

# FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

## COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF PHILEMON

Paul Apple (March 2010)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

### **Philemon 15 “*That you would have him back forever*”**

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TEXT: Philemon 1-7

TITLE: *ATMOSPHERE FOR FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION*

**BIG IDEA:**  
**EFFECTIVE FAITH SHOWS ITSELF IN PRACTICAL LOVE**

**INTRODUCTION:**

The Apostle Paul is petitioning Philemon to receive back into good graces Onesimus, the slave he had led to the Lord but the slave who had robbed his master and run away to Rome. Paul has been urging Onesimus to make things right with his master; but at issue would be whether Philemon would be willing to forgive and extend love to Onesimus and whether he would be able to trust him again. This is a practical test of genuine Christian love. Paul does not want Onesimus to be punished; in fact he would like him to be freed up to be returned to him for service in the gospel. But Paul does not presume upon the willingness of Philemon.

**C.S. Lewis** once said “Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea, until he has something to forgive.”

**Martin Lloyd Jones** once said “I say to the glory of God and in utter humility that whenever I see myself before God and realize even something of what my blessed Lord has done for me, I am ready to forgive anybody and anything”

**Rupprecht:** The traditional interpretation has been that Paul sent him back with Tychicus at the time of the writing of the Epistle to the Colossians.

Paul wrote the letter to Philemon in approximately 57 -60A.D. probably during his first imprisonment in Rome. This letter was written at about the same time that he wrote his letters to the church at Ephesus (Ephesians) and to the church at Colossae (Colossians).

Much along the lines of the Book of James – 9 Tests of Genuine Faith

- Faith without **Perseverance** is dead
- Faith without **Obedience** is dead
- Faith without **Impartial Love** is dead
- Faith without **Good Works** is dead
- Faith without **Practical Wisdom** is dead
- Faith without **Intimacy** is dead
- Faith without **Submission to the Will of God** is dead
- Faith without the **Fear of God** is dead
- Faith without **Fervent Effectual Prayer** is dead

Here in Philemon we see how faith must work together with love in very practical ways to bless the saints

**(:1-3) GREETING: FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN CHRIST INVOLVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS AS PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL**

A. Author

1. Main Author – Enslaved to the Will of His Master – Belonging to His Master

*“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus,”*

Paul oj desmtoj Cristou/Vhsou

Also physically in prison at the time because of his faithful labors for Christ; obligated to serve under the circumstances ordained for him by his master; he will be asking Philemon to fulfill his obligations as well

**Hendriksen:** all the details of the imprisonment as well as its outcome, whether it be the death-sentence or acquittal, are in the hands that were pierced for this prisoner, those very hands that now control the entire universe in the interest of the church. Paul’s imprisonment is therefore a very honorable one. The mention of himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus is also very tactful, probably implying, “In comparison with the *sacrifice* that I am making is not the *favor* which I am asking you to grant a rather easy matter?”

2. Companion / Co-Laborer (not really co-author)

*“and Timothy our brother”*

kai. Timogtoj o adel foj

Spiritual brotherhood is closer relationship than flesh and blood

Not just Paul’s brother, but “*our*” brother

B. Recipients: Beloved family members in Christ and fellow workers in the gospel ministry

1. Main Recipient

*“to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker”*

Fil hmoni tw/ agaphtw/ kai. sunergw/ himwh

All *brothers* in the Lord should also be *fellow workers*

No room in the family of God for those who don’t enter into the yoke of partnership in the gospel ministry; involves commitment and hard work

2. Associates

a. Apphia

*“and to Apphia our sister”*

kai. VApfia| th/ adel fh

probably the wife of Philemon and as such would have had some oversight responsibility over the slaves as they worked in the household

b. Archippus (Perhaps the son of Philemon or prominent preacher)

*“and to Archippus our fellow soldier”*

kai. VArcippw| tw/ sustratiw|th| himwh

**Phil. 2:25** – reference to Epaphroditus using same term

### 3. Overall Local Church

*“and to the church in your house”*

kai. th|katv oikon sou ekkl hsiā{

Philemon fairly wealthy; hospitable; hosting the church = the people

[Some people would advocate today that the house church format is still optimal – whole house church movement]

body of “called out” ones

**Oesterley:** Up to the third century we have no certain evidence of the existence of church buildings for the purposes of worship; all references point to private houses for this. In Rome several of the oldest churches appear to have been built on the sites of houses used for Christian worship.

#### C. Salutation/ Benediction

*“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”*

carij umih kai. eirhnh apo. qeou/patroj hmwh kai. kuriou Ihsou/ Cristou{

The resources of God that are most precious to us can be summed up as Grace and Peace

The Father and the Son work in tandem to provide those benefits to the saints

**Oesterley:** In the N.T. the word *peace* expresses the spiritual state, which is the result of a right relationship between God and man. According to Jewish belief, the establishment of peace, in this sense, was one of the main functions of the Messiah (cf. Luke ii. 14), it was herein that His mediatorial work was to be accomplished.

