

## Lesson 4

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's been a great study.

A small book, 25 verses, packed with wonderful information.

I might have said it in the second one. I don't think I have it in my notes today. But Philemon was the ultimate death of slavery.

It was certainly the death of slavery in the Christian world. Because a brother can't own a brother.

And so this book is filled with wonderful news from the Spirit of God.

And in both biblical and secular history, there are tremendous examples of a forgiving spirit.

[ 1 : 12 ] And we come to your handout there. The greatest example was that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unjustly condemned.

Hanging in a Jerusalem sky. Asking the Father to forgive those who condemned Him. And those who were at that very moment carrying out His execution.

There's no greater example of forgiveness anywhere in the Word of God. More profound than that. Perhaps a greater example would be the forgiveness of us for our sins and bring us into the body of Christ. Stephen. Stephen. You remember Stephen?

He's called the first martyr of the church age. I'm not sure why Jesus didn't call the first martyr of the church age. And while being murdered unjustly, I might add, He asked the Lord not to hold this sin against His executioners.

[ 2 : 31 ] So profound was Stephen's forgiving spirit that it was burned into the mind of one of his killers.

A man by the name of Saul of Tarsus. Who we later discover becomes the Apostle Paul. Paul held the coats so the people stoning Stephen could have a better aim, more velocity.

And he held their coats and egged them on. Because of what he saw and did to Stephen and the church that day, Paul often said he was not worthy to be called an apostle.

And I'm convinced in my own mind that Paul never fully forgave himself until he saw Stephen in glory.

And I think then everything was set right. In secular history, we have Sir Thomas More. He was the Lord Chancellor of England under a ruler that we probably are familiar with his name, Henry VIII.

[ 3 : 54 ] He was unjustly condemned to death by the very men with whom he had served honorably and shared their friendship.

At his sentencing, he spoke these words. As the blessed Apostle St. Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present and consented to the death of St. Stephen and kept their clothes that stoned him to death, and yet be they now both twain holy saints in heaven and shall continue their friends forever, so I verily trust and shall therefore right-heartedly pray that though your lordships have now in earth been judges to my condemnation, we may yet hereafter in heaven merrily all meet together to our everlasting salvation.

He's being executed. Burned at the stake. I'm not convinced all those guys made it to see him in glory, but maybe they did. Well, Paul closes his letter to Philemon by giving insight to the motives for forgiveness.

On the one hand, he is trying to bring his friend Philemon to the point of forgiving his runaway slave, Onesimus.

Paul was also leaving the church a blueprint blueprint for forgiveness that would stand the test of time until Christ Jesus returns, and I think that's point three.

[ 5 : 58 ] Paul will give to his friend Philemon six motives for forgiveness or for forgiving, and these are the same motives that serve as the foundation of Christian forgiveness, regardless of the circumstance.

These six motives are the recognition that we all live under the cloud of an unpayable debt, which is point four on your handout.

We all live under the cloud of an unpayable debt. We can't pay the sin debt. Can't do it. Second, that our forgiveness of others is a source of blessing.

That's fifth on your sheet. Third, that obedience requires forgiveness.

That's point six. Next, that only through forgiveness can we maintain fellowship with God.

[ 7 : 13 ] Next on your list. And then, that forgiveness is dependent upon grace. It is a grace gift from God.

Well, first we have the unpayable debt. In verse nine, he says, I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will repay it.

And I love this. He gives a parenthetical statement to Philemon. He says, I'll repay any debt that Onesimus has.

And he says, lest I should mention to you that you owe even your own self to me as well. I think that's great. I'm going to pay off his debt Philemon, but you owe me your very life.

What are you going to do? Paul dictated his letter through the services of a recording secretary. But in this letter, as well as in Colossians and 2 Thessalonians, he placed a note at the bottom of the letter in his own handwriting.

[ 8 : 31 ] That is like taking a type letter and then writing in a postscript down at the bottom. So he gave this little postscript. We already know from our last lesson that Paul offered to pay any financial debt owed by the slave Onesimus.

Now there is a possibility that we can't confirm it, but there is a possibility that Onesimus stole money or property when he fled his master. We do know that he stole services from him. Because like it or not, Philemon owned him and he is working for him. We studied last time that restitution is an essential ingredient of forgiveness and clearly Onesimus had no means with which to repay Philemon.

