

Philemon 1:1-3 “Primer” – Sermon Series: Profits of Forgiveness

**Intro:**

**1) Word Picture – Fake \$100**

- a. At 1<sup>st</sup> glance, it looks like a real \$100
- b. Upon further inspection, you’ll begin to notice some issues
  - i. Some things don’t match up to the real deal
- c. It can fool you if you’re not careful – happened to me!

**2) There are some aspects of the Christian life that you can forge for a time**

- a. “Fake it until you make it”
  - i. Certain behavioral changes
  - ii. Happiness – fake smile
  - iii. Bible knowledge

**3) Reality – you may be able to forge some aspects of the Christian lifestyle for a time, but there are other aspects that are hard to forge**

- a. One aspect of the Christian faith that is hard to forge is the ethic of genuine, Godly forgiveness
  - i. Simply – it’s hard to fake forgiveness
- b. Why?
  - i. Forgiveness is easily tested and easily noticed if its not genuine

**4) Over the next couple weeks, we are going to be walking through a NT book whose main theme is that of forgiveness**

- a. Philemon is a book centered around Godly reconciliation and forgiveness
- b. Sermon Series: Profits of Forgiveness
  - i. In this little letter we get to see a real life test of Christian forgiveness
- c. Profits – what blessings come from genuine, Godly forgiveness
  - i. V11 – a play on words
  - ii. Onesimus – useful – root: to have benefit

**5) Outline – J. Phillips**

- a. The Praise of Philemon 1-7
- b. The Plea for Onesimus 8-17
- c. The Pledge of Paul 18-25

**6) Key verse – 15,16**

**7) This book is a beautiful picture of real, genuine, Gospel forgiveness**

- a. Sermon – Intro/Primer
- b. Text: V1-3
- c. Goal – begin to be equipped with a foundational understanding of Gospel forgiveness and inspect our lives to see if we line up with what the Bible calls forgiveness

## **Dedication of Forgiveness**

### **1) Philemon is a brief 25 verse letter that is unique in the writings of Paul**

#### **a. Unique in its Compression**

- i. Shortest letter of the Apostle Paul, a man known for his ability to expound
- ii. It's the 3<sup>rd</sup> shortest book of the Bible
  - 1. 3 John, 2 John, Philemon, Obediah, Jude
- iii. What I appreciate about the brief books of the Bible is the straightforwardness we receive because of its brevity
  - 1. In other words – God gets to the point quick
  - 2. We see this in Philemon

#### **b. Unique in its Correspondence**

- i. What's fascinating about this letter is that there is no real explicit doctrinal teaching like other letters of Paul
- ii. This is a personal correspondence between two friends addressing an issue that had the potential to cause a lot of problems
- iii. This letter is really an example of doctrine-lived-out
  - 1. It's a letter of orthopraxy
  - 2. We could say – we have Gospel reconciliation seen in a real-world situation

#### **c. Unique in its Context**

- i. Paul is writing to his friend, Philemon, for the confines of imprisonment
  - 1. Notice how Paul opens this letter – Declares himself as “a prisoner of Jesus Christ”
    - a. This is most likely a reference to Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> Roman imprisonment noted in Acts 28:30,31
    - b. Places the time of writing in line with Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians
  - 2. What's unique about this introduction – Paul does not begin any of his other letters with this designation
    - a. Its true he mentions his bonds from time to time
      - i. Phil. 1:13, Col. 4:18
    - b. But its not in his introduction to his audience
  - 3. Typically Paul would start a letter with an emphasis on his apostleship
    - a. Rom. 1:1, 1 Corn. 1:1, 2 Corn. 1:1, Gal. 1:1....
    - b. This designation was to give the words of Paul an element of authority – he spoke as one sent out by Jesus
    - c. Even in his pastoral epistles to individuals, Paul referenced his apostleship

