Bible Commentary

A. The Notice (v.12a)

“I am sending him back.”

1. This is action on Paul’s part

He uses anapempo which is an aorist, active, indicative verb which means “to send back to the place from which he came.”

2. This is faith in Philemon’s response

a) Remember he already knew Philemon

b) What he kept hearing about Philemon’s love and faith brought joy to him and Timothy

So now Paul makes:

B. The Request (v.12b)

“You therefore receive him.”

1. In order for Philemon to receive Onesimus he must forgive him

Craig Keener says, “Slaves were sometimes

freed by their masters to become slaves of the temple of some god; here Paul asks that Philemon free Onesimus for the service of the gospel.”<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Reception is the first step in the process of forgiveness

The word “receive” is *proslambano*.

It signifies “a special interest on the part of the receiver suggesting a welcome” (Vine).

It literally means, “to take to one’s self.”

It does not occur in the NASB but it is certainly assumed.

He uses the phrase “that you should have him back forever” in verse 15 and “accept him” in verse 17.

“Philemon needed to receive this slave back into his life, because Onesimus did seek forgiveness” (MacArthur). He was “forgiven...transformed” and “proven faithful” to Paul (Ibid.).

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<sup>4</sup> Craig Keener. IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament

“The fact that Onesimus was standing there as Philemon read the letter proved his repentant attitude.

He returned to face the master he had wronged and who had the power to punish him severely.

Before he ever verbally repented, Onesimus demonstrated the fruit of genuine repentance” (Ibid.).

Tychicus, who accompanied Onesimus, was not a slave hunter or citizen who brought the runaway slave back to his master.

Tychicus, was also known by Philemon, because he was one of the pastors in the church at Colossae.

Warren Wiersbe says, “If a slave ran away, the master would register the name and description with the officials, and the slave would be on the "wanted" list. Any free citizen who found a runaway slave could assume custody and even

intercede with the owner.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul gives the notice and the request and shares:

### C. The Affection (v.12c)

He says, “I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart.”

#### 1. Paul was torn by the departure of Onesimus

Paul uses the same word for heart (spanchna) that he used in verse 7.

It referred to the “inward organs, bowels, inward affections.”

D. Edmond Hiebert says, “Onesimus, the vagabond slave, has become so precious to the apostle that sending him away is like ‘tearing the heart out of his own breasts.’”

#### 2. He wanted Philemon to know that it is a great sacrifice that he is making as well as a demonstration of his faith in sending him back

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<sup>5</sup> Warren Wiersbe. The Bible Exposition Commentary

In verse 13 Paul continues to open his heart regarding Onesimus:

#### D. The Desire (v.13)

He says “whom I wished to keep with me, on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.”

1. Paul wanted to keep Onesimus because of his imprisonment

The word “wished” (eboulomen) “involves the idea of purpose, deliberation, desire.”<sup>6</sup>

Paul says he purposed to keep him.

The word “keep” (katechein) means “to retain” (Ibid.).

Why did he purpose to retain him? That “he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.”

The word “minister” is diakoneo, which means “to serve” or “wait upon” (Ibid.).

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<sup>6</sup> Fritz Rienecker, *The Linguistic Key to the Greek NT*, 660



Onesimus was “useful” to Paul while imprisoned in Rome.

2. But Paul knew it was right to reconcile matters between Philemon and Onesimus so he sends him back

Paul makes his:

E. The Point (vv.14-16)

He says, “But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. 15 For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, 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.”

1. Paul was not looking for favors (v.14)
2. He wanted “voluntary” action (v.14)

This is why he said in the beginning of his appeal that it was “for love’s sake” that “I rather appeal to you” (v.9)

He says, “But without your consent” (“consent” is gnome, which means, “opinion, judgment” (Rienecker, Vines)

“I wanted” (“wanted” is thelo, which means, “wished” or “decided.” It refers to a decision reached - Robertson) “to do nothing.”

He says he didn’t want to do anything without his opinion on the matter so that his “good deed might not be by compulsion (anagke, “pressure, necessity”), as it were, but voluntary (“willingly”).

He knew Philemon would do what is “fitting” in this matter that’s why he appealed to Philemon’s character.

3. In verses 15-16 he seeks to help him see God’s providence in the matter
  - a) Providence refers to the situations and circumstances that God used to bring Onesimus to salvation

Onesimus never dreamed what would happen to him when he left.

If anything he feared being caught and taken back to his master or even killed.

Because God chose Onesimus before the foundation of the world to become one of His children, He caused Onesimus to go to Rome and meet Paul.

Onesimus didn't know that's what was going on, nor does anyone else. The circumstances that led you to hear the gospel were out of your control.

You thought you were going somewhere else for some other reason just like Onesimus but God had other plans!

Paul says, "For perhaps he departed for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord" (vv.15-16).

b) Providence led Onesimus to Christ

As Onesimus was running from Roman law which condemned his actions, he was also running from God's law. But little did he know that it would be the "schoolmaster" to bring him to Christ (cf. Gal.3:24).

Onesimus was now a "beloved brother" and Paul wanted Philemon to "not only...welcome Onesimus back, but to restore him to service."<sup>7</sup>

True forgiveness not only receives a repentant sinner but also restores them to service. Now Paul takes it upon himself restitution.

Paul goes further in his appeal by asking Philemon to "charge" his debt to him

#### F. The Charge (vv.17-18)

He says, "If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account."

