

Philemon Sermon Series – Sermon 3 – The Foundations of Forgiveness – V8-14

**Intro:**

**1) The Scripture has a lot to say about speaking the right things at the right time to the right person**

- a. As a matter of fact, what you say, when you say it, and how you say it can distinguish you from being a foolish person
  - i. Prov. 17:28 - <sup>28</sup> Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.

**2) The Bible encourages us to discern when to speak and how to speak**

- a. Consider the following:
- b. Prov. 10:32 - <sup>32</sup> The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness.
- c. Prov. 12:18 - <sup>18</sup> There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.
- d. Prov. 15:1 - A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.
- e. Prov. 15:23 - <sup>23</sup> A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!
- f. Prov. 25:11 - <sup>11</sup> A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

**3) Word Picture – puzzle piece**

- a. A word spoken well is like the last piece of the puzzle that brings it all together

**4) One of the most powerful phrases a person can utter that can unlock the potential of great reconciliation is – “I forgive you”**

- a. There’s an untold power behind that little phrase that can change the trajectory of a relationship

**5) Hard part – its not always easy to say that little phrase**

- a. As we have just went over – we need to be discerning as to how and when we say such a phrase
- b. Its vital that when we speak forgiveness it is a “word fitly spoken”

**6) When it comes to forgiveness it seems that there is much confusion around how, when, and to whom forgiveness is given**

- a. Today we are going to look at a situation which calls for forgiveness and see the foundation upon which forgiveness is given
- b. Goal – leave here today grasping what it means to be a forgiving person
- c. Context – body of the letter which outlines the situation and request from Paul
  - i. Interesting – the word forgiveness doesn’t appear in letter, but it does in action
- d. Text: V8-14
- e. Sermon – The Foundations of Forgiveness

**Forgiveness is an ACTION of love – V8,9**

**1) What we learn here in V8,9 is: Paul could have commanded Philemon, in exercising his authority, to receive Onesimus back and accept him into the church**

- a. Yet – Paul appeals to the Godly love Philemon is accustomed to showing

**2) Paul already defined Philemon as a brother in Christ who loves well – V5,7**

- a. So it should come as no surprise that Paul easily appeals to Philemon's Godly love in the request to forgive Onesimus
- b. As a matter of fact, that is how V8 begins
  - i. "Wherefore" – for this reason, accordingly
    - 1. This word creates a link between what has been said to what is being said
  - ii. Since Philemon was a brother who loved well, Paul was appealing to him to display that love in this unique situation
  - iii. "Philemon had been a great blessing to many saints, and now he could be a blessing to one of his own slaves who had just been saved!" – Warren W. Wiersbe
  - iv. In other words – Paul's request was made as an appeal of love, not a forced obedience to a command

**3) Reality – Paul and Philemon knew that Paul could have approached this whole situation from a position of apostolic authority and issue a command to forgive**

- a. Enjoin – to appoint over, to put in charge, denotes putting upon one as a duty
- b. Convenient – fitly, proper, to do one's duty
- c. In other words – Paul could have commanded Philemon to accept Onesimus under the umbrella of obedience to Paul
- d. Yet Paul knew – forced love is not real love

**4) Notice – Paul exhorts Philemon to forgive as an action of Godly love rather than obedience to Paul's authority**

- a. Beseech – exhort, call for, appeal
  - i. To call + by the side
  - ii. To call by the side and encourage
- b. Paul knew that if real forgiveness were to take place, it would have had to come from the Godly tender-mercy of Philemon
- c. Forgiving Onesimus wants to be a fulfillment of Paul's personal desire, but rather is was an action of a Christ-filled life

**5) Appealing to Philemon this way meant that a failure to forgive would have been a rejection of Christian morality and truth**

- a. Paul's wise approach here teaches us a key aspect about forgiving our brothers and sister in Christ
  - i. Forgiveness is an action of love

**Application**

- 1) Good perspective on forgiveness – forgiving each other is an action of love and a fulfilment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Commandment**
  - a. Matt. 22:34-40
  - b. Truth – we are quick to forgive and excuse ourselves
  - c. “We find ourselves eminently worthy of forgiveness and have a hard time understanding why others would not forgive us.” – J. Mac
  - d. If we love one another as we love ourselves, we should be quick on forgiveness
  - e. Sentence to ponder – A Christian who possesses a Godly love will be a Christian who extends Godly forgiveness

**Forgiveness is an AVENUE of wisdom – V9**

**1) There's a phrase worth noting that Paul mentions when he gives his appeal to Philemon**

- a. V9b
- b. Rather than request as Paul the Apostle, he requests as Paul the aged

**2) Why add this little detail to the request?**

- a. "Aged" here seems to indicate something deeper than just a chronological rendering of Paul's life
  - i. At this time – Paul would have been somewhere around 60
  - ii. Not old according to our standards, but somewhat old in Paul's context
    - 1. Most historians agree the average life expectancy at that time was around 35
      - a. Poor records, infant mortality, slave labor, war
- b. Yet, Paul's appeal seems to stress something more than just his numerical age
  - i. What makes us conclude that?
  - ii. It is likely that Paul is not much older than Philemon
    - 1. Philemon is married, successful in business, has a son old enough to be in ministry
  - iii. It wouldn't make sense to stress your age if the person you are talking to is about the same age
    - 1. We see in the Bible age is stressed when there is a large age gap
      - a. Example – John in 1 John
  - iv. Also – Paul adds a qualifier to the term aged – V9c
    - 1. His "aged" seems to be linked to his mission experiences
- c. What seems to be the case here – Paul is one who is aged in the sense of wisdom and Godly life experience
  - i. We could say – Paul is older than his years
  - ii. Paul had been through a lot
    - 1. Years of Jewish education
    - 2. Years of Christian education
    - 3. Successful mission work
    - 4. Persecution
  - iii. Paul packed a lot of life into those 60 years