**MacArthur:** Grace, the means of salvation; peace, the result of salvation.

### (:4-7) EFFECTIVE FAITH SHOWS ITSELF IN PRACTICAL LOVE

### THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER FOR THE EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF LOVE AND FAITH IN THE LIFE OF PHILEMON

#### (:4) INTRODUCTION: Ongoing Thanksgiving for Philemon

*“I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers”*

Eucaristw/ tw| qew| mou pantote mneian sou poioumenoj epi. twh proseucwh mou(

Switch in pronoun number in this section from plural to singular “*you*”

Paul took the time to pray for specific individuals and their needs;

The tone of Paul’s prayers was one of thanksgiving

Always tried to accentuate the positive; not looking for things to criticize or to harp on someone’s weaknesses

*“always”* – goes with the giving of thanks -- consistent pattern in the letters of Paul (cf.

Eph 1:16, Phil 1:3, Col. 1:3,4)

## **I. (:5) THE DISTINGUISHING BRAND OF GENUINE CHRISTIANITY SHOULD BE THE SYNERGY OF ACTIVE FAITH AND PRACTICAL LOVE**

Exemplary Report: Commending Philemon for Consistent Pattern of Love and Faith

### A. The Report of Practical Love

*“because I hear of your love,”*  
akouwn sou thn agaphn

*“toward all the saints”*  
eij pantaj touj agiouj(

Who did Paul hear of this good report from? Possibly Epaphras ( Col. 1:7,8; 4:12)

Chiastic Arrangement: A-love / B-faith / B-Lord Jesus / A-all the saints

**Oesterley:** The first and prominent thought is Philemon’s love. This suggests the mention of his faith, as the source from which it springs.

No partiality of prejudice

Concept of separation for God’s service (Lev. 19:2)

No false spirituality

Unusual emphasis here – Why?

### B. The Report of Active Faith

*“and of the faith which you have”*  
kai. thn pistin( hē eceij

*“toward the Lord Jesus”*  
proj ton kurion Ihsouh

Object of our faith is what is important

**Maclaren:** The preposition here used to define the relation of faith to its object is noteworthy. Faith is *“toward”* Him. The idea is that of a movement of yearning after an unattained good.

## **II. (:6) THE DYNAMIC BASIS FOR PRACTICAL LOVE IS EFFECTIVE FAITH THAT MATURES IN THE COMPREHENSION OF OUR UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST**

Specific Petition:

### A. Foundation for Love = the common faith in our Lord Jesus Christ

*“and I pray that the fellowship of your faith”*  
ōpwj h koinwnia thj pistewj sou

- could be the sharing of faith in terms of evangelism

- could also be the sharing of faith in obeying God in other practical areas such as showing love to the brethren which is the emphasis of this book

**Guzik:** It is possible that Paul means the sharing of material things, prompted by faith. The ancient Greek word for sharing is *koinonia*, and sometimes Paul used *koinonia*,

which means "fellowship, sharing," to describe giving (2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Romans 15:6).

B. Functioning of Faith = the maturing and exercise of that faith

*"may become effective"*  
energhj genhtai

C. Fruit of Spiritual Knowledge = comprehending and applying the truth of our precious union with Jesus Christ

*"through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you"*  
en epignwsei pantoj agaqou/ tou/en himh

D. Focus of Our Faith and Love = ministering to others so that Christ would be exalted

*"for Christ's sake."*  
eij Cristonh

**Matthew Henry:** The apostle joins prayer with his praises, that the fruits of Philemon's faith and love might be more and more conspicuous, so as that the communication of them might constrain others to the acknowledgment of all the good things that were in him and in his house towards Christ Jesus; that their light might so shine before men that they, seeing their good works, might be stirred up to imitate them, and to glorify their Father who is in heaven. Good works must be done, not of vain-glory to be seen, yet such as may be seen to God's glory and the good of men.

**Rupprecht:** With equal certainty one might suggest that:

1) Paul prays that Philemon's participation in the faith will be made effective because of his full understanding of God's goodness to both of them; or

2) he prays that Philemon will be active in the faith so that he will develop a full understanding of God's goodness to both of them.

The former interpretation is more attractive than the latter one because of Paul's repeated suggestion that knowledge precedes good works (cf. Col. 1:9, 10).

**Wiersbe:** He also prayed that his friend would have a deeper understanding of all that he had in Jesus Christ. After all, the better we know Christ and experience His blessings, the more we want to share these blessings with others.

