

## Lesson 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] Several years ago, there was a very large gathering of Charismatics, members of various Charism and there were hundreds if not thousands. They were given a survey to be filled out and most of those were turned in. This particular survey was sort of nice in that it only had one question.

It said, and this was the question, if God would give you any one thing, what would you ask for? That was the question. Pretty simple. And during the convention, the answers to the survey were compiled and published during the conference. The people organizing the conference were thrilled with the answers. They thought it was the greatest thing they ever heard of.

And these are a few of the things, and I don't have near all of them, that they asked for that they would be guaranteed to receive from God. Health was very near the top. Wealth, I think, was at the top. Property. Actual physical land. But then most of them wrote on the form already paid for. They didn't want to have to pay for it. They wanted them to. And the list went on and on and on. And it contained a host of material things. Each one had a common denominator in that they were all transitory. By transitory, I mean that the items that were on this list are going to one day pass away. I promise you in heaven we're not going to worry about health.

We're not going to worry about wealth or lack thereof or property. We're going to have a room in the Father's mansion. That's pretty neat. So this list went on and on. There was nothing on this list of eternal value. Didn't make the list.

Here are some things that were notably absent. Sanctification never showed up. Brokenness, thankfulness, praise, prayer, and then the biggie, holiness. They just simply didn't make the list.

[ 3 : 14 ] Those types of things didn't make the list in spite of the fact those are the things that will follow us into glory. Those very things. That's what we will take with us and leave those other things behind.

Well, for the next three weeks, we're going to discuss one of the things that was not on the list, but it should be on the list of every true believer.

And that is the spirit of forgiveness. And that's what we're going to be looking at. Now, your first point on there, Philemon teaches us that every believer should cultivate a spirit of forgiveness. Philemon teaches us that every believer should cultivate a spirit of forgiveness. And the second on your list is my next sentence.

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[ 4 : 38 ] As a character trait, forgiveness has just about disappeared from the landscape.

Non-Christians who make up the vast majority of the world's population view forgiveness as weakness to be exploited.

When is the last time you saw a television show or a movie built around a character that forgave rather than took vengeance on his antagonist?

I mean, vengeance is all over the internet. It's everywhere. But leave movies and television behind. Our culture, and particularly our judicial system, is built around unforgiveness and blame shifting. The shifting of blame. Currently, in law schools across America, there are courses taught that if something bad happens to you, then someone is to blame.

You just have to figure out who, and then go after them with a vengeance. Identify the person, identify the company, haul them into court.

[ 6 : 06 ] That is rank blame shifting, a word I made up according to spell check. And I've done that a lot of times in my life.

One of the more graphic examples of this, though not the only example, involved an attorney by the name of John Edwards, no relation to Jonathan Edwards, the great theologian.

You might remember John Edwards. He was the vice presidential candidate when John Kerry ran for president against George Bush. It was later proven that Edwards produced a child out of wedlock with a woman in California while his wife lay dying of cancer in a hospital bed in North Carolina.

Edwards made a really good living suing doctors. That was his niche in the legal profession. And he apparently made good at it.

He massed a fortune estimated at some \$30 million. In one case, and I studied this, looked at it in some detail, he sued a doctor's group because the baby that they delivered had multiple sclerosis. [ 7 : 24 ] Depositions were taken. And in the depositions, it was proven beyond all doubt that one of the doctors, who happened to be a female anesthesiologist, she was just out of medical school, had done her internship.

She did it perfectly. She did exactly what they teach in medical school. And even the doctors rallied around her, said, look, she didn't make one error.

She followed every procedure that she had been trained to do while in school. And speaking through their lawyers, these doctors asked that she be dismissed from the lawsuit because she had done nothing wrong.

And I really believe that Edwards' reply captures the essence of what's wrong in America, and especially with the legal system.

To the statement that the woman doctor had done nothing wrong, Edwards replied, what does that have to do with anything? That was his answer, his response.

[ 8 : 42 ] So what? Whether she did anything wrong or writes immaterial, I just have to prove to the jury she did something wrong. And then they go at it with a vengeance. That captures the hallmark of our age.

And I've seen it time and again. In lawsuits, I've been in lawsuits. You can't sue the police department without suing the police chief. And amazing, I didn't realize how bad I was until I had a plaintiff attorney deposing me, you know.

Golly, I thought I was a pretty good guy. We live in a society filled with bitterness, with vengeance, with hatred directed at others.

Unforgiveness abounds at every level in our culture. It is the cause of lawsuits and it is the cause of retaliatory crimes.