None. So Paul here is essentially signing an IOU for Onesimus and it's going to be up to Philemon whether to cash it or not.

Whether to cash it or not is entirely in the hands of Philemon. Then Paul writing of course by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit does something that is nothing less than brilliant.

[ 10 : 00 ] He reminds Philemon that he owes a greater debt than does his slave. Onesimus owes Philemon a debt that is soon going to pass away.

It will soon pass. Philemon owes Paul an eternal debt. Paul had brought the gospel of Christ to Philemon and led him to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You can't pay that back. There may be an individual that led some of you all to the Lord. You owe them everything. You can't pay that back.

I had an old Bible years ago, old Schofield Bible years ago and I wrote in one of the blank pages in the front all the people that had influenced me to receive the gospel.

Going back to grandmothers and things like that. Guy in the Marine Corps that talked to me. I mean, you know, just all kinds.

[ 11 : 07 ] I had this whole list. And then we got the Bible rebound and they tore that out. It's gone. I lost it. I lost it. It's gone. So there's a principle at work here.

To whom are you indebted? Who shared the Lord Jesus Christ with you? Maybe it was godly parents, a wife, or a friend.

Somewhere along the way, someone felt the need to share the good news of Christ with you and there was an eternal result. There's a great book that Randy Alcorn wrote really for Voice of the Martyrs.

We have it out there. Call Safely Home. It's a fictional book, but it's really not fiction. Randy came and hung out with us for months and VOM gave him the ammunition for this, but he put it under fiction.

I read it once a year, I can't put it down. And it's just this lengthy story, but I won't give it away other than the main subject, he's martyred, He goes to heaven, and the Lord, well done, good and faithful servant, and he says, we're going to have a banquet in your honor.

[ 12 : 31 ] And he goes, my honor, Lord? Yep, your honor. And he said, well, who's going to be there? And he said, everyone that influenced you for the gospel, and everyone that you led to Christ, and everyone that those persons led someone to Christ.

So he said, you know, it's this geometric progression, and there's going to be a lot of folks there. And then the Lord added in the book, I was going to fix the meal, but your mother and grandmother wouldn't hear what they're going to prepare the meal.

He threw that in. It's a great book. To whom are we indebted? Of course, the ultimate debt we owe is to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

He atoned for our sin. When He was on the cross, we were on His mind. I think that would make a great song. When He was on the cross, I was on His mind.

So we who owe so much to so many should be quick to forgive anyone who may owe us a debt small in comparison.

[13:50] Small in comparison. having received an unpayable spiritual reward, can we not forgive a temporal debt that's going to go away?

And I've got to tell you, unforgiveness among Christians is ugly. It is really an ugly thing. forgiveness should bring blessing.

In verse 20, yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Philemon was quick to bless or give benefit to many in his earthly ministry.

Remember that the church in Colossae where he lived even met in his home. And Paul now asked to receive a blessing or benefit from Philemon.

Well, what blessing can you give the Apostle Paul? Forgive Onesimus. That was the blessing Paul was seeking. Forgive Onesimus.

[15:04] Philemon could benefit Paul. He would benefit Paul. How? He would be doing it in the Lord's name, forgiving Onesimus.

His forgiveness would be an expression of obedience. His forgiveness would reveal his deep love for the church which would benefit greatly from this godly example.

I mean, we're in the 21st century, 10,000 miles away, and we're still talking about it. This had a tremendous impact on the church.

His forgiveness would maintain the unity of the fellowship in the church. Clearly, his forgiveness of Onesimus would refresh the heart of Paul.

And Paul would be spiritually blessed as a result of all of this. And we should remember that the church was watching all of this unfold.

[16:14] And the world was watching the church. So it's twofold. One major motive of a forgiving spirit is that when it becomes known, it blesses believers and it blesses unbelievers alike.

And I'm sure there are people that are believers today because they were forgiven when they were unbelievers. And that was used by the Lord to draw them to Christ.

I'm sure that's happened. Forgiveness is essential for obedience. Having competence in your obedience, I write to you since I know that you will do even more than what I say.