### **III. (:7) THE DEFINING BAROMETER OF EFFECTIVE FAITH SHOULD BE THE PRACTICAL EXPRESSION OF LOVE TOWARDS THE SAINTS**

Overall Joy and Encouragement – Testimony of Practical Expression of Love by Philemon towards the Saints

A. The Encouragement of Love to the Apostle Paul

*"For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love,"*  
caran gar pol lhn escon kai. parakhsin epi. th| agaph| sou(

B. The Encouragement of Love to the Saints

“because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.”  
οἱ τὰ σπλαγχνὰ τῶν ἀγίων ἀναπεπῶνται διὰ σοῦ ἀδελφεῖ

Refreshed in every way: spiritually, financially, physically

**Constable:** Paul felt much joy and comfort as he heard of Philemon's love. The Greek word translated "hearts" (splaγchna) designates total personality at the deepest level.<sup>14</sup> Philemon had already demonstrated the kind of behavior that Paul was going to call on him to manifest again. Paul's request would test his response. However, Paul was confident of Philemon's cooperation. He appealed to him from the same authority level, as a "brother" (cf. v. 2 where Paul called Apphia a "sister").

**William Kelly:** Undoubtedly there had been evil in Onesimus, and in his desertion of his master. But is it not the word of God to overcome evil with good, instead of being overcome by it? Is it not so that grace has wrought for us and in us? Nothing different is looked for now, but rather accordance with that course of grace which had characterized Philemon.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How was Paul able to maintain such a positive attitude and such a fruitful ministry while imprisoned for Jesus Christ?
- 2) What errors evidence themselves when there is no synergy between active faith and practical love?
- 3) How would you define the substance of “*every good thing which is in you*”?
- 4) How can we refresh the hearts of the saints in practical ways?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Oesterley:** only epistle of Paul of a private character . . . dealing with a personal matter (cf. 3 John). Paul's influence on Onesimus must have been strong to have induced him to return. . . Nothing could exceed the affectionate tactfulness displayed in the Epistle; the delicate way in which St. Paul combines the appeal to all that is best in Philemon with a gentle, yet distinct assertion of his own authority (see vv. 8, 9, 21) is very striking. The Epistle is a witness to the very high demands which Christianity makes upon men.

**Maclaren:** As **Luther** puts it, “We are all God's Onesimuses”; and the welcome which Paul seeks to secure for the returning fugitive, as well as the motives to which he appeals in order to secure it, do shadow forth in no uncertain outline our welcome from

God, and the treasures of His heart towards us, because they are at bottom the same.

**Lenski:** Paul shows perfect tact in this letter. He calls out all that is noble in Philemon. He touches all the motives that will induce Philemon to receive Onesimus back in a Christian manner. No excuse is offered for the slave's running away. He ran away as a pagan, Paul returns him as a Christian. Philemon lost a heathen slave who had never served his master except in his heathen way; Paul gives him back a Christian slave who comes back to his master of his own accord, impelled by a Christian conscience, to make good his past grave fault and henceforth to serve his master in a truly Christian way.

**Baxter:** Social evils are soonest changed by transformed lives. How simple was this Philemon-Onesimus matter compared with the complicated master-versus-worker problems of modern industry! Yet here is the open secret which can solve every social and industrial dispute, to the wellbeing of men and the honour of God, i.e. the application of Christian principles by Christian men.

**MacArthur:** He says "*I am a prisoner of Christ Jesus.*" It's a wonderful note because it is the way you would expect to react to the Romans. The Romans thought he was a prisoner of Rome. They had captured him. They had incarcerated him. He was under their authority. But from his vantage point he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He was in prison because Christ put him there, not because Rome put him there. And if you ever have any questions about that, all you have to do is remind yourself of some of the things that he said while he was in prison, most notably this one at the end of Philippians, "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus, all the saints greet you especially those of Caesar's household." The Lord had him in prison and while he was there he was evangelizing Caesar's household. . .

So here is a man he loved and a man who had worked alongside of him. Now this friendship probably developed in Ephesus, just as a note, because Paul never went to Colossae. When I said he was responsible for the founding of the church there it was because he founded Ephesus, stayed there three years and out of Ephesus all those other churches in Asia Minor were planted. No doubt during the time Paul was at Ephesus, this man was converted, came to know Paul on a personal way even though he lived a little distance away in the very small town of Colossae. So they had from then on developed a friendship. And Paul now is going to put his friendship on the line, folks, he really is. This is a straight-forward letter. He's going to ask Philemon to do something in the area of forgiveness that is crucial. . .

Now there's risk here because Philemon would have the right to punish Onesimus. But Paul decides to send him back anyway, but not without a letter, so he sends this letter. And what it basically says is you've got to forgive this guy, you've got to be willing to be merciful. You've got to treat this slave the way Christ treated you. Same principle that he put in Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13, forgive as you have been forgiven. And that's basically the background of this story. . .



#### **(:4-7) The Characteristics of One Who Forgives:**

As a result of the sinfulness, the wickedness and the lack of any kind of Christian social restraint in our culture, we have a society filled with bitterness, filled with vengeance, filled with anger, filled with hate, filled with hostility toward others. This can be seen in the retaliatory kind of crimes that become so commonplace in our day. It can be seen in the suits, law suits against everyone for everything conceivable and inconceivable. In fact, it is frightening to think about the fact there are more people in law schools today than in all other professional graduate schools combined. We are going to proliferate an almost endless number of attorneys to take care of an endless number of law suits as people retaliate back and forth for every minuscule and major issue of life that has been foisted upon them. . . Certainly ours is the most hostile, the most angry, the most unforgiving, the most vengeful culture that I have ever experienced in my brief life time.

