

The Foundation for Forgiveness

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[0:00] The Book of Philemon And it really does fit well as a follow-up to James, because the Book of Philemon demonstrates how someone with true saving faith should act.

And in this session we'll cover the first seven verses, and the first seven verses provide the foundation for forgiveness. So it's the foundation for forgiveness that we'll look at tonight.

And let's read verses 1 through 3 first, because they provide some background. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Apphia, our sister, and to 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. So we're going to look at three things in the letters, first three verses. We're going to look at the letters writers, the letters recipients, and the letters reason.

And we see the writers in verse 1. And one of the writers, obviously, is Paul. And notice that Paul identifies himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

[1:38] This is the only time that Paul introduces himself as a prisoner of Christ. What does Paul typically introduce himself as? Do you remember?

Yeah. He typically identifies himself either as a bond slave or an apostle or both a lot of times, too. And some speculate that Paul omits the apostle designation here because he doesn't need to assert his authority to Philemon.

And he fully expects Philemon to comply with his request without any reminder. And other folks that I looked at take the opposite view. They think that Paul actually refers to himself as a prisoner to put more pressure on Philemon to honor his request.

Because Paul's request should seem relatively minor when Philemon considers that Paul's making it from prison. And in verse 1, we also see that Timothy is with Paul.

So that's why it goes into your next blank there if you don't already have it. It's Timothy as one of the writers. And Paul identifies Timothy as our brother. And in letters to Timothy, Paul often refers to Timothy as his son.

[2:45] And we don't know why exactly Paul refers to Timothy as our brother here. But he may have had at least two reasons in mind. One could be that Timothy's just continued to grow in the faith.

And Paul's recognizing that. Or the other could be that Paul simply wants to lift Timothy up.

Because with the exception of one time in Philippians, Paul refers to Timothy as a brother when Paul mentions him to other people.

So now that we've met the writers, let's meet the recipients. And the letter to Philemon actually has five recipients or groups of recipients.

And in verse 1, obviously, the first recipient is identified as Philemon himself. And Philemon was a wealthy man from Colossae who'd come to faith under Paul's teaching.

And the name Philemon means friendly or kindly. And the second recipient is Apphia. And Apphia is a feminine name.

[3:44] And the text doesn't explicitly say it. But Apphia is generally believed to be Philemon's wife. That's because the end of verse 2 talks about the church that meets in their house. Then looking at the third recipient, we see that the third recipient is Archippus.

And Archippus is likely Philemon and Apphia's son. We see that he lives in the same house with them. And he's also mentioned in Colossians 4.17.

And here's Colossians 4.17. It says, So some believe that Archippus was actually the pastor of the church at Colossae.

And whether he was the pastor or not, we know that he was a minister of some sort. And here's just an interesting bit of trivia on the Archippus name. The Archippus name actually means Herder of Wild Horses.

So I'll leave it to you to decide whether a minister being called Herder of Wild Horses has any significance. So then the fourth recipient you see there is the church that meets at their house. [4:57] So their church is the fourth recipient. And of course that's actually a group of recipients. And when this letter was written, the house churches were very common.

And this letter was a personal letter to Philemon, but Paul wanted the church to hear it. And he may have had a couple of reasons for that. First, the church members could learn from what Paul had to say. And then also the church members could hold Philemon accountable for honoring Paul's request.

So this could be another way to make sure that Philemon really did what Paul wanted. And if Paul had the second reason in mind, this probably would give him a pretty good nudge to do what he wanted him to do.

So I said that the letter had five recipients, didn't I? How many do we have so far? So let's go back and look at the verses to see if I missed one then.

From the last part of verse 1 through the end of verse 2, that's where Paul says, To Philemon, our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Abbe, our sister, and to Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.

[6:00] So do you see the fifth recipient there? Well, the fifth recipient actually is not explicitly listed there. It's another group. And the fifth recipient, like the church, is the group, like I said, and that recipient is us.

So we are the fifth group of recipients. So put us in your blank, or we either one, whichever you want to do there. So why do I say that we are the fifth group of recipients?

But we can be confident that the letter was intended for us because we have it. And Scripture includes several of Paul's letters, but we know that not every letter Paul wrote became Scripture, right?

Because in his letters to the Corinthians, Paul mentions a third letter to them, yet we have only two that became Scripture. So that the fact that this letter to Philemon was preserved, and we can read it today, shows that God actually intended it for us.

So if you really want to cause a stir around town, just tell people that the Apostle Paul has sent a letter to Highland Park Baptist Church. And then if you want to cause an even bigger stir, you can tell them that the Apostle Paul has sent a letter directly to you, and it might be interesting to watch that reaction.

[7:14] So we've looked at the writers and the recipients. Let's look at the letter's reason. And we see the summary of that reason in verse 3. And here's that verse again. It says, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the letter to Philemon is about grace and peace from God and Jesus. And it's also about how the recipients of that grace and peace should extend the grace and peace to others.

And throughout the letter, Paul emphasizes forgiveness as a way to extend the grace and peace through others. So the blanks there that you have on the reason are grace and peace extended through forgiveness.