**3) We could say – this request came from a man who was full of wisdom who unashamedly lived out his faith, even unto imprisonment**

- a. Setting this request in the context of this title is an indication of the wisdom that comes with forgiveness

**Application**

**1) Godly wisdom tells us we forgive because God forgave us**

- a. Wisdom – God's Word known and understood, now lived out
- b. Eph. 4:31,32
- c. Forgiveness is you living out God's word – it's an avenue for wise living

**Forgiveness is an AFFIRMATION of God's Authority**

- 1) It's important to understanding this request that we grasp who it is that is being forgiven**
  - a. We see this in V10-14
  - b. Who's being forgiven?
    - i. Onesimus – a runaway slave who has recently come to saving faith in Jesus
- 2) Paul appeals for Philemon's forgiveness based on the conversion of Onesimus**
  - a. What we understand here is – Onesimus was no longer “just a slave”, but rather he is Paul's son in the faith and Philemon's brother in Christ
  - b. Onesimus was a former fugitive who has been to the cross, received forgiveness, and is seeking reconciliation with Philemon
- 3) We could put it this way – the returning Onesimus is not the same man as the runaway Onesimus**
  - a. V11
  - b. Play on words to reveal the reality of his conversion
    - i. Onesimus – common slave name indication his usefulness
      1. Lit – useful/profitable
    - ii. In essence – “Useful formerly was useless, is not useful”
    - iii. He as a changed man
- 4) Why is this important to note?**
  - a. Reveals to us 2 things:
    - i. Paul was aware of Onesimus' history and issues
    - ii. Paul was also keenly aware of God's intervention, salvation, and redemption
  - b. By sharing this information with Philemon Paul was applying – 2 Cor. 5:17
  - c. In other words – Philemon was to forgive because God was at work

### **Application**

#### **1) You won't change a person from the outside in – they need an internal/eternal conversion**

- a. Onesimus didn't show back up because of outward adherence, but rather because inner conversion
- b. Sometimes you are waiting for someone to change and pressuring from the outside
  - i. What you should do is seek that change through praying for what's on the inside

#### **2) Refusal to forgive when forgiveness is due is essentially usurping the authority of God**

- a. Rom. 12:14,19
- b. "By failing to forgive, believers presume to take the sword of divine judgment out of God's hand and wield it themselves. Such an attitude implies that God is unjust, indifferent, or unable to judge, all of which is blasphemous." – J. Mac
- c. Truth is – God is eternally more able to deal with the wrongs done to us than we are
  - i. In His omniscience He is eternally qualified to understand and act in perfect wisdom
  - ii. In His omnipotence He is has the authority to do that which is right
    - 1. In His holiness, He will
- d. Why do we forgive each other?
  - i. Because I trust that God is at work in your life and will right your issues and failures
  - ii. You and I are able to forgive each other because God is working in our lives
    - 1. Phil. 1:6

**Forgiveness is ACKNOWLEDGEMENT of one's repentance**

**1) What I love about this portion of Scripture is that Paul is not silent on Onesimus' repentance**

- a. We've learned that Onesimus has been redeemed, but we also learn that Onesimus is living repentant

**2) Look at Onesimus' repentance**

- a. Faith – V10,11
- b. Return – V12
  - i. Notice how Paul speaks of Onesimus' return – “receive him, that is, mine own bowels”
  - ii. Paul is sending his heart when he sent back Onesimus
  - iii. Speaks volumes to the relationship between Paul and Onesimus
- c. Service – V13,14
  - i. Evidently Onesimus was not serving Paul in Gospel ministry – V13c
  - ii. Paul knew that this was done without Philemon's knowledge and wanted to make sure Philemon was aware of this
    - 1. Two reasons:
    - 2. To get Philemon's permission
    - 3. Knowing that Philemon would have wanted to serve Paul himself, Paul let Philemon know that his slave had served in his stead

**3) What we have in these verses is a portrait of a repentant man**

- a. And Paul wanted to make sure Philemon knew that

**Application**

**1) The Big Question about forgiveness – do I forgive in every circumstance?**

- a. First – note that this book is speaking of forgiveness between believers
  - i. To apply this otherwise, as some attempt, would not fit the content
- b. We must make a distinction between the intention of forgiveness and the expression of forgiveness
  - i. Luke 17:3,4
  - ii. We must always stand ready to forgive
    - 1. God does – Psalm 86:5
    - 2. Forgiveness – to hand over into custody
    - 3. Your heart must give custody of forgiveness to God and be have the intention of forgiveness, not vengeance
  - iii. Expression of forgiveness
    - 1. Q – Does God forgive everyone?
    - 2. God forgives when there is repentant faith
    - 3. Luke 17 mentions repentance as a key aspect of expressing forgiveness
    - 4. We express forgiveness when repentance is expressed
- c. Another way to say it – forgiveness involves 2 relationships
  - i. You and your heart before God
  - ii. You and reconciliation with another

**Closing**

- 1) This letter issues us a great challenge – will we forgive Biblically?**
  - a. As an action of love
  - b. As an avenue of wisdom
  - c. As an affirmation of God's authority
  - d. As an acknowledgement of repentance
  
- 2) Saying "I forgive you" is a phrase that needs to be said and felt with Biblical weight**