**The Meaning of Forgiveness**

*Philemon 1-3*

**Overview:**

* Paul writes this letter and calls for Philemon to forgive his slave Onesimus who has wronged his master.
* We are commanded to forgive.
* No one is ever more like God than when they forgive, because God is a forgiving God.
* Paul was imprisoned in Rome—perhaps the Mamertine Prison—which were deplorable conditions
* While Paul was a prisoner, he was winning those in Caesar’s household to Christ
* Paul had been responsible for Philemon’s conversion (v 19)
* Paul founded the church the meets in Philemon’s house
* Paul identifies himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus
* Paul’s appeal to him is personal, sensitive, and full of compassion. Not an appeal from authority (vv 8-9)
* His appeal is from his own hardship and suffering as a prisoner of Christ in an awful place. If I am being faithful, could you be faithful as well in honoring Christ in this way?

**Philemon 1-3**—Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker, 2and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Who is Philemon?

**v. 1**—Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker.

a. Only mentioned once in Scripture.

b. He is the head of his household in Colossae, a small town with a church that met in his home.

c. He is a man of means—his house was large enough to accommodate the church.

d. Philemon is a “fellow worker” and is loved by Paul.

1. Paul asks him to do something that was not normally done.

2. He asks him to forgive a runaway slave who was deserving of punishment.

1. Other characters in the story

**v. 2**—and to Apphia our sister [refers to his wife], and to Archippus [likely refers to his son] our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

[**Colossians 4:17**](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Col%204.17)— “Say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.”

1. In the early years of the church, the church met in homes

**v.2**—“… to the church in your house.”

1. Many early believers would have been converted slaves

**I Cor 1:26-29**—For [[r](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+c+or+1&version=NASB#fen-NASB-28390r)]consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to [[s](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+c+or+1&version=NASB#fen-NASB-28390s)]the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29so that no [[t](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+c+or+1&version=NASB#fen-NASB-28393t)]man may boast before God.

1. The Greeting

**v. 3**—Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The purpose
   1. to demonstrate the nature of Christian love
   2. to reveal the working of God in providence
   3. an example of proper manners, Christian courtesy; no commands, just the pleadings of love
   4. to help Christians maintain good relationships
   5. is to show the effect of conversion on social structure
   6. And some suggest that this is the first assault or attack on the institution of slavery; (Not present here or anywhere in Scripture).
2. Slavery in the Bible  
   1. There is no place in Scripture where there are any efforts to abolish slavery. (Eph 6:5-6; Titus 2:9-10; Col 23:22-24; 1 Tim 6:1-2; [1 Peter 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Pet%202.18)).

**Gal 3:28**—There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is [[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=gal+3%3A28&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29131a)]neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

* 1. There is, however, a call to righteous love on the part of God’s people in every relationship, no matter what that relationship is; whether it’s in a marriage, whether it’s in a family, whether it’s in a slave/master relationship.

**Eph 6:5**—Slaves, be obedient to those who are your [[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph+6&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29343a)]masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6not [[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph+6&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29344b)]by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the [[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph+6&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29344c)]heart. 7With good will [[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph+6&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29345d)]render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

**Titus 2:9-10**—*Urge* bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not [[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=titus+2&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29918e)]argumentative, 10not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

**Eph 6:9—**And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

* 1. Slavery had a positive side. Slaves were cared for, housed, fed, protected, educated, trusted, in many cases loved and rewarded.
  2. Onesimus was Philemon’s non-believing slave who had run away, and he had stolen from his master.
  3. The punishment would be severe—branding, tortured, even crucified.
  4. Onesimus ran to Rome and in the providence of God, runs into Paul and becomes a believer.

1. The character of Philemon—a good Christian master

**vv 4-7**—Ithank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and 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.

**Col 4:7-9**—As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. 8*For* I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; 9and with him Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

1. The Risk
   1. Onesimus was due punishment.
   2. Paul sends Onesimus back to his master with a letter asking Philemon to forgive him.
   3. The gospel should bring these brothers together. It is no longer defined by human classification.
   4. The issue isn’t master/slave; but a crime that needed to be resolved; and it could be resolved if Philemon would forgive the now converted runaway slave.
2. The heart of forgiveness—no matter what the offense, Christians should be eager to forgive

Outline of Philemon

1. The Spiritual character of one who forgives, vv4-7
2. The spiritual action of one who forgives, vv 8 to 18
3. The spiritual motives of one who forgives, vv 19 to 25