**The Spiritual Character of Forgiveness**

*Philemon 4-18*

**Overview:**

* Paul writes this letter and calls for Philemon to forgive his slave Onesimus who has wronged him.
* Previously, we identified 10 principals of biblical forgiveness:

1. *When we forgive, we are most like God.*
2. *Murder is more encompassing that the act itself.*
3. *God is more offended than you are.*
4. *Those forgiven of much should forgive the lesser sins.*
5. *By refusing to forgive, you will not enjoy the fellowship and love of other believers.*
6. *A refusal to forgive results in divine chastening.*
7. *A refusal to forgive results in being unforgiven.*
8. *The lack of forgiveness renders us unfit to worship.*
9. *A refusal to forgive is to ultimately usurp the authority of God.*
10. *The offenses against you are the trials that perfect you.*

* Paul is “aged” when he writes this letter (v 9). He was likely around 60 years old.
* Paul has suffered much for the gospel.

**2 Cor 11:23-28**—Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. 25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26*I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27*I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches. because – “Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

* He bears the scars of Christ.
* Paul appeals for Philