

# “Reasons to Forgive”

## *Philemon 19-25*

**Theme:** Forgiving those who offend us is one of the pieces of evidence that Christ is in us.

### I. Exculpation<sup>1</sup> – v. 19

#### A. The Reality of Personal Offenses

1. As Paul draws his letter to Philemon to a close, he draws Philemon’s attention to the personal nature of Paul’s interest in him - *“I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand ...”*
2. It is as if Paul were writing Philemon an IOU as he says, *“I will repay it [whatever Onesimus owes].”*
3. Paul is not telling Philemon to just forget about it; he realizes that the offenses caused by Onesimus are real and that Philemon knew actual loss.
4. However, our personal advantages and prosperity ought not always drive our decisions or choices – cp. 1 Corinthians 6:7.

#### B. The Recognition of the Greater Obligation

1. Paul reminds Philemon that Paul wasn’t concerned primarily with his own advantages or even safety as he proclaimed the Gospel in Ephesus when Philemon heard the Gospel – cp. 1 Corinthians 15:32.
2. This is why he reminds Philemon that sacrifices are constantly made for the advancement of the Gospel and the glory of Jesus Christ – *“... not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well.”*
3. “Paul’s plan is to put Onesimus’s debt on his account and then cancel it because Philemon owes Paul an even greater debt.”<sup>2</sup>
4. Onesimus owes Philemon the loss of money while Philemon owes Paul his soul’s deliverance, an incomparable state.

### II. Example – vv. 20-21

<sup>1</sup> Exculpation means to clear from a charge of guilt or fault; free from blame; vindicate

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, Colossians & Philemon, p. 226.

## A. The Priority of Mercy – v. 20

1. Paul calls on Philemon to prioritize mercy and thereby edify people by his example – *“Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord”* – a play on Onesimus’ name as he speaks of *“benefit”* [ὀνίνημι], the root for his name.
2. By showing mercy and forgiving Onesimus, Philemon would *“refresh my heart in Christ”* – a reference to the relief from Paul’s concerns for his “son” Onesimus and the unity it would produce in the Colossian church.
3. Philemon would, by forgiving Onesimus, provide the pattern for mercy in the conflicts of others.

## B. The Pattern for Mercy – v. 21

1. Paul expresses his confidence in the example that Philemon would provide that the Holy Spirit is driving what he chooses to do – *“Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.”*
2. Saints led by God’s Spirit are not seen as seeking to get by with as little as possible in obedience to the Lord but to do all they can to the glory of Christ.
3. The imitation of our Lord in forgiveness is what the Spirit of God influences the believers to seek – cp. [\*Ephesians 4:32\*](#).

## III. Expectation – vv. 22-24

### A. The Anticipation of Fellowship – v. 22

1. Hence, believers are expected to do the right thing.
2. Paul encourages Philemon to do what is right even as he communicates that he ought to plan on a visit from Paul – *“At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.”*
3. He expects Philemon not to have resentment toward him because of Paul’s “pressure” on Philemon to forgive Onesimus.
  - a) *Paul expects Philemon not only to forgive Onesimus but to extend hospitality to Paul – “prepare me a lodging ...”*
  - b) *Additionally, Paul expects Philemon to “pray I will be given to you.”*
4. The fact that Paul would visit Colossae caused Philemon to know

he would give an account for his decision regarding forgiving Onesimus.

## B. The Accountability through Fraternity – vv. 23-24

1. Additionally, Paul indicated to Philemon there was a cadre of men who trusted that he would do the right thing, having been in fellowship with Onesimus while he was in Rome serving alongside them.
2. These men include “... his fellow workers:”
  - a) *Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you ...” – a native of Colossae and likely one of their pastors – cp. [Colossians 4:12-13](#).*
  - b) *“as do Mark ...” – one of Paul’s most valued assistants who had overcome Paul’s opposition because of failure, and who was now someone Paul treasured – cp. [2 Timothy 4:11](#).*
  - c) *“... Aristarchus ...” – a Jewish believer who was with Paul during many of Paul’s lowest moments of suffering through the riot at Ephesus, the shipwreck en route to Rome – cp. [Colossians 4:10-11](#).*
  - d) *“... Demas ...” – was a fake – a good one that is here counted on by Paul, but who ultimately demonstrated his true colors – cp. [2 Timothy 4:10](#).*
  - e) *“... Luke ...” – was a physician who tended to Paul throughout many of his journeys and aided him through his frequent ailments; he was alone with Paul at the end of Paul’s life – cp. [2 Timothy 4:11](#).*
3. The greetings from these men would have reminded Philemon of the quality of men who had been with Onesimus and who sent him back, desiring Philemon’s mercy and forgiveness.

## IV. Enabling – v. 25

### A. The Reminder of Grace

1. Paul closes his letter, reminding Philemon of the common experience of all whom God has forgiven – *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ ...”*
2. *“Grace” [χάρις]* – is that unmerited favor whereby the undeserving are given blessings sourced solely in the benevolent heart of God.
3. Paul reminds Philemon that he, too, can provide a godly example of forgiveness and grace.

## **B. The Resource of Grace**

1. That grace remains the constant state in which we stand and enables us to do the will of God as the indwelling Spirit of Christ directs – “... *be with your spirit.*”
2. None of us can overcome our selfish ambition and ego-centric self-advocacy without the grace of God – the resource enabling us to do what is right – cp. *Colossians 1:9-11.*

**Forgiving those who offend us is one of the pieces of evidence that  
Christ is in us.**