#### **Aside: Consequences of Failing to Forgive:**

1) Number one, it will imprison you in your past. A failure to forgive will imprison you in your past. As long as you fail to forgive an offender, an offense committed against you, you are shackled to the past. Unforgiveness keeps that pain alive. Unforgiveness keeps that sore open. Unforgiveness never lets that wound heal. And you go through life reminding yourself of what was done to you and so you feed that open wound, you feed that open sore, you stir up that pain and you accumulatively build up the larger and larger degree of anger. You go through life accumulating bad feelings. . .

2) It produces bitterness. The accumulative effect of remembering without forgiveness some offense done against you no matter how brief the time or long the time is that you become a bitter person. The longer you remember the offense the more data you accumulate on it, the more recited memory you have for it the more it occupies your thinking. And the more it occupies your thinking the more it basically shapes your person. Bitterness is not just a sin, it is an infection. And it will infect your whole life. And bitterness can be directly traced to the failure to forgive. It makes you become caustic, it makes you become sarcastic. It makes you condemning. It gives you a nasty disposition, harassed by the memories of what you can't forgive, your thoughts become malignant toward others, you get a distorted view of life and you have literally diseased your whole existence. Anger begins to rage in you and it can easily get out of control. Your emotions begin to run wild. Your mind becomes the victim of that. You entertain continuing thoughts of revenge. And what happens? Even casual conversation becomes a forum for slander, a forum for gossip, a forum for innuendo against the offender and your flesh, that horrible remnant of your old self, has gained control.

3) Unforgiveness gives Satan an open door. Unforgiveness throws the welcome mat out and invites the demons in .

4) Unforgiveness hinders your fellowship with God. Jesus said if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

**Characteristics of one who forgives:**

- 1) Concern for the Lord = a true believer – your faith is real
- 2) Concern for people – your love is real
- 3) Concern for fellowship – you want harmony, peace, unity
- 4) Concern for knowledge – God has given you the capacity to forgive
- 5) Concern for the glory of Christ
- 6) Concern to be a blessing

**F. B. Hole:** If we have done some palpable wrong to another, no more effectual proof of our repentance can be given than that of confession and restitution, as far as that may be within our power. It is ever a trying process, but it is practical righteousness, most effective as a testimony and most glorifying to God.

**Corrie Ten Boom:**

Corrie ten Boom likened forgiveness to letting go of a bell rope. If you have ever seen a country church with a bell in the steeple, you will remember that to get the bell ringing you have to tug awhile.

Once it has begun to ring, you merely maintain the momentum. As long as you keep pulling, the bell keeps ringing. Miss ten Boom said forgiveness is letting go of the rope. It is just that simple. But when you do so, the bell keeps ringing. Momentum is still at work. However, if you keep your hands off the rope, the bell will begin to slow and eventually stop. It is like that with forgiveness. When you decided to forgive, the old feelings of unforgiveness may continue to assert themselves. After all, they have lots of momentum. But if you affirm your decision to forgive, that unforgiving spirit will begin to slow and will eventually be still. Forgiveness is not something you feel, it is something you do. It is letting go of the rope of retribution.

TEXT: Philemon 8-16

TITLE: *APPEAL FOR FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION*

**BIG IDEA:**

**BROKEN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE TRANSFORMED BY OUR NEW FAMILY RELATIONSHIP IN CHRIST**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Broken human relationships create pain for each one of us. The pain is increasingly severe according to the closeness of the former bond of companionship and love and loyalty. That is why divorce hurts so deeply. Where you should find love and intimacy, you now find turmoil and separation. But broken relationships affect us in other contexts as well. Think of losing a friend or being estranged from former contexts of Christian fellowship or feeling ostracized at work or rejected by your schoolmates ... Broken human relationships always cause pain and create awkward situations.

The Apostle Paul inserts himself into the middle of a broken relationship between Philemon and his slave Onesimus. You remember the context from last week. . . Now Paul is making an impassioned plea for reconciliation. He wants Philemon to set aside his natural feelings for vengeance (He had been wronged . . . probably robbed . . . and publicly embarrassed ) and receive Onesimus back as much more than a slave – but as a beloved brother in the body of Christ. The aged, imprisoned Apostle has already been successful behind the scenes in persuading Onesimus to return. Think of the internal struggle that Onesimus must have faced. His life had turned around as he met Paul and as Paul introduced him to the Savior. But instead of being able to forget all about the mistakes of his past, he is now being urged to make things right in his relationship with Philemon. What a risk to make himself vulnerable and go back to submit to the disposition of a former master whom he obviously had not respected enough to stay with. But the gospel had so transformed the life of Onesimus that he was willing to trust the Lord to do the right thing and leave the results in His providential hands. But what would be the reaction of Philemon?