So let's stop there for a second. How did we get the grace and peace that we have from God and Jesus? Yeah. We got that grace and peace when God forgave us of our sins because of what Jesus did for us, right?

So you can see how the forgiveness ties in with grace and peace there. And most of my material for the Philemon series comes from two sources. One is from Barry King, who's the pastor of Grace Baptist Church in London.

[8:28] And the other is Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. But I have to throw in a couple of John MacArthur references as well. And here's what John MacArthur says about God and forgiveness.

He says that God is a God of forgiveness. Man is never more like God than when he forgives. So listen to that last part again. Man is never more like God than when he forgives.

So let's check a couple of cross-references then that remind us that God is a God of forgiveness. We'll use one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.

So the first one from the Old Testament is Isaiah 55.7. And Isaiah 55.7 is the verse that says, Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and he will have compassion on him and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Then the one I use from the New Testament is 1 John 1.9. And 1 John 1.9, of course, says, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[9:36] So now do you see why John MacArthur said that man is never more like God than when he forgives? And Scripture echoes a similar statement to this as well.

And we heard this cross-reference from Don on Sunday night. That's Proverbs 19.11. And Proverbs 19.11 says, A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.

A few minutes ago, I said the letter to Philemon emphasizes forgiveness. So who does Philemon want us to forgive? He wants us to forgive Onesimus, who's a departed slave, who's since been converted to Christ.

And we'll talk more about Onesimus next week when we cover the verses where he first gets mentioned. Suffice it to say for now, though, that Philemon and Onesimus would have a strained relationship at best.

So is everybody caught up on the blanks so far? Forgive Onesimus. Forgive Onesimus. Forgive Onesimus. Forgive Onesimus. Forgive Onesimus. Before we leave the first three verses, let's check out two more things.

[10:49] And one is that the greeting of grace and peace is distinctly Christian, because grace is their traditional Greek greeting, and peace or shalom is their traditional Jewish greeting.

Say that again. He said that grace is their traditional Greek greeting, and peace or shalom is their traditional Jewish greeting.

So just by using that greeting, we see that diverse groups can join together when they become Christians. And you'll also see some commentators say that because grace is what we get from God, God's grace is the only way to have true peace.

So that's another way that the grace and peace go together. And the other thing I wanted us to notice from the first three verses is that the grace and peace Paul mentions comes from both God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And because of that, we can tell that Paul is clearly saying that Jesus is God because he's put God and Jesus on the same level. Let's move on to verses 4-7 now.

[11:58] And in verses 4-7, we'll see Paul's prayers for Philemon. He says, I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.

And I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. 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.

So notice that Paul's prayers related to Philemon include a thanksgiving section, and they also include a request section. We're going to take the verses slightly out of order, because verses 4, 5, and 7 include the thanksgiving part.

So let's look at the thanksgiving part first. Here are verses 4, 5, and 7 again. He says, I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.

Now skip to verse 7. 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. So think about how Philemon must have felt to have Paul write those words about him.

[13:12] This wasn't just anybody who was saying those things, but it actually was an apostle. And not only that, it was the apostle who actually converted Philemon. So how do you think Philemon probably would have felt about that?

Probably would have been pretty excited to have Paul say something like that about him, wouldn't he? Yeah? So we see that Paul was thankful for Philemon's love and faith, and Philemon manifested that love and faith three ways.

He showed his love and faith through his attitude toward Jesus. So attitude is what goes into your next point there. Not only did he show it through his attitude toward Jesus, he showed it in his

attitude toward other Christians.

So attitude toward other Christians is the second point. And then the last way he showed his love and faith was his ministry to other Christians.

So ministry is what goes into your final blank there in that section. Verse 5 talks about Philemon's attitude toward Jesus and toward other Christians.

[14 : 28] And then verse 7 is where we see the reference to his ministry to other Christians. And Paul's relationship with Philemon here illustrates a key point. And that's that when we have been brought into a right relationship with God, every other human relationship we have is changed.

So let me say that one again. When we've been brought into a right relationship with God, every other human relationship we have is changed.

Remember what James said in James 2, verses 15 and 16. He said, If a brother is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and be filled, and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

And from verse 7, we can tell that Philemon ministered to his fellow believers in need. Because look what verse 7 says again. That's where it says, For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

So you thought you knew we wouldn't be able to get through a lesson without at least one reference to James tonight, didn't you? Some of us have a whole list of our bodies here. So when we first started looking at verses 4-7, I asked you to imagine how Philemon must have felt when Paul described him this way.

[15 : 53] And verses 5 and 7 show us why Paul is thankful for Philemon. But verse 4 shows us that Paul is not thankful to Philemon. And that's a key point to notice there.

And he's not thankful to Philemon because verse 4 says, I thank my God always making mention of you in my prayers. So why does Paul thank God for what Philemon does?

That's right. God is the one who enables Philemon's love for others. So, Paul recognizes that God is the one who enables Philemon's love for others.

