**THE FORGIVING PHILOSOPHY OF PHILEMON**

**Philemon 1-25**

At the foreman’s signal, the giant wrecking ball is released,

and with dynamite force and a reverberating crash,

it meets the wall,

snapping bricks like twigs and scattering pieces of mortar.

Repeatedly, the powerful pendulum works,

and soon the barrier has been reduced to rubble.

Life has many walls and fences that divide, separate, and compartmentalize.

Not made of wood or stone,

they are personal obstructions,

blocking people from each other - and from God.

But Christ came as the great wall remover,

He tears down the partitions of sin that separates us from God and blasting the barriers

that keep us from each other.

His death and resurrection opened the way to eternal life to bring all who believe into the family of God.

Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures were littered with barriers as society assigned people to classes

and expected them to stay in “their place” -

men and women, enslaved and free, rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, pious and heathen.

But with the message of Christ, the walls came down, and Paul could declare,

“There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian,

bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all” (**Colossians 3:11**).

This life-changing truth forms the backdrop for the letter to Philemon.

This epistle to Philemon is Paul’s personal plea for a slave.

Onesimus “belonged” to Philemon,

a member of the Colossian church and Paul’s friend.

But Onesimus, the slave, had stolen from his master and run away.

He somehow made it to Rome where he met Paul,

and there he responded to the Good News and came to faith in Christ.

So Paul writes to Philemon and reintroduces Onesimus to him,

explaining that he is sending him back,

not just as a slave - but as a brother.

He respectfully asks Philemon to accept and forgive his servant.

The barriers of the past and the new ones erected by Onesimus’s desertion and theft should no longer divide them.

they are one in Christ.

The book of Philemon has been described as:

A model of Christian courtesy,

A manifestation of Christian love,

A monument of Christian conversion,

As we look at this epistle, think of

Paul in the place of Jesus,

Philemon = God, The Father,

Onesimus = ourselves, us personally.

We see a picture of Christ’s intercession on our behalf

Letter to Philemon not private (addressed to 4 parties). **vs. 1-3**

- To Philemon,

He was likely a member of the church at Colosse

A very hospitable one, opened his house for the church to meet

It is probable that he was one of Paul's own converts (cp. **vs. 19**)

- Apphia (wife - sister? If wife, she was just as affected as her husband),

- Archippus (Thought by many to be the son of Philemon.

Most prob. pastor of ch. at Colosse - **Colossians 4:17**)

**Colossians 4:17** “And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.”

- **And the church!!**

(Puts Philemon “on the spot.”

All watch reaction

Christian spirit of forgiveness to returning, thieving, runaway **slave**)

Philemon = friendly

Paul doesn't demand the decision - appeals.

To strengthen appeal, Paul gives Philemon his due. **vs. 4-7**

Thanks God for all good deeds

then asks for a personal favor -

forgive & welcome back now **Christian** slave.

A brother in Christ!

What a difference Onesimus’s status as a Christian made in his relationship to Philemon.

He was no longer merely a servant - he was also a brother.

Now both Onesimus and Philemon were members of Gods family -

equals in Christ.

A Christian’s status as a member of God's family transcends all other distinctions among

believers.

We dare not look down on fellow Christians (if truly saved).

Remember, they are our brothers and sisters,

our equals before Christ

**Galatians 3:28** “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

How we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ's family reflects our true Christian commitment.

Slavery was widespread throughout the Roman Empire.

In those early days, Christians didn’t have the political power to change the slavery system.

Paul didn't condemn or condone slavery

but worked to transform **relationships**.

The Gospel begins to change social structures by changing the people **within** those structures.

Onesimus had been one of Philemon's slaves **vs. 16**

Who evidently had run away **vs. 15**

Somehow, he had traveled from Colosse to Rome, found Paul,

and was converted to Christ **vs. 10**

He had become very dear to Paul, and very useful **vs. 11-13**;

**Colossians 4:9** “With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.”

Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him.

Needed help while in prison.

Knew he couldn’t - sent him back.

Makes interesting play on Gr. name:

Onesimus = “profitable”

**vs. 17-19** In keeping with bookkeeping idea - offers to assume debt Onesimus incurred.

Can’t pay debt, doesn’t expect to be asked to.

Uses opportunity to **NOT** make mention of Philemon’s debt to Paul - balance scales.

Really wants Philemon to receive Onesimus back & forgive.

Because he was Philemon’s spiritual father,

he hoped Philemon would feel a debt of gratitude that he would repay by accepting Onesimus with a spirit of forgiveness.

**Galatians 6:1-3** “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”

To put more pressure on Philemon, Paul mentions he hopes to be released soon from prison & visit him. **vs. 22**

Hints he expects Philemon to “do more than I say.” **vs.21**

**Set Onesimus free?**

Whatever, because we have epistle, we know Philemon forgave Onesimus

Didn’t have to forgive -

legally: could have beaten, imprisoned, or executed the thieving, runaway slave

Christians supposed to forgive!

**Ephesians 4:32** - And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,

even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Cp. **Philemon 17-19a** with **2 Samuel 9**

David & Jonathan - **1 Samuel 18:1, 3-4**

“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul . . . . Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

**2 Samuel 9** = Beautiful picture of forgiveness, as well as salvation by grace.

1) What grace is - kindness to a helpless one for another’s sake. **vs. 1-3**

**1 Jn. 2:12** “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.”

2) Grace gives the highest place. **vs. 11**

**Ephesians 1:1-6** “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

3) Grace keeps the saved one. **vs. 13**

**John 10:28,29** “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.”

Christians are to be stewards of God’s forgiveness:

**Ephesians 4:31** “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

Model Prayer - **Matthew 6:12** “And forgive us our debts, **as we forgive our debtors.**”

(Also - **vs. 14,15** “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”)

“What if I just can’t forgive?”

**Matthew 5:23,24** “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

**Matthew 18:15** “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

It is our Christian **duty** to forgive,

otherwise we can’t serve God to our fullest.

God forgave **us** because of Jesus!

**Philemon 17&18** “If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;”

Same 5 words translated “imputed” in **Romans 5:13 -**

“For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.”

**2 Corinthians 5:21** “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

**Isaiah 53:5,6** “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

**1 Peter 2:24** “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”

**NOTE - vs. 24 -** Marcus (John Mark)

Mark abandoned Paul & Barnabas (**Acts 13:13**)

cp. **2 Timothy 4:11** “Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is **profitable** *[Onesimus]* to me for the ministry.”

Philemon probably knew of John Mark

So Paul uses him as an example and challenge

This small book is a masterpiece of grace and tact

and is a profound demonstration of the power of Christ and of true Christian fellowship in action.

What barriers are there in our homes, neighborhood, and church?

What separates us from fellow believers -

race? status? wealth? education? personality?

As with Philemon, God calls us to unity,

breaking down those walls and embracing our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**The great invitation** -

**Ephesians 4:31, 32** “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”