The power of the gospel in transforming lives means that things do not have to remain in their dysfunctional state. As new creatures who have been reconciled to God the Father in Christ we can experience reconciled human relationships as well. But it's never easy. Reconciliation requires **repentance** and **restitution** and **forgiveness**. But that's the type of behavior that should correspond with the experience of God's grace and forgiveness in our own lives.

**5 PRIORITIES ENCOURAGING A SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION AMONG BELIEVERS IN BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS**

**I. (:8-9) PURSUE AGAPE LOVE -- FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE APOSTLE PAUL**

### A. (:8) Tone of Appealing Rather than Commanding

*“Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper . . . I rather appeal to you” (same verb in vs. 10)*

Dio( pol lhn en Cristw/parrhsian ecwn epitassein soi to anhkou . . .  
mal lon parakalw

Reconciliation is the right thing to do in this instance = “*what is proper*”

**Hendriksen:** The reference to authority is made to flash before Philemon’s mind for just a moment, only to recede entirely to the background when the spotlight is turned on the most dynamic motivating power in the entire universe, namely, love.

### B. (:9a) Theme of Agape Love

*“yet for love’s sake”*

dia. thn agaphn

This is the point of emphasis in this section

### C. (:9b) Testimony of Paul’s Example – Playing the Sympathy Card

#### 1. Wisdom of Spiritual Experience

*“since I am such a person as Paul, the aged,”*

toioutoj wh wj Pauloj presbuthj

possibly plea for some sympathy related to his old age and all that he had experienced for Christ; not likely a reference to his authority since he was appealing rather than commanding

**MacArthur:** More than a reference to his chronological age (which at the time of this letter was about 60), this description includes the toll that all the years of persecution, illnesses, imprisonments, difficult journeys, and constant concern for the churches had taken on Paul making him feel and appear even older than he actually was. . .

Acts 28 says he was a prisoner in a rented house, he has people coming and going, he's chained probably to a Roman soldier. And he's saying, "Philemon, can you dare refuse a request from poor old me?"

#### 2. Sacrifice of Committed Service

*“and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus”*

nuni. de. kai. desmioj Cristou/Ilhsou

How could you refuse the appeal of such a spiritual giant as the Apostle Paul?

How can we act in a way that would contradict the agape love that has been demonstrated to us?

How much is agape love a priority in how you relate to others?

## II. (:10-11) PUT AWAY FORMER PREJUDICES

You used to look at this person a certain way. Now you need to change your thinking

completely. When you see this person you don't want all of the memories of how they have wronged you to keep flooding back and clouding your ability to relate to them.

**3 Dramatic Changes** need to be recognized in the life of Onesimus:

Paul has already recognized these changes; now Philemon needs to view Onesimus in this new light as well

**A. (:10a) Change in Favored Status** – Now a Protégé of the Beloved Apostle

*“I appeal to you for my child Onesimus,”*  
parakal w/ se peri. tou/ emou/ teknu(

**B. (:10b) Change in Family Identity** – Now a Child of God

*“whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,”*  
oñ egenhhsa en toiñ desmoiñ( \Onhsimon(

**C. (:11) Change in Functional Value** – Now Useful

*“who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.”*  
ton pote, soi acrhston nuni. de. ðkaiñ soi. kai. emoi. eucrhston(

**MacArthur:** This is the same Gr. root word from which “*Onesimus*” comes. Paul was making a play on words that basically said, “Useful formerly was useless, but now is useful” – Paul’s point is that Onesimus had been radically transformed by God’s grace.

Name Philemon means affectionate or one who is kind

Look at how Christ was able to look at Simon Peter and see his potential for ministry

What is more important to you? Hanging on to your old prejudices in terms of how you view the potential of this person or giving the other person the benefit of the doubt regarding his repentance and commitment to following Christ?

### **III. (:12-14) PROMOTE GOSPEL MINISTRY PARTNERSHIP**

**A. (:12-13a) Valuable to Paul for Gospel Ministry**

*“I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me,”*  
oñ anepemya, soi( auton( tout\ estin ta. ema. splagcna\ oñ egw. eboul omhn proj emauton katecein(

**Lenski:** the nobler viscera (heart, liver, lungs), the seat of the feelings

**B. (:13b) Valuable to Philemon for as an Extension of His Gospel Ministry**

*“so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;”*  
iñ a uper sou/ moi diakonh\ en toiñ desmoiñ tou/ euaggel ipu(

Onesimus could now serve as an extension of the ministry of Philemon

C. (:14) Voluntary Requirement of this Gospel Ministry Partnership = Your Goodness  
“*but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.*”  
cwrij de. thj shj gnwmhj ouden hqel hsa poihsai( iħa mh. wj kata. anagkhn to. agaqon sou hƒal l a. kata. ekousion

Reconciliation is ultimately about furthering our partnership in the gospel so that the cause of Jesus Christ would be advanced; it is not ultimately about me enjoying more comfortable relationships.