And remember Ephesians 2, 8-10, that's where Paul said, Paul's thankful to God because Philemon is simply doing what God enabled.

And that reminder from Paul is likely what kept Philemon from getting too carried away with himself.

So we've covered the thanksgiving part of Paul's prayer. Let's look at the request part next.

[17 : 08] And that part is in verse 6 which we skipped over just a minute ago. Verse 6 says, And I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

So verse 6 is somewhat difficult to untangle, but Paul seems to be making two requests here. The first request is that he wants Philemon to realize just how much God has changed Philemon.

And we see that in the part of the verse where Paul talks about the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. Philemon will realize just how much God has changed him because of the way he deals with Onesimus.

And Barry King, who I said was one of the sources for this study, has an interesting and challenging quote about this passage. He says that those of us who believe in the doctrines of grace have a responsibility to practice the grace in the doctrines.

He said, those of us who believe in the doctrines of grace have a responsibility to practice the grace in the doctrines. So, on your blanks there, just split the grace and doctrines in those two verses.

[18 : 20] The other thing that Paul is requesting for Philemon is that Paul wants others to see how God has changed Philemon so that Philemon's testimony will become more effective. And next week, we'll see that Onesimus arrived with the letter and you know that everyone in the church is watching Philemon's reaction when Onesimus knocks on the door.

So, this brings us to the application items for this section of the letter. And in the introduction, I call this passage the foundation for forgiveness. forgiveness. And the five foundations for forgiveness are actually the application points tonight.

The first is the foundation of the gospel. So, the foundation of the gospel. And we saw that in verses 3 and 4.

And because we've been forgiven, we can forgive others. And Mark Dever puts it this way. He said, God's only son, Jesus, came to earth and lived a perfect life, which he then laid down as a sacrifice for our sins.

God vindicated Jesus and demonstrated his acceptance of that sacrifice by raising him from the dead. And that summary should remind us of 1 John 4.10. And 1 John 4.10 says, And this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. [19:41] So, the second application point and the second foundation for forgiveness is the context of the church. So, the context of the church.

And we see that in verses 1 and 2. Because think about what a well-functioning church should do. A well-functioning church should encourage us to forgive. And never is that more true than when we need to forgive fellow Christians.

And by having the church listen in on his letter to Philemon, Paul wisely makes Philemon accountable to the church. Think about Galatians 3.28. That's where Paul reminds us in the Galatians that there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And we see this unique blend of people in Philemon too, because we talked about how in addition to their theological significance, grace and peace are the traditional Greek and Hebrew greetings. And then we know that Paul applies his words to both slaves and free men because Onesimus was a slave. And we also know that the letter is addressed to both males and females because when we looked at the recipients, we saw both of those in the recipient list.

[21:02] So then the next foundation for forgiveness is the practice of praying for others. others. So the practice of praying for others. One of the commentators said that holding a grudge against someone is a lot more difficult when we regularly spend time praying for that person.

So let me mention that again. Holding a grudge against someone is a lot more difficult when we regularly spend time praying for that person. And we know that Paul doesn't have a grudge against Philemon, but verses 4-7 still show us how we should pray for others.

Then the next foundation for forgiveness is the necessity of love. So necessity of love is what goes into your blanks there. Think about our studies in James where we found out that faith manifests itself through love.

And in verses 5-7, that's where Paul talked about sharing faith and love with fellow Christians. And as we act in faith, we come to understand our faith more and we realize just how much faith that we have.

And the Christian's encounter with God's love changes the way that we respond to others. And then the last one we have on our examples for tonight is the example of an elder.

[22:16] So your last foundation for forgiveness is the example of an elder. And we see that primarily in verse 1, but it's actually throughout all verses 1-7. And we talked about how the letter to Philemon is the only time where Paul introduces himself as a prisoner of Christ.

And to paraphrase Mark Dever, he said that Paul's setting an example here. He's showing us how to be humble, joyful, thankful, and full of praise, even in the difficult circumstances of prison.

So that's how he's given us as an example of an elder. And so every Christian should follow that example, and when we do, that character trait becomes the other foundation for forgiveness.

So to whet your appetite for the next sections that we have in Philemon, here's something else to get your attention. Not only was Philemon written to us, but we're also represented in the letter.

Onesimus, Paul, and Philemon were real people, but their behavior models behaviors of others.

And in the coming weeks, we'll see how Onesimus models how we once were. Paul models what Jesus did for us, and then Philemon models how God views us now.

[23:25] And we'll see that as we go through the next couple of lessons. So let's close tonight with one final thought about forgiveness, and that is that no final forgiveness example surpasses what God has done for us in Christ.

So when we struggle to forgive, let's remember 1 John 2.1b to 1 John 2.2, and those verses say, and if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he himself is the propitiation for our sins.

And not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. And then the last cross-reference is one we also heard on Sunday night, and that's Ephesians 4.32. And Ephesians 4.32 says, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

So be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. So that wraps up the first seven verses of Philemon. Next week we'll look at the factors of forgiveness, and those will be verses 8-16.

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