

Philemon: Lesson Five – Forgiven!

Philemon – “Forgive, as Christ has forgiven you.”

The Appeal

8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, 9 yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—10 that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. **11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.** 12 I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you.

The Transformation - Useless to Useful

13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. **15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.** He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

The Wrong - Restitution

18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

Paul’s argument is based on his own wretched life before Christ and how God’s grace changed his hard heart into a heart of clay. It is also based on Philemon’s life and the change that took place in him when Paul led him to the Lord. We know nothing of that event other than Paul’s reference to Philemon owing his very life to Paul. And finally Paul argues on the based of Onesimus’ changed life.

Paul’s basis of forgiveness is not pity for the man, or for the man’s sorrow or repentance. It is simply the argument of the cross. God transformed the prodigal son. The son does not transform himself. God maneuvered the prodigal to the end of himself, and drove him back to his father. It is the mercy of God, the grace of God, and the goodness of God that leads each of us to repentance. Every man in Christ is a new creation in Christ Jesus old things were passed away, all things became new, not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He saved us. (Read Ephesians 2:8-10) No man can glory in God’s presence because of his repentance or faith. It is all the work of God in Christ.

It is a serious mistake to think that our salvation is based on something good in us. God's word makes it very clear that there is no good in us outside of Christ. Even our best efforts, our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6)

Even the willingness to repent is the work of the Spirit of God, not of us, lest any man should boast. Too often we want to take some credit for earning God's grace and mercy. If it is earned, it is not grace. If it is merited, it is no mercy.

Too often we believers want to take credit for our repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, forgetting that it is all a gift from God, not of works. We didn't repent because we came to our senses. We repented because God's goodness led us to brokenness and repentance. This was the case with the prodigal son, this was the case with the Apostle Paul, this was the case with Onesimus, this was the case with Philemon, and THIS IS THE CASE WITH EACH OF US. It is the mercy and grace of God that leads us to salvation. So, there is no boasting. It's all God doing.

Many years ago I came across a wonderful explanation of this by A.W. Pink in his book, *The Sovereignty of God*. Let me quote here:

*“When addressing the unsaved, preachers often draw an analogy between God's sending of the Gospel to the sinner, and a sick man in bed, with some healing medicine on a table by his side: all he needs to do is reach forth his hand and take it. But in order for this illustration to be in any wise true to the picture gives us of the fallen and depraved sinner, **the sick man in bed must be described as one who is blind (Ephesians 4:18) so that he cannot see the medicine, his hand paralyzed (Romans 5:6) so that he is unable to reach forth for it, and his heart not only devoid of all confidence in the medicine, but filled with hatred against the physician himself. (John 15:18)***

Christ came not to help those who were willing to help themselves, but to do for His people what they were incapable of doing for themselves.” (The Sovereignty of God, by A. W. Pink, pp 140-141)

A man without Christ is unable, incapable, and unwilling to repent of his sins without God first melting that heart of stone.

“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of

Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” (2 Corinthians 4:3-7)

Here is the biblical picture of us before Christ...

1. He is a slave to sin. John 8:34
2. He does not see his sin as very sinful. John 16:8-11
3. He chokes out the Word with other interests. Luke 8:12-14
4. He has rejected, ignored, or neglected God. Rom 1:18-20
5. He has a sin nature I Corinthians 2:14
6. He is blinded to the Gospel by Satan. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4
7. He is dead in sins and trespasses. Ephesians 2:1
8. He willfully walks in disobedience Ephesians 2:2
9. He obeys the prince of darkness. Ephesians 2:2
10. He serves his own desires of the mind and body. Eph 2:3
11. He has no faith. Eph 2:8-9
12. He is separated from God, alienated by sin. Eph 2:12
13. He is bound for eternity in hell. Revelation 20:15

What does this have to do with FORGIVENESS? Everything! What did Jesus teach us about forgiveness and demonstrate with his life? *“Pray...forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”* (Matthew 6:12)

And *“So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”* (Matthew 18:35) Peter asked Jesus, “How many times a day should I forgive my brother if he sins against him. Seven times a day? Jesus replied. *“No, I say to you till seventy times seven!”* Do the math. That’s 490 times a day. That’s 176,400 times a year. In other words, forgive without limits, just as your Heavenly Father has forgiven you. He that is forgiven little loves little, but he that is forgiven much loves much. (Luke 7:47)

The character of the Lord Jesus is forgiveness, freely and without conditions or reserve. Think of all the bad people Jesus encountered in his ministry who he forgave freely. Think of the thief on the cross, a thief and a murderer, but he was forgiven without begging or even asking. Then there was the multitude and the Roman soldiers who crucified him, *“Father forgiven them for they know not what they do.”*

The Cross Made the Difference

Forgiveness is always about the Cross of Christ. He died in your place. All our sins were placed on him while he hung on that cruel cross. *The LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (Isaiah 53:6) *He bore them away in his body on the tree.* (1 Peter 2:24) *He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him.* He is the Great Forever Forgiver.

