

Forgiveness

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Philemon / Forgiveness / Philemon 8-21

Scripture Reading | [Philemon 8-21](#)

Review

- Introduction to the book - situation between Philemon and Onesimus - runaway servant becomes brother
- Paul's commendation of every good thing in Philemon in Christ Jesus
- Conveniency of "receiving" - based upon Christ, grace, and salvation
- Paul not commanding but beseeking
- The process of forgiving - receive (repentance & change), restore, and restitute

Introduction

1. Defining Forgiveness
2. The God of Forgiveness

Sermon

1. Defining Forgiveness

- Forgiveness comes from Old English, forgiefan and the prefix "for" intensifies and completes the action of the verb "give"
 - "giefan" = to give
 - "forgiefan" = to give completely, to give up, to remit

- “forgiveness” = the act of fully giving up a claim or debt
- a matter of judgment
- [Luke 6:37](#) “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:”

2. The God of Forgiveness

a. Only God Can Forgive

- [Daniel 9:9](#) “To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;”
- [Mark 2:7](#) “Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?”

b. God’s Forgiveness is Plenteous

- [Psalm 103:8-12](#) “The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: Neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, So great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, So far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”
- The Frequency of Forgiveness
- The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

c. God Delights in Mercy

- [Micah 7:18-19](#) “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, And passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, Because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; And thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

d. He Chooses not to Remember Sins

- [Isaiah 43:25](#) “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, And will not remember thy sins.”

e. God is Ready to Forgive

- [Psalm 86:5](#) “For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; And plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.”
- The Prodigal Son - [Luke 15:1-32](#)

f. God’s Forgiveness causes Fear

- [Psalm 130:3-4](#) “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, That thou mayest be feared.”

g. God’s Forgiveness flows from Mercy & Grace

- [Exodus 34:6-7](#) “And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.”

Conclusion

The book of Philemon is not merely about a runaway servant—it is a living picture of the God of forgiveness calling His people to embody His character.

- **Only God Can Forgive** - Yet Philemon, having been forgiven by God, is now called to extend that same forgiveness to Onesimus. Human forgiveness is always derivative—possible only because we have first been forgiven.

- **God's Forgiveness is Plenteous** - Philemon ought not measure or limit his mercy. Just as God's forgiveness extends "as far as the east is from the west," so Philemon is called to abundantly forgive the one who was once unprofitable but is now profitable.
- **God Delights in Mercy** - Paul appeals, "let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord." Philemon's forgiveness will not only delight Paul and the Lord, but should flow from delight, reflecting the heart of God who delights in showing mercy.
- **God Chooses Not to Remember Sins** - Forgiveness means "to give completely"—a total, final release. Philemon must receive Onesimus "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved," no longer holding his past against him. A removal of guilt and a lack of remembrance.
- **God is Ready to Forgive** - Paul says "receive him". When Philemon receives this letter he will be in his presence. Like the father of the prodigal son, Philemon should eagerly welcome Onesimus without hesitation or probation.
- **God's Forgiveness Causes Fear** - Philemon's obedience in forgiving demonstrates proper reverence for God and deepens all relationships involved—Onesimus is received "for ever... both in the flesh, and in the Lord."
- **God's Forgiveness Flows from Mercy & Grace** - Paul insists the forgiveness must be willing, "not of necessity, but willingly," reflecting how God's forgiveness flows from His gracious nature, not obligation.
- **The Parable Lived Out** - Like the unforgiving servant in [Matthew 18](#), Philemon has been forgiven an unpayable debt—his own salvation. To withhold forgiveness from Onesimus would be to forget the grace he himself received.

- **The Divine Pattern** - Onesimus departed "for a season" but returns "for ever." God is able to work temporal offenses into eternal blessings through forgiveness. What began as loss and betrayal becomes transformed through grace into eternal brotherhood. All relationships.
 - Philemon cannot claim to know the God who is "ready to forgive," "plenteous in mercy," who "delighteth in mercy," and who "blotteth out transgressions" while refusing to extend that same forgiveness to his brother Onesimus.
 - To withhold would be hypocritical
 - To do would be most like God
 - In forgiving Onesimus, Philemon would not merely resolve a social situation—he would reflect the very heart of the God who forgave him - thus presenting His body a living sacrifice and proving what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.