

The Sweetness of Forgiveness – Part 2

Philemon 19-25

Introduction:

1. What a joy the study of this little book has been. This book is about a real-life story that happened to Paul.
2. In Rome, Paul had led a young man by the name of Onesimus to Christ. But, Paul found out that Onesimus had been a servant of his dear friend, Philemon. Onesimus had rebelled against Philemon and fled from him.
3. So, Paul was really caught in the middle. Philemon and Onesimus were at odds, and Paul had a close relationship with both men.
 - He loved them both dearly. Philemon had been his dear friend and fellow laborer for years, and Onesimus was Paul's convert who had been such a blessing and encouragement to him.
4. Paul's heart was to see their relationship mended and restored. In order for this to work, two things had to happen:
 - Onesimus had to be willing to go back to Philemon and seek to make things right.
 - Philemon had to be willing to receive back Onesimus, forgive him, and restore him. vs. 12, 17
 - The word “*receive*” is used three times (vs. 12, 15, 17). It means “to take someone by the hand and lead them into your home as a welcome guest and friend.”
5. So, Paul had sent Onesimus back to Colosse and, at the same time, sent back this letter to Philemon, and the letter to the Colossian church.
6. Notice Paul's words in Colossians 3:13-14. Paul desired for the situation between Philemon and Onesimus to be a living display of these verses to that local congregation.
7. Why should Philemon forgive Onesimus? Why should **we** forgive those who have wronged us? The conclusion of this letter provides the answer.

Forgiveness brings peace of mind. vs. 19

Forgiveness produces joy. vs. 20a

Forgiveness is a testimony to others. vs. 20b, 23-25

1. Our forgiveness (or lack thereof) has a direct affect on others who are watching us.
2. Notice in verse 20 how Philemon's forgiveness would result in refreshing Paul. Not only this, Paul lists several of his co-laborers in verses 23-24. They also would be watching carefully to see how Philemon would respond to this situation.
 - Would Philemon respond with grace (vs. 25) or with wrath?
 - Others were watching and would be directly affected by Philemon's decision.

3. It is possible to hold internal bitterness against a person and keep it hidden so that nobody else knows, but this is very unlikely. Most of the time, there are others who know of your tiff and are aware of the contention. Word spreads.
1 Corinthians 1:11
4. It is a very poor testimony for a believer when this happens. A believer may say, "But he was wrong and I was right." As a Christian we must understand that there are times when being **right** isn't what matters the most. You can be right, but be wrong.
 - What do I mean by this? You may find yourself in a situation where another person did something wrong that ill-affected you. But, instead of seeking to reconcile your differences with him and apply Christ-like forgiveness, you stew on it and get bitter. Your attitudes are wrong.
 - This is what I mean by being right, yet being wrong.
5. Paul taught that believers should be living in a way that is "*becoming*" to the gospel of Christ. Our lives should make the gospel of Christ look attractive. One of the ways that we do this is by our love and unity, and lack of contention.
Philippians 1:27; John 13:35
6. A believer's testimony should be marked by love, forbearance, and forgiveness towards others. These are the character attributes we should be known for.
Ephesians 4:2-3

Forgiveness brings obedience. vs. 21

1. Forgiveness really is not an option for a believer. It is a command. Notice how Paul words this in verse 21, "*Having confidence in thy **obedience**...*"
2. This was an obedience issue for Philemon. There was not option A or option B for Philemon, if he wanted to be right with God and be obedient. There was only one option. He had to forgive Onesimus and receive him as a brother in Christ.
3. Remember, Paul sent the letter to the Colossians at the same time that he sent this letter to Philemon. Notice what Paul says in Colossians 3:13. Paul assumed that there would be quarrels in the local church.
4. CrossRoads is a wonderful church family. You can see the love and grace of Christ evidenced in very real and apparent ways, on a consistent basis. But, it is not a perfect church, nor are its members perfect.
5. Let me share with you reality. There will be times when other people in this church offend you, hurt your feelings, are insensitive to your needs, and flat out do you wrong. There will be quarrels. Where there are **people**, there are quarrels and disagreements.
6. The question is not whether there will be quarrels; the question is how you will **respond** when the quarrels come.
7. Paul gives us some clear cut commands on how to respond. You can summarize it in two action verbs: forbear and forgive.
 - "Forbear" literally means, "to put up with."
 - There are times when you just put up with people's actions, and you simply apply grace and go on. You just chalk it up to the possibility that

- they may have been having a bad day, or it was totally unintentional, or they don't feel well, etc.
- Then there are times when the offence really stings, and you can't just blow it off and forbear. You have to intentionally face the cross and apply Christ-like forgiveness.
8. Here is what I have found in my many years of ministry. As you grow in the grace of Christ, when offenses and quarrels come:
 - About 80% of the time, you can just forbear, apply grace, and go on with no ill effects.
 - About 15% of the time, you find yourself unable to put the offense out of your mind, so you have to talk to the Lord about it, lay it at His feet and apply Christ-like forgiveness.
 - About 5% of the time, the offence is so great that you must sit down with the person and seek to resolve it, and then apply Christ-like forgiveness.
 9. The more immature we are in Christ, the more those numbers flip the other way, where everything is a big issue, and we are always mad and offended. People are always “doing us wrong.” We are always in a tizzy over something.
 10. But the point is, forgiveness is an obedience issue. A believer cannot harbor bitterness and anger and be right with God. Unforgiveness gives place to the devil. 2 Corinthians 2:8-11

Forgiveness enhances our prayer lives. vs. 22

1. Paul expressed great confidence in Philemon's prayers. This is because Paul felt confident that Philemon would do what was right with Onesimus and forgive him.
2. Bitterness will always hinder your prayer life. The reason why is very simple. When you are hanging on to grudges and full of bitterness, you don't feel like praying. As we said earlier, your spirit knows that this is hypocritical and it hinders your prayer life.
 - Almost guaranteed, bitter people are not praying people.
3. Oh, the liberty that comes when you obey God's Word and apply forgiveness to every offence and every wrong. The black cloud that was over your head will be gone and you will feel free to be able to commune with God.
4. Unforgiveness is sin, and sin always hinders your fellowship with God.
5. When you decide to apply Christ's forgiveness to your earthly relationships, you will find that instead of being bitter, you will be praying for that person at whom you were bitter.
6. This is so much more productive, both for you and for him.

In Conclusion:

1. Why should we forgive? At the end of this little letter, we have seen five powerful reasons to forgive.
 - It brings peace of mind.
 - It produces joy.
 - It is a powerful testimony to others.

- It brings obedience.
 - It enhances our prayer lives.
2. Why would we **not** forgive? A person may say, “Why should I forgive and let them off the hook?”
 3. Do you know what the reality is? When you refuse to forgive, who is on the hook? You are! Everywhere you go, it follows you, robbing you of your peace and joy.
 4. When you choose to forgive, you are letting them off **your** hook. This means you are free! The sweetness of forgiveness is that it sets you free.