

Willing to Apologize

When Onesimus became a Christian, God began to work in his heart. God convicted him of the wrong he had done to Philemon, and he decided to return and face him again. He owed Philemon an apology.

GOD'S PEOPLE MAKE IT RIGHT.

Do you find it hard to apologize? Today we are going to learn 3 lessons about apologizing.

Lesson #1 - Forgiveness cannot be forced. 8-9

⁸Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus—¹⁰I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.

Rather than commanding Philemon, Paul was coming to him with a request on behalf of Onesimus. If Philemon was going to forgive Onesimus, he had to make the choice on his own. No one could force him to do so.

When we go to someone and ask for forgiveness, we need to realize, we can't make them forgive us. Maybe you're

afraid to apologize because you don't think they will accept your apology. Would you rather be known as the one who owned up to where you went wrong and tried to make it right? Or would you rather be known as the one who never apologized?

Now let me turn the tables the other way. If you're resisting forgiveness, let me share with you what Paul said to Philemon in trying to convince Philemon to forgive him.

Paul was an older man at this point, and he was in prison for preaching the gospel. Paul knew what it was like to be mistreated, and he had enough life experience to tell Philemon that refusing to forgive is not worth it.

Lesson #2 - An apology and a changed life go hand in hand. **11-14**

¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³ I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.

Many people are afraid to forgive because they don't want to be hurt again. When a Christian apologizes, there should be a life change that demonstrates the apology was sincere. That's what we see in the example of Onesimus. Onesimus went from an untrustworthy and useless individual to the godliest man on earth vouching for his changed character.

Onesimus's story tells us it's never too late. No matter how big of a mess you've made in the past, God can still turn your life around.

I wonder about what was going on in the minds of both Philemon and ONesimsu as they read this letter for Paul. Philemon must have been thinking, "Wow, if this is what Paul says about him, he must be a changed man." Onesimus must have been thinking, "Wow, I can't believe Paul would say this about a mess of a person like me."

If you apologize to someone, demonstrate with your actions that you are serious. Make the necessary changes in your life.

Lesson #3 - God can make the future better than the past.
15-16

15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer

as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

We have to assume that when Onesimus was wrestling with the idea of returning to Philemon, he was terrified. He could've lost his life. But I love what Paul said. Paul knew something of the goodness of God. He appealed to Philemon based on how God can take messed up situations and turn them around for good.

Paul had so much hope for these two Christian men. If Onesimus was willing to apologize, and Philemon was willing to forgive, their future as brother and brother would be far better than their past as master and slave.

God can use your failures to make your future better than your past if you're willing to make it right.

Is there someone you need to talk to today? Onesimus traveled 1,000 miles to make it right. Are you willing to take one?

God's people make it right. You can't force someone to forgive you, but that shouldn't stop you from doing your part. Remember, an apology and a life change go hand in hand. It may be tough but have hope, God can make your future better than your past.