That's verse 21. Paul had the greatest of confidence in Philemon's obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He'd seen it on display. Got saved under Paul, opened up his church, his home to the church, wanted to see people saved.

[17:28] And Paul reminds Philemon of what he already knew. The necessity of obeying Christ.

The necessity of obeying Christ. Paul knew this was the very heart of his friend and he is confident of his response. Now, we can be confident that Philemon understood theology.

why wouldn't he? He said under the greatest teacher in that day and any day I think, the Apostle Paul, Philemon understood the truth that was taught in the Old Testament.

He understood that forgiveness from God depends on our forgiveness of others. He understood that.

He knew that God places no limits on forgiveness. It's not conditional. Well, if you'll do this and this and this, I'll forgive you. God never says forgive unless the person has done the following and then follows up with a list of atrocious sins committed against you.

[18:46] Paul's comment that he knows Philemon will do more than Paul asks is open ended. It's absolutely open ended. And it may be some or all of the following.

A call for the emancipation of Onesimus. Freedom. That wasn't done every day in the Roman world. Wasn't done in America every day. When we had slaves.

And I told you in the first lesson, I was very open with you, I come from a slave-owning family. I wasn't around. This was pre-Civil War. And we had two slaves, Louis Grisard and a woman called

Mammy.

I will say this, when the Civil War ended, they said, can we stay with you? And they did. And are buried in the family plot and all that. But there's a call here to free Onesimus.

A call to welcome Onesimus back, not grudgingly, but with open arms. this may be a call for Philemon to permit Onesimus to minister alongside him.

[ 19 : 59 ] Remember, the slave had just undergone theological training from the greatest theologian on earth at that time, the apostle Paul. And Paul may be calling on Philemon to forgive anyone who has wronged him.

Now, Philemon like us is to forgive not because of the law or out of fear. He and we forgive out of love and obedience directed to the Lord.

It is after all the Lord who commanded him and us to forgive. well, next we have accountability. Let's talk about that.

This is probably the most important and perhaps the least understood. Paul speaks here of accountability in verse 22. And at the same time also prepare me a lodging for I hope through your prayers I shall be given to you.

Paul expected to be and eventually was released from his first imprisonment by the Roman authorities. He asked Philemon to prepare him a lodging knowing that he will soon visit his friend.

[ 21 : 23 ] Now, let's work in this concept of accountability on Philemon's part. Imagine for a moment how awkward it would be for Paul to request Philemon to forgive Onesimus, pay him a visit only to learn Philemon had refused to do so.

Well, no, Lord, Onesimus is in prison. No, he's scheduled for execution. No, I've got him out here slaving away in the fields. Paul had even been asking Philemon to pray for his release so he could come and visit him.

Paul understood something that the sovereignty of God works its purpose through prayer. We don't understand that. People often ask me, if God knows everybody is going to be saved, why do we pray?

Well, one, he told us to. And we don't need another reason. That's good enough right there. But somehow God weaves all that together through our prayers.

We don't know how that works. but Philemon could hardly pray for Paul's relief, had he not forgiven Onesimus.

[ 22 : 44 ] If he doesn't pray for his release, the Romans might hold on to Paul. Who knows? Paul has placed Philemon in a spiritual corner.

He can only extricate himself really by forgiving Onesimus. this is spiritual accountability at work. And what about an application here?

We will one day appear before the Lord Jesus Christ. Can you imagine Jesus saying, I forgave you. That's why you're here.

I forgave all your sins. Could you not forgive your brother? Wow! I hope that doesn't happen to me. I'm searching my heart.

Understanding and acknowledging that level of accountability is a powerful incentive to forgive those who have wronged us. I don't even know if I should add this.

[ 23 : 48 ] It's not in your notes. But I remember the Korean man whose two sons were murdered by a robber. and he went to the authorities and said, would you release that man to my custody?

And they said, well, we might. Are you going to kill him? He says, no, I'm going to adopt him and raise him to where he knows the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wow! That's pretty amazing. forgiveness for the sake of fellowship.

Verse 23 and 24. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus greets you as does Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

Wouldn't you love to be called fellow worker by Paul? There are no hermits in the body of Christ. We do not operate independent of the fellowship.