What type of priority do you put on partnership in gospel ministry? What is best for the testimony of Jesus Christ?

#### **IV. (:15) PONDER GOD’S PROVIDENTIAL WORKING**

Focus on the Eternal over the Temporal

“*For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,*”

taça gar dia. touto ecwrisqh proj wƒran( iħa aiwnion auton apechj(

Just like the incident with Joseph and his brothers where they were out to harm him, but God orchestrated the events for the good of His people ( **Gen. 50:20**)

**Hendriksen:** Paul wants Philemon to see and consider God’s glorious, overruling providence.

#### **V. (:16) PREFER SPIRITUAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

Focus on the Spiritual Fellowship over the Household Hierarchy

“*no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.*”

ouketi wj doul on al l a. uper doul on( adel fon agaphton( mal ista emoi( posw| de. mal lon soi. kai. en sarki. kai. en kuriw|

**Hendriksen:** both in the affairs of this world and in the affairs of the higher life

**Constable:** In Onesimus, Philemon would receive one with whom he could share the fellowship of Christ and one who would render him more conscientious service than he could expect from a non-Christian.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Story of the Prodigal Son

**1 John 4:7-11** “*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our*

*sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) As parents, when should we appeal to our children for proper behavior rather than commanding them?
- 2) Why does Paul put so much emphasis on his imprisonment for the cause of Christ?
- 3) What broken relationships cry out for a need for reconciliation in your life?
- 4) Do you think Philemon sent Onesimus back to minister to Paul? If so, why did Paul request that lodging be prepared for his upcoming visit?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Hendriksen:** Onesimus is being sent back, but by no means alone. Big-hearted Paul sees to it that, instead of forcing this slave to beg for mercy all by himself, he returns supported by:

- a. Tychicus
  - b. a letter from Paul addressed to the entire congregation of Colossae, in which love and the spirit of forgiveness is emphasized, and
  - c. a letter dealing specifically with the case of Onesimus.
- Surely, never did a runaway return to his master in better company!

**Wiersbe:** If a slave ran away, the master would register the name and description with the officials, and the slave would be on the 'wanted' list. Any free citizen who found a runaway slave could assume custody and even intercede with the owner. The slave was not automatically returned to the owner, nor was he automatically sentenced to death. While it is true that some masters were cruel (one man threw his slave into a pool of man-eating fish!), many of them were reasonable and humane. After all, a slave was an expensive and useful piece of personal property, and it would cost the owner to lose him."

**Matthew Henry:** Observe, Even good men may sometimes need great earnestness and entreaty to lay their passions, let go their resentments, and forgive those who have injured and offended them. Some have thought it to look this way, when Paul is so pathetic and earnest, mustering up so many pleas and arguments to gain what he requests. Philemon, a Phrygian, might perhaps be naturally of a rough and difficult temper, and thence need no little pains in touching all the springs that might move him to forgiveness and reconciliation; but rather should we strive to be like God, who is slow to anger, ready to forgive, and abundant in pardons.

**MacArthur**: You say, "Where's the repentance?" Verse 10, "I appeal to you for my child whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus." It's implied. How do you know he repented? Because he's there, folks, he's there. He went back. He did the most dangerous thing. He went back humble, repentant to face the man he had wronged, the man who had the right of power over his life to exact punishment. He went back. That's repentance. You don't have to say the word, you just have to do the deed. Remember what John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and the scribes? He says why don't you show me the fruits of repentance, not just talk about it. Here's the fruit. He went back. Very dangerous, could have cost him his life. But he did what was right. He says I appeal to you for this one who stands before you who I have begotten, I'm the human instrument of his salvation by the grace of God, he is now my child, he came to Christ here in my imprisonment and I'm sending him back, open your arms, he's repentant. Obviously or he wouldn't be there. He's humble. He seeks to have a restored relationship with this man whom he has wronged. That is the first element of forgiveness, the reception of the person back into one's life. Open up, kill the hostility, embrace the person.

**Kevin Higgins**: As I thought about the mysteries of how God works, I was reminded of a story I heard a few years ago. The story begins with a poor Scottish farmer by the name of Fleming.

One day, while trying to scratch out a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved. "I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life."

"No, I can't accept payment for what I did," the Scottish farmer replied, waving off the offer. At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel.

"Is that your son?" the nobleman asked.

"Yes," the farmer replied proudly.

"I'll make you a deal. Let me take him and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll grow to a man you can be proud of." And that he did. In time, Farmer Fleming's son graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the nobleman's son was stricken with pneumonia. It was penicillin that



saved the nobleman's son. The name of that nobleman was Lord Randolph Churchill. The son who was saved? Sir Winston Churchill.

We could spend a lifetime trying to figure out how and why God does what He does, but a better use of our time and energy would be to trust that the God who sees the future just as plainly as He sees the past knows better than we do what is good for us. We must trust Him and be obedient, even when we grow uncomfortable or unsure.