- i. He was writing to an individual, but was dealing with matters of church doctrine
  - 4. Here in Philemon, Paul starts differently – he doesn't stress his apostleship, he stresses his imprisonment
    - a. Reason 1 – set the tone of appeal
      - i. Paul was dealing with a single person, a friend, and was seeking to speak gently to him
      - ii. Paul started this way to set the tone of a gentle appeal rather than a guiding authority
      - iii. V8,9,17
      - iv. In other words – Paul was asking kindly
    - b. Reason 2 – set the expectation
      - i. Paul was about to give Philemon a big ask – a counter-cultural, counter-flesh, Gospel-ethic request
      - ii. He mentioned his chains as a way to say – If I can go through this suffering for Jesus, surely you can do this smaller thing I'm about to ask

**2) Given the uniqueness of this letter – it begs the question “What was Paul appealing to Philemon for?”**

- a. Paul was asking Philemon to extend Godly, compassionate forgiveness to a slave who had wronged Philemon, but has recently been converted and is living repentant
  - i. 3 major characters of Philemon – Paul, Philemon, Onesimus

**3) The major theme of Philemon is that of Godly reconciliation and forgiveness**

- a. Highlight reel – a story we will grow familiar with over the coming weeks
- b. Philemon is a letter dedicated to forgiveness

**4) Why is this important to know?**

- a. Because the scenario teaches us both theology and sanctification
  - i. Tells us about a God who stands ready to forgive
    - 1. Ps. 103:2-3, 12-13
    - 2. Neh. 9:16,17
  - ii. Tells us about how we are to practice forgiveness in our lives to one another
    - 1. Matt. 6:12
- b. Write down – I need forgiveness and God stands ready to give it

### **Depiction of Forgiveness**

#### **1) Philemon opens us with Paul giving his greeting and making mention of who he is writing to**

##### **a. Paul – the author**

- i. Customary opening for a greeting of that time
- ii. Could you imagine the mixed emotions Philemon experienced when receiving this letter
  - 1. Seeing Onesimus
  - 2. Reading Paul's name – the man responsible for leading him to the Lord
    - a. The man responsible for impacted the region for the name of Jesus

##### **b. Timothy – not the co-author, but evidently was with Paul when this was written**

- i. It's fascinating that Paul would mention Timothy at the beginning of this letter seeing how he mentions names of others at the end – V24,25
  - 1. Why?
- ii. Reason 1 – It's most likely that Philemon knew Timothy personally as well seeing how Timothy was with Paul in his ministry
- iii. Reason 2 – A way to add emphasis to what he was requesting
  - 1. Using Timothy's name like this would suggest Timothy was in agreement with Paul
- iv. Reason 3 – A way to portray Timothy as a leader in the faith at that time
  - 1. Timothy played a significant role in Paul's ministry and Paul mentioned him often at the beginning of Paul's writings
  - 2. "[Paul] wanted Timothy to be recognized as a leader and his heir..." J. Mac

##### **c. Philemon – recipient**

- i. A wealthy, prominent leader of the Colossian church
  - 1. The church worshipped in his house – V2
- ii. Most likely a convert of Paul personally
- iii. Philemon was a great man of faith and had a good reputation – V5
- iv. Paul labels him as "beloved" and "fellow laborer"

##### **d. Apphia – a feminine name, with no other designation and in line with Philemon, this was most likely Philemon's wife**

- e. Archippus – given the context, this was most likely Philemon and Apphia’s son
  - i. He was also a prominent figure in the ministry of that area – Col. 4:17
  - ii. Paul labeled him as a fellow soldier – “with + army”
    - 1. Church tradition tells us Archippus was stabbed to death by a mob during the time of Nero
    - 2. “Like many soldiers of the cross, he apparently died on the battlefield of faith.” Danny Akin
- f. This family was sold out for Jesus

**2) What is significant about this list of names mentioned here at the opening of this letter?**

- a. It’s more than just a grammatical list of who’s who
- b. This list is a list depicting the gracious forgiveness of God
  - i. It is fitting a book of forgiveness starts with a list of names of people who have been forgiven