[ 24 : 56 ] Paul names members of the fellowship and is subtly reminding Philemon that he is accountable to all of them. Failing to forgive Onesimus would disappoint them all and send the wrong signal to the church.

So, really much is at stake here. And it's in Philemon's court. The ball's in his court. But we also are to have a forgiving spirit.

Much is at stake there as well. When we fail to forgive one another, we disrupt the fellowship and can cause godly or church discipline to fall on us.

And Paul, as we all know, was a preacher of grace. Maybe the greatest preacher of grace. And Paul is going to end his letter on a powerful note of grace as he often did.

In verse 25, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. God. Wow. There is no doubt that Philemon is under deep conviction to forgive Onesimus.

[ 26 : 17 ] If he had any doubts as to where he could find the strength and source of that forgiveness, Paul reminds him with these closing words.

Philemon can forgive Onesimus because of the grace of God. That grace that has been extended to Philemon. He's under the grace of God.

Now he knows Onesimus is under the grace of God as a brother in Christ. Paul asked Philemon to exercise the same grace with which the Lord Jesus forgave him.

He asks us the same thing. He asks us the same thing. So how does it all end? I think we can be fairly certain that Philemon forgave Onesimus.

Doesn't say that. Doesn't tell us. Kind of intriguing. But I think that happened. If he didn't, I'm not sure Paul would have written this letter and have it end up, I'm not sure the Spirit of God would have it end up in the canon of Scripture.

[ 27 : 33 ] So what happens to Onesimus? Did Philemon forgive him? Did God use Onesimus?

Well, we don't really know. But we have one intriguing hint in sacred Scripture.

remember Tychicus? When Paul wrote Philemon said, I'm sending Onesimus the runaway slave back to you.

No longer a slave but a brother in Christ. And he's coming with Tychicus. Tychicus had some letters to deliver to the churches from Paul.

But another important reason, there were slave hunters in the Roman Empire. They made a great living catching runaway slaves and taking him back to the Roman authorities where they faced a very uncertain future that even included execution.

[ 28 : 38 ] And the fact that Tychicus would be with him would buffer Onesimus from arrest. So that's who came back with the letter to Philemon.

He's sent by Paul on his journey with Onesimus back to Philemon. And we read this little section in the book of Colossians. And remember that's where the church met in Philemon's home.

And this is what it says in Colossians chapter 4 verses 7 to 9. Tychicus will tell you all about my activities.

Paul writing of course. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts.

[ 29 : 45 ] He's writing to the church that meets in Philemon's home. And then he says this and I'm sending with him Onesimus. Wow.

The name shows up again. Our faithful and beloved brother who is one of you. They will tell you everything that has taken place here.

So Onesimus shows up again in another book of the Bible. A beloved brother, a fellow worker working alongside Tychicus, both of whom were serving the apostle Paul.

Well, that's inspired scripture. Nearly a half century goes by and we find a writing from one of the church fathers, Ignatius.

He's in Smyrna. I've been to Smyrna. Smyrna is now called Ismir. It's in Turkey. Turkey in the Bible was Asia Minor.

[ 30 : 58 ] Smyrna. You remember Smyrna from the book of Revelation? The second church received no condemnation from the Lord. It was a church under severe persecution and the Lord described it as a pure church.

It wasn't perfect, but it was pure in the sense that everyone in that church was a believer. How do we know that? Unbelievers aren't going to hang around and be persecuted for something they don't believe in.

And that's where Ignatius was from. Smyrna. And Ignatius is on his way to be martyred. Like many before him including Polycarp the first bishop of the church at Smyrna.

And I've stood in the Roman garrison where we think Polycarp was executed. He wrote a closing letter to the church in Ephesus.

Now this is a secular writing from the church fathers. It's not inspired. If you want to borrow some of those books for a weekend, I've got 38 volumes by the church fathers.

[ 32 : 07 ] In it he said these words, I received your large congregation in the person of Onesimus, your pastor in the world, a man whose love is beyond words.

Now could that be our Onesimus from Philemon? It very well could be. I think it is. If it is one and the same man, what a testimony to the forgiveness of Philemon and an even greater testimony to the forgiveness of God.

is Thank you.