We've had those here where people retaliate against someone. By the way, in my example of the lady anesthesiologist, she was ordered to pay a six-figure judgment to the victim.

[ 9 : 58 ] And I got that in quotation marks. I'm sure she had malpractice insurance. They paid. She resigned as a doctor. She said, my ulcers can't handle this.

She's right out of medical school. She bought an antique store, I think, in one of the Carolinas where she works to this day selling antiques after all that training.

Now for the true Christian, any unwillingness to forgive should be foreign to us. It should be foreign to us. A spirit, and this is number three on your list, a spirit of unforgiveness is an open act of rebellion and disobedience directed at God.

Did you get that? A spirit of unforgiveness is an open act of rebellion and disobedience directed at God.

In fact, and this is point four, our level of forgiveness should be just as intense as God's level of forgiveness directed at us.

[ 11 : 14 ] That's the type of forgiveness we're talking about. High calling. I want to add something here that I didn't put in the notes, but I think it's important. Forgiveness is not mush and milk.

Okay? If a guy breaks into your home, kills your family, forgiveness I'm talking about is not going up to him saying, hey, you know, that's alright.

It's good. I forgive you. You know, nothing you did is wrong. You're okay. You're a good Joe. It may be, not always, but it may be going to God and saying, I can't deal with this.

I'm turning it over to you. I'm free now. You have it. Deal with these individuals as you see fit, not as I see fit. That may be the level of forgiveness that we're talking about.

There are many results of the Christian's unwillingness to forgive, and I'm going to mention four. Unforgiveness will imprison us in the past and keep the pain alive.

[ 12 : 32 ] That's what unforgiveness does. Unforgiveness will produce in us a spirit of bitterness and that will distort all aspects of our Christian walk.

Unforgiveness is an open door that gives Satan an entrance into our life. Unforgiveness hinders and disrupts fellowship with God.

I promised I wasn't going to do this but I'm going to. When I mentioned Satan, did you see the Pope's quote today? He's trying to explain this pedophilia with his bishops and he said, Satan is behind all that.

He's revealing all this on my bishops in order to destroy the faith of many Catholic members. Wait a minute. I think God exposed this.

He blamed Satan for exposing pedophilia within the ranks. Now, I threw that in for free. It doesn't matter what we do as followers of Christ.

[13:49] And this is your fifth point. If we refuse to exercise a spirit of forgiveness, we cannot be right with God. Can't be right with Him.

Now, how important was the spiritual characteristic of forgiveness? God devotes an entire book to the subject. The whole book.

He does so in the book of Philemon. Well, it's one chapter, 25 verses, but still, it's a book. He does that in the book of Philemon, but in a very special way.

He does so, He does not teach, God does not teach us forgiveness here by principle or by parables. Instead, the Spirit of God reveals to us a real life example in the relationship between a man named Philemon and one of his slaves, a man by the name of Onesimus.

So, we're going to have throughout this training here a real life example of godly forgiveness. Now, Paul begins in verse one, that's usually the best place to begin, with one of his classic introductions.

[15:15] You've got to love Paul, a prisoner or slave of Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Athea, our sister, and to Archippus, I can never do that, Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house, grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Classic Paul. All 13 of his books. There are a number of names contained in this introduction. We have Paul, the great evangelist, who identifies himself as a prisoner, although he was a prisoner of Rome, he prefers to be known as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

He's so attached to Christ, he's a slave to Christ. We also have Timothy, Paul's spiritual son, and we know a lot about Timothy, don't we?

Philemon is described here as Paul's beloved brother and fellow worker. Boy, if you're going to be a beloved brother and fellow worker, you've got to be attached to the apostle Paul, he mentions Athea and that is most probably Philemon's wife.

And then he mentions the name I can't pronounce, Archippus, with whom many believe that was the son of Philemon and Athea. And Paul describes him as a fellow soldier.

[17:07] You've got to love those terms. They're really, really neat terms. And finally, Paul mentions the church. The church that met in Philemon's house.

And that church would have met in Colossians, Colossae. Paul also gives his standard greeting and this is sent in all 13 of his epistles.

grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Which leads us to point six. And you've got to remember, grace is the means of salvation. Peace is the result of salvation.

salvation. You can at times have grace without peace, but you cannot have genuine peace without grace.

[18:09] It takes grace to appropriate peace with God. And Paul then communicates six concerns that he has, all of which should be our concerns as well.

and first of all, he articulates a concern for the Lord Jesus. Do you ever think that way in the 21st century?

You know, look around what the world and what this country is doing to Christ. We should be offended, embarrassed, just unbelievable.