- 1. Forgiveness is never earned.**
- 2. Forgiveness is never justice.**
- 3. Forgiveness is mercy & grace.**
- 4. Forgiveness is from the heart.**
- 5. Forgiveness is unilateral.**
- 6. Forgiveness is not about his worthiness.**
- 7. Forgiveness is not overlooking his sin.**
- 8. Forgiveness is not excusing the sin.**

Forgiveness is not about ignoring, overlooking, or excusing someone’s sin. It is about covering it, because of Calvary. *“Calvary covers it all, my past with its sin and shame, my guilt and despair, Jesus took on him there. And Calvary covers it all.”* Love covers a multitude of sins. (Proverbs 10:12)

Therefore, no one owes you an apology! No one has to beg your forgiveness. They don’t need to make amends. They don’t have to grovel. You cannot hold someone

hostage because of your antagonism toward them just because they did you wrong. They are guilty, but Jesus paid it all on the cross for them as well as for you. So, freely you have received, freely give. Just let it go! Lay it down at the foot of the Cross, or it will enslave you.

*Jesus paid it all
All to him I owe
Sin has left a crimson stain
He washed it white as snow.*

Consider what God has done with your sin.

1. They were paid in full – Romans 5:11
2. They were forgiven/pardoned – I John 1:9
3. They were laid on Jesus – Isaiah 53:6
4. They were washed whiter than... – Isaiah 1:18
5. They were covered – Psalm 32:1
6. They were cleansed by the blood – Hebrews 9:22
7. They were blotted out– Isaiah 44:22
8. They were removed as far as... – Psalm 103:12
9. They were cast in depths of sea – Micah 7:19
10. They were forever forgotten – Jeremiah 31:34

Unforgiving Spirit

We as Christians are sometimes the most unforgiving people. We withhold forgiveness because we have been offended, slighted, insulted, or hurt by what others have said or done. We seem to forget that we have been forgiven ALL OUR TRESSPASSES. All our guilt has been washed away. God remembers them no more. But we remember, rehearse, report, regurgitate, and remind ourselves and other people how bad that offending person is. Brothers, this ought not to be so. Jesus gave us a parable about the unforgiving debtor who was forgiven a heavy debt he could never pay, but then he turned around and held his brother hostage because of a minor debt he owed. (Matthew 18:

After 45 years of ministry and much counseling of troubled people I have found that most believers are unforgiving and hold grudges because a father, mother, husband, wife, or other believer did them some wrong. Each time when I ask them if they are angry they reply, “No, I’m no angry. I’m just hurt.” Anger is unforgiveness. It’s ugly head in a variety of emotions. Check your emotions. They reveal the real self deep inside.

1. You're Angry – you never really got over it
2. You're Hurt – your emotions betray you
3. You're Bitter – something inside has wilted
4. You're Wishing Evil – you hope they suffer the same as you
5. You're Vengeful – you'd like to get even
6. You've Unresolved Conflict – you've never gone to them over this
7. You're Unhappy, unrest within – you are miserable
8. You're Stewing – Can't let it go. Your mind keeps spinning it over and over
9. Unable or unwilling to forgive – you think it's just not fair.

You have been offended and hurt. You cannot let it go because you are unwilling to forgive. You want Justice. You want them to apologize. Or perhaps you want to get even for them to suffer as you have. All this is unforgiveness. Remember what Jesus said, *“So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”* Forgiveness is letting the guilty go because their debt has been paid on Calvary, even before they recognize it. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from ALL SIN. And the blood of Jesus is the means by which you can unilaterally forgive them, as Christ has forgiven you.

How does this issue of forgiveness apply to... in your life?

- ...adultery and marital unfaithfulness
- ...marriage relationships
- ...broken personal relationships
- ...parents who hurt you, words, attitudes
- ...murder ...rape...sexual abuse in childhood
- ...9/11 terrorists, beheadings
- ...school shootings
- ...marital abuse, physical, mental, verbal
- ...drunk driver killing innocents
- ...friends who betrayed you
- ...bad people who mistreated you
- ...conflict resolution in church

Like with Philemon, the offended party, the ball is in your court, to act like a Christian or to act like the Roman world of unforgiveness and getting even.

What will you do with the Onesimus's in your life?