**3) Each person mentioned here has been a recipient of God’s forgiveness**

- a. Paul
  - i. Started out as a murderous, self-righteous, zealot, who persecuted the church
  - ii. Paul’s own testimony – Acts 26:9-11; Phil. 3:4-6
  - iii. Yet – Gal. 2:20
  - iv. The very 1<sup>st</sup> word in the book of Philemon is a testimony to what God’s forgiveness can do
- b. Timothy – Acts 16:1,2
  - i. Came from a religiously divided and confused home
  - ii. Now – he is named among Paul
  - iii. Listen to this – Phil. 2:19-22
- c. Philemon and family
  - i. A family who, before trusting Jesus, was headed to a Christless eternity in hell but now have had their position and posture changed by God’s forgiveness
    - 1. Forgiven and fellow laborer
    - 2. Forgiven and fellow soldier
- d. Church in thy house
  - i. Ekklesia – a “called out” gathering of believers who assemble together and worship
  - ii. Represents a host of people who have experienced God’s forgiveness and life-change

**4) Notice how Paul elaborated on their relationship with God – “grace and peace”**

- a. This is a customary greeting of Paul given in all of his writings
- b. It's a reminder of what and how we have received the forgiveness of God
  - i. Grace – undeserved favor of God's forgiveness
  - ii. Peace – The resulting state of God's forgiveness
- c. Paul elaborates on this in Eph. 1:6,7

This opening greeting is filled with Depictions of God's forgiveness

## **Decision of Forgiveness**

### **1) This little letter is a great sanctifying challenge to you and I as followers of Jesus**

- a. Challenge – Having experienced God’s forgiveness, will we be quick to extend genuine, Godly forgiveness
  - i. That’s what Paul is challenging Philemon with

### **2) Truth – It’s hard to live out something you don’t really understand**

- a. I find that to be true when it comes to forgiveness
- b. Many times we hear the term, singing or preaching, but don’t really grasp the essence of what it means
- c. In this study, we are sure to learn about what it means to extend forgiveness
  - i. Over the course of this letter, our understanding of forgiveness should grow

### **3) Forgiveness**

- a. A word which saturated the ministry of Jesus
  - i. Mentioned 142 x’s in NT
    - 1. 42 in Matt, 34 in Mark and Luke, 14 in John
    - 2. Only 15 references outside the Gospels
  - ii. In other words – forgiveness is closely associated with the life and ministry of Jesus
    - 1. You want to learn about forgiveness – go look at Jesus
- b. Common Greek word used in everyday language
  - i. Lit. – to send off, send away, to put apart
    - 1. Denotes a hurling or letting go
  - ii. Basic meaning – to put away an offense
  - iii. Nautically – indicates loosening the mooring of a ship and release it to sea
  - iv. Militarily – to shoot/discharge an arrow into the sky so that its out of sight
  - v. Legally – word associated with divorce, a putting away
  - vi. Economically – a canceling of a financial debt
  - vii. Religiously – the taking away and putting off of sin, guilt, and shame
- c. There are many depictions of how forgiveness is used in the Greek world
  - i. Indicates the many ways and times we must stand ready to forgive

### **4) 1<sup>st</sup> mention – Gen 50:17 – Joseph’s brothers urging forgiveness when Israel died**

### **5) 1<sup>st</sup> concept – Adam and Eve covered by God after sin**



- 6) **Interesting – forgiving – Grk. Charizomai – to give the grace of forgiveness, to do something pleasant or agreeable – to hand over into custody**
  - a. Root – a joy-filled greeting
  - b.
- 7) **Forgiveness is a term loaded with meaning that we must know, understand, and in wisdom, live out**

### **Closing**

- 1) **Challenge – prepare your heart to learn what forgiveness is and what it looks like practically**
- 2) **Rejoice - in the forgiveness you have received from Jesus**
- 3) **Understand – forgiveness can be a difficult thing to extend in some cases**
  - a. Onesimus – not an easy person to forgive