He says starting in verse 4, I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers because I hear of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus.

You know, when's the last time you greeted someone like that or wrote a letter perhaps? I hear about your faith in Christ. And so Paul begins by praising Philemon.

[19:17] And let me say to you, humanly speaking, we might look at this different than what it really is, but Paul, and ultimately the divine author, the Holy Spirit, did not intend this to be a

flattering letter.

They're not trying to set Philemon up, although it kind of appears that way. We'll get in that in the days ahead. It was intended to affirm Philemon's virtuous character.

This was, by the way, point seven. Paul speaks of Philemon's virtuous character because he is going to make an extraordinary request of him that was very unusual in the Roman Empire.

Very unusual request. So this is what is behind all this. But it's not intended to be just this flattering letter.

Paul is going to ask this virtuous man, to forgive his slave Onesimus.

[ 20 : 40 ] That just wasn't done in the Roman Empire. Forgive a slave that has wronged you? And to do so, Philemon will have to draw on every ounce of his virtuous character granted to him by the grace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul was an authority on the character of Philemon. He knew him. He knew him well. And more to the point, he had brought him to the feet of Christ.

He had brought Philemon to the cross. Spiritually speaking. He had worked with him to develop further his relationship with the Lord.

Knowing Philemon the way he did, Paul devoted time to thanking God for him. He says, making mention of Philemon in my prayers.

Can you imagine Paul saying, by the way, I'm really praying for you. I pray for you constantly. That's amazing. There was nothing negative about Philemon.

[ 21 : 57 ] He's a neat guy. I want to talk to him someday. Philemon had done nothing wrong in his dealings with people. In fact, he opened up his house to the church that met there.

And in that regard, Paul does not correct some character flaw in Philemon. Because there wasn't one.

Paul is counting on the virtuous character of his friend. And we're getting close to number eight. The point Paul is making in all of these opening words of the book is this.

Forgiveness begins with a genuine concern on how to please and serve Christ.

Christ. I hope you got that down. Major point. Forgiveness begins with a genuine concern on how to please and serve Christ.

[ 23 : 05 ] Christ. Paul knew about the faith Philemon had for the Lord Jesus. Paul knew that Christ had forgiven Philemon. On that basis, Philemon, and put your name in there, should be able to forgive others.

Anyone forgiven by Christ should have the capacity to forgive, right? Really. Like all of us, Philemon could forgive because he had been forgiven.

Another point that Paul makes here is a concern for people. And in the second part of verse five there, he says, because I hear of your love toward all the saints.

And Paul uses that highest form of love being agape. That is the love of self-sacrifice. It's more than phileo, which is I like you a whole bunch.

Philadelphia is a city of brotherly love. I've been there. It's not. But came out of that. Eros, which is a sensual type love. This is agape.

[ 24 : 18 ] This is the love of self-sacrifice. This is the love that will, is capable of putting a man on the cross on behalf of others.

That's the level of love. Someone willing to die and propitiate the sins of his people. That's the level of love we're talking about. Because Philemon's faith was real, so too was his love for God, for the Lord Jesus Christ, and for fellow Christians.

It was a level of love that gave Philemon the ability to forgive. Such love originated with and flowed from the very Spirit of God.

When Philemon is, and he will forgive, and when we forgive, the Spirit of God is flowing right through us. Paul also expresses a concern for fellowship in the first part of verse 6.

and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective. Now, please mark this down in your mental file somewhere.

[ 25 : 38 ] There is no place for individualism within the body of Christ. We're a body. We may be a thumb, we may be an eyelash, we may be whatever, but we're a body.

Real faith results in the desire for real fellowship. Fellowship was a foundational motive for Philemon to forgive Onesimus.

In the Greek language, fellowship is koinonia, it's difficult to explain in the limitations we have with our English language. It is more than just enjoying being in the company of each other, or if Baptist folks, eating with each other.

I mean, how can you have a fellowship without food? We proved that Monday night. It is more than that. It is a mutual sharing.

It is a partnership, if you will, or a participation with that is produced by faith in Christ. That's the common denominator.

[ 26 : 47 ] And we're in a partnership with Christ and with each other because of that. And Paul wants Philemon's faith to become even more effective.

And that means powerful. Now, point nine, very major in this study. An act of Philemon for giving a slave would send a powerful message to the church.

and we're talking about the Roman Empire here, folks. There was nothing in Roman law to forgive a slave for wrongdoing. It didn't exist.

And any act of Philemon forgiving a slave is going to be a powerful message to the church. which leads us directly into point ten, there can be no fellowship without forgiveness.