##### 1. We are partners (v.17a)

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., MacArthur.

“Count” (echeis) means “regards.”

“Partner” (koinonios) which is used in verse 6 means a “sharer” or one who “belongs.” The word “denotes those who have common interests, common feelings, and common work” (Lightfoot).

He is saying, “If you regard me as one who is a sharer or partner in the gospel, then:

2. Receive him as you would me (v.17b)

“Receive him” is the same word in verse 12, proslambano. It means “to take to one’s self.”

“Take him to yourself as you would me. If you regard me as a partner, do the same to him.”

To eliminate any excuses, Paul concludes in verse 18 by saying:

3. Charge what he has done to me (vv.18-19)

D. Edmond Hiebert says, “The Apostle at once takes care to remove the last hindrance which might arise in the mind of Philemon concerning

the case.”<sup>8</sup>

He says, “If he has wronged you.” The word “wronged” (adikeo) means, “to act unjustly, to injure”<sup>9</sup>

The words “or owes you anything.” “Owes” (opheilo) means, “to owe money, be indebted for” (Strong) or “be indebted to” (Fri).

a) “I will repay”

“Repay” Gr.apotino, “to pay off” (Strong), “to make compensation” (GING)

b) “You owe me”

“Owe” Gr.prosopheilo, “to owe besides” (Strong) or “to owe in return” (Fri)

Paul ends his appeal with:

G. The Confidence (vv.20-21)

1. Paul wants to profit from Philemon (v.20)

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<sup>8</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, First and Second Thessalonians.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Rienecker.

He says, “Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.”

The word “joy” (onaimen) here means “to benefit or profit.”

“Refresh” (anapanson) is the same word used in verse 7 which means “to give relief, rest.”

2. Paul knows because of the kind of person that Philemon is, he will do more than Paul has requested (v.21)

He closes with, “Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.”

He had “confidence” (pepoithos, “to trust, be confident, to have confidence” [Thayer]) in Philemon’s “obedience” (hupakon, “compliance, submission” [Thayer]).

### **III. THE ACCOUNTABILITY - Paul Holds Philemon Accountable (vv.22-25)**

- A. By Requesting for Lodging (v.22)

“But meanwhile” (hama), means, “at the same time, besides”<sup>10</sup>

“Prepare” (hetoimaze), “make ready”

“A guest room” (xenia), “lodging.” It may denote quarters in an inn or a room in a private house.

“Because he knew the case against him was weak, Paul expected to be released from this imprisonment.”

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Paul holds Philemon accountable...

## B. By Greetings from Friends (vv.23-25)

Believers do not act alone, independent of the fellowship.

By sending greetings from five men known to him, Paul reminds Philemon of his accountability to all of them.

Failing to forgive Onesimus would disappoint their high expectations of him and bring him under their

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Rienecker.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., MacArthur.



discipline.<sup>12</sup>

### 1. Ephapras (v.23)

He was converted under Paul's ministry and was most likely the founder of the churches at Colossae.

According to Col.4:12 he was a native of Colossae and well known to Philemon.

"He was probably the pastor of the church that met in Philemon's house" (MacArthur).

### 2. Mark (v.24)

This is John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas and author of the gospel that bears his name.

He defected under Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:13) which led to a falling out between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-39).

By now, he is a changed man. Paul asked for him in 2 Tim.4:11.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., MacArthur.

### 3. Aristarchus (v.24)

Colossians 4:11 tells us that he was a Jewish believer.

According to Acts 20:4; 27:2, he was a native of Thessalonica.

“He had a long association with Paul, and had been through some rough times with him.

He was with Paul during the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:29), and on the ill-fated sea voyage to Rome that ended in shipwreck (Acts 27:4).

He was Paul’s beloved fellow-worker, and was with him in his imprisonment (Col.4:10).

According to tradition, he was martyred in Rome during the persecutions under Nero” (MacArthur, 230).

### 4. Demas (v.24)

Not much is known about him except for what we have in 2 Tim.4:10. It says, “For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world,

and has departed for Thessalonica.”

“He most likely was an apostate, since John wrote, ‘If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him’ (1 Jn.2:15).

Here, though, he was still Paul’s fellow-worker” (MacArthur, 230).

#### 5. Luke (v.24)

He is called “the beloved physician” in Col.4:14 who was a Gentile Christian doctor and the author of the third gospel and Acts.

Where he started in verse 3 with grace, he ends his letter.

#### C. By the Mention of Grace (v.25)

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Paul closes with the desire for “grace” for all the recipients of this letter but especially for Philemon.

He would need “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” in order to forgive Onesimus.

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Let me state what I have just said in 6 steps on how to forgive those who wrong you:
  - a. Recognize who the Offender Is (vv.10-11)
  - b. Go to Him in Person (vv.12-16)
  - c. Accept Him (v.17)
  - d. Charge His Offense to Christ (vv.18-22)
  - e. Remember Others Are Watching (vv.23-24)
  - f. God Will Give You the Grace to Forgive (v.25)
2. The book of Philemon ends here, but not the story.
3. **How did things turn out?**
4. No doubt Philemon forgave Onesimus.
5. **What about you?**
6. **Is there someone in your life you haven't forgiven?**
7. Before you can forgive them you have to receive them. Once you receive them then are you able to restore them.

8. **What about restitution? Charge it to God's account.**
9. Since He has forgiven you of such a great debt, you forgive others of their lesser debt.
10. Let's pray.