In our passage in Philemon tonight, the apostle Paul brings God's providence into the equation. Think about it. Paul travels to Ephesus and leads a man to the Lord. Paul then moves on until years later he is placed in a Roman prison hundreds of miles away. Meanwhile, the man he has led to the Lord has a slave to run away. Of all the places in the world that slave could have gone, he ends up in Rome, where he too hears the gospel of Christ from Paul and experiences a wonderful change of life.

We can't script those sort of events, and yet they happen in our lives all the time. That's one of the reasons Paul was able to write what he did in Philemon 15.

*"For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;"*

TEXT: Philemon 17-25

TITLE: APPLICATION OF RECONCILIATION

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST PROVIDES THE MOTIVATION FOR CHRISTIAN RECONCILIATION**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Before we can fully grasp the process of Christian reconciliation between two parties where some wrong has occurred – where there has been a rift created by some undeserved injury – we must understand how Jesus Christ has graciously reconciled us to God the Father.

**MacArthur:** Forgiveness, we have noted, is the most God-like and the most Christ-like act a Christian can do. Never are you more like God or Christ than when you forgive because that is what God does, that is what Christ does. Forgiveness is a magnificent virtue.

**4 REMINDERS FROM THE GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST THAT MOTIVATE FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION**

**I. (:17-20) GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST REMINDS US OF GREATER DEBTS WE WERE UNABLE TO PAY – VICARIOUS PAYMENT OF ALL WRONGS THAT PAVED THE WAY FOR RECONCILIATION**

A. (:17) Reconciliation Requires Gracious Acceptance

*“If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.”*

Eiv ouñ me eceij koinwnon( pros| aboul/ auton wj emeñ

B. (:18-19) Reconciliation Requires Gracious Restitution

1. Responsibility for the Wrong

*“But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account;”*

eivde, ti hdikhsen se h' ofei,lei( touto emoi. el |logañ

2. Repayment of the Wrong

*“I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it”*

egw. Paul oj egraya th| emh| ceiri( egw. apot|sw\

3. Reassessment of the Wrong (in light of former gracious compensation)

*“(not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).”*

iha mh. legw soi ofi kai. seauton moi prosfei,leiñ

Reminds me of the movie White Christmas where the one soldier saves the famous singer from the falling wall and then uses that to obligate the singer

## II. (:20) GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST REMINDS US OF THE GREAT BLESSINGS OF RECONCILIATION

*“Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.”*

nai( adel fe( egw, sou onaimhn en kuriw\| anapauson mou ta spl agcna en Cristw\|

**MacArthur:** The forgiveness of Onesimus by Philemon will bring spiritual joy and refreshment because Paul loves both those men. Paul wants them to be one. Paul loves the unity of the church. Paul wants Colossae as a church to see that forgiveness as a great example, an object lesson. If Philemon refuses to forgive Onesimus, it will burden the heart of Paul, it will sadden the heart of Paul, it will trouble the heart of Paul because he loves both those men and he loves that church and he loves the unity of the church. Any failure to forgive will injure that relationship, it will injure that church. It will mar its ministry and its effectiveness and it will misrepresent the power of the gospel to the unconverted world that's watching. So he simply says you've been willing to do so much refreshing for other people, would you just do this for me? Would you forgive this man and refresh me and bless me and give me joy? Two good motives to forgive. You owe more than you can ever pay and if you forgive you'll bless the saints because you'll pursue unity.

## III. (:21) GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST REMINDS US OF HOW WE SHOULD GO THE EXTRA MILE (BEYOND OBEDIENCE)

A. Encouragement of Faithfulness

*“Having confidence in your obedience,”*

Pepoiqwj th\ upakoh\ sou

**Hendriksen:** It is exactly the gospel as proclaimed by Christ that demands that those who have been greatly benefited shall also show kindness to others. Matt. 18:21 -35 proves this point in a striking manner.

B. Expression of Obligation

*“I write to you,”*

egraya, soi(

C. Expectation of Grace

*“since I know that you will do even more than what I say.”*

eidwj oti kai. uper al| egw poihsai\|

## IV. (:22) GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST REMINDS US THAT ACCOUNTABILITY IS IMMINENT

A. Be Prepared for the Arrival of Spiritual Authority

*“At the same time also prepare me a lodging,”*

afna de. kai. etoimaze, moi xenian\

B. Be Praying for the Arrival of Spiritual Authority

*“for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.”*

e\ pizw gar o\ ti dia. tw\h proseucw\h umw\h carisqhsomai umi h\A

Are we truly looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in terms of the accountability and judgment that He will bring?

**Lightfoot:** There is a gentle compulsion in this mention of a personal visit to Colossae. The apostle would thus be able to see for himself that Philemon had not disappointed his expectations.

**MacArthur:** So, Paul literally paints him into a corner. I'm coming and I'm expecting that what will free me is your prayers. That's a heavy burden. Now Philemon is saying to himself...I don't pray, he doesn't get out of prison...I don't want to be responsible for him being in prison, I've got to pray for his release, I'm praying for his release, I know where his first stop is...here, I've got to forgive him. That's spiritual accountability.

Paul believed in the power of prayer

**(:23-24) CLOSING GREETINGS:** (see Col. 4:10-14)

A. Fellow Prisoner

*“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,”*

\Aspazetai, se \Epaфраj o\ sunaicma\ wtoj mou en Cristw\ \hsou\

B. Fellow Workers

*“as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.”*

Ma\kkoj( \Aristarcoj( Dhma\j( Louka\j( oi\ sunergoi, mou\A

Mark = case where Paul became estranged from Barnabas; but now Paul reflects back and sees the value of Mark in the ministry (2 Tim. 4:11)

Demas = one who will subsequently fall away from the faith; acting now as a hypocrite (2 Tim. 4:10)

**Wiersbe:** Luke, of course, was the beloved physician (Col. 4:14) who accompanied Paul, ministered to him, and eventually wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

**(:25) BENEDICTION: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”*

-H cari\j tou\ kuri\pou \hsou\ Cristou\ meta. tou\ pneumatou\j umw\h\A

Back to the beginning: this epistle shows faith in action with the results being the demonstration of practical Christian love in the gracious reconciliation between

## Philemon and Onesimus

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would we treat believers differently if we were to treat them as Christ has treated us?
- 2) Can there be reconciliation without repentance? How about forgiveness?
- 3) What types of great debts do we owe to various people who have had such an impact in our life?
- 4) When we anticipate the imminent return of the Lord Jesus, do we think of the accountability and judgment He will bring?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**MacArthur**: Now you will notice that he has said something very significant in verse 18. He said, "If Onesimus has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account." This is the issue of restitution. Paul knows Onesimus has nothing. He can't repay what he stole. He can't repay the 500 denarii that Philemon had to spend to get someone to take Onesimus' place. He doesn't have that money. So Paul says instead of trying to get it out of him, he doesn't have it, just charge it to my account. And then most interestingly, Paul says, "I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it." And Paul picks up the pen and signs the IOU with his own name. That's what he's doing. I'm writing my own name with my own hand as a guarantee that if you'll put it on my account I'll pay it. And he keeps the pen in hand from verse 19 to the end. And so the last number of verses here come from the Apostle Paul himself. So we have here not only what is from his inspired mind but what is from his own hand, as well. He is signing his name and saying I will make restitution for Onesimus who has no money. Obviously Paul must have had some. You'll remember that he had received some gifts during his imprisonment. He notes them in Philippians chapter 2 verse 30 and chapter 4 verses 14 to 18 and says to the Philippian church, "Thank you for sending me some things, some money, some support in my imprisonment." So he had some resources, perhaps he had enough to pay the debt. Paul is willing to do that.

But then notice what he says in parenthesis. "Lest I should mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well." What is he saying here? He's saying, "By the way, I know Onesimus owes you a debt, but may I remind you that you owe me a greater debt than he owes you?" Here's Paul's plan. Put his debt on my account, then cancel it because you owe me so much. That's what he says.

Now there's a principle here. Philemon is not just a man who is owed the payment of a debt. Philemon is also a debtor who owes a far greater and unpayable debt to Paul. Onesimus owes Philemon a material debt. Philemon owes Paul a spiritual debt. Onesimus owes Philemon a temporal debt. Philemon owes Paul an eternal debt. Why? Paul had given him the gospel. Paul had led him to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. How is he ever going to pay that back? So he says Onesimus' debt should be put on my account and then cancel because you owe me so much, because I was used by God to deliver you from death and hell.

**Wiersbe:** This is to me an illustration of what Jesus Christ has done for us as believers. God's people are so identified with Jesus Christ that God receives them as He receives His Son! We are "*accepted in the beloved*" (Eph. 1:6) and clothed in His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). We certainly cannot approach God with any merit of our own, but God must receive us when we come to Him "*in Jesus Christ.*" The word *receive* in Philemon 17 means "to receive into one's family circle." Imagine a slave entering his master's family! But imagine a guilty sinner entering God's family! . . .

It takes more than love to solve the problem; love must pay a price. God does not save us by His love, for though He loves the whole world, the whole world is not saved. God saves sinners by His grace (Eph. 2:8 -9), and grace is love that pays a price. God in His holiness could not ignore the debt that we owe, for God must be faithful to His own loan. So He paid the debt for us!

**Alexander Maclaren:** Why doesn't the Bible come out and condemn the institution of slavery?

First, the message of Christianity is primarily to individuals, and only secondarily to society. It leaves the units whom it has influenced to influence the mass. Second, it acts on spiritual and moral sentiment, and only afterwards and consequently on deeds or institutions. Third, it hates violence, and trusts wholly to enlightened conscience. So it meddles directly with no political or social arrangements, but lays down principles which will profoundly affect these, and leaves them to soak into the general mind.