It just, it doesn't exist. It just does not exist. So, Paul wants Philemon's faith to be effective, powerful.

[ 28 : 00 ] That's going to be a powerful message. And it should lead to more fellowship because if forgiveness is absent, there is no fellowship. And then Paul expresses a concern for knowledge.

Second part of verse 6, through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you. Now, as believers, we experience tremendous blessings. I want you to consider these.

We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. You could chew on that a long time and never plumb the depths. I've tried. We've been given a new nature.

Aren't you glad? Because we all had the sin nature from Adam. We've been given a new nature.

We've been given the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in us.

By the way, never leaves us, never forsakes us. We are gifted with the deep knowledge of the truth concerning God. Well, where does knowledge about God come from?

[ 29 : 07 ] It comes through knowing the truth. That's where the knowledge comes from. And I want to suggest to you this evening three ways Philemon could learn about the truth of forgiveness.

He's got three ways. And these apply to us also, by the way. Philemon had an opportunity to read about forgiveness.

forgiveness. Paul would have opened up the Old Testament scrolls to them. The New Testament didn't exist. He would have been glad to open those up. So he could have read about forgiveness, done a study, a word study.

He could hear a sermon on forgiveness, bring Paul down to the house church, and hey, Paul, why don't you preach a few series on forgiveness? He could do that. Or, boy, this is powerful, he could forgive.

Now, which of those do you suppose would be the best teacher with the most lasting impact on Philemon's life? He could forgive.

[ 30 : 18 ] That would have a lasting impact. It would have a lasting impact on the church.

Obviously, Philemon actually forgiving someone would be tremendous.

experience is always the best teacher. That's number 11. The best teacher on forgiveness is by forgiving someone.

Because they deserve it, not because you just want to be in good with God. Philemon would walk in obedience with the Lord.

Walking in obedience is how all of us experience the good things God has in store with us. The best teacher, number 11, on forgiveness is by forgiving someone.

The way that Philemon can experience the knowledge of God's standard for forgiveness was to forgive of all people a slave. Just didn't do that every day in the Roman Empire.

[ 31 : 22 ] God's And that is a principle Paul gives Philemon and all who are in a relationship with the Father through the Son. This is written a couple thousand years ago.

It applies to the 21st century. And then Paul has a concern for glory. Not his own obviously, but he says in the last part of verse 6, for Christ's sake.

Boy, those things will preach. for Christ's sake. We are to live our Christian life for Christ's sake. All that we do, all that we think, should be for the glory of Christ.

And if it's not for the glory of Christ, we probably shouldn't be doing it. Paul spoke of this in 1 Corinthians 10:31 when he said this, Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

If we are truly devoted to the glory of Christ, we can and will forgive others. An unforgiving spirit does not glorify Christ.

[ 32 : 42 ] And I'm sure that Paul was confident that Philemon would forgive Onesimus because Paul knew that Philemon's ultimate desire was to bring glory to Christ above all things.

And that's your last point tonight. All of what Paul is asking of Philemon in this book is for the ultimate glory of Christ. And that's major.

That's major. But Paul also had a concern to be a blessing in verse 7 there. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you brother.

Talking to Philemon. Philemon had developed a reputation for love. How important is that for us in this day of unlove and perverted love?

Philemon was living an agape style of life, a sacrificial love. As was common in the New Testament, the word heart is used there. And in the original it meant bowels.

[ 33 : 51 ] We have a different concept of bowels in our day. Because my wife's here, I'm not going to elaborate on that. I'll just move on. Back then, bowels referred to the seed of feelings.

Philemon was a man of deep, intense feelings. He was undoubtedly a man who had refreshed many who were hurting, many who were struggling, many who were suffering.

And there was a lot of that to go around in the Roman Empire just as there is today in the world. Refreshed is a Greek term used to describe an army resting from a weary march.

Philemon was known as a man who brought hurting people rest and renewal. I have a feeling his house was a way station for the hurting and suffering.

He was a peacemaker in every sense of the word. Blessed are the peacemakers. Now there is no evidence in scripture that Philemon was ever an elder, a deacon, or a teacher.

[ 34 : 59 ] Given his wealth, he was probably a businessman. Most likely how he accumulated his wealth. But obviously he was a kind man, and God can use kind men and kind women.

Because Philemon was already a tremendous source of blessing for others, Paul was confident that he could be counted on to forgive his runaway slave.

Now the question that I leave you with tonight is have you and I ever been forgiven by God? Well, if we're believers, we have been, right? If we're with Christ, in Christ, then we have been.

And if that is true, then we too should be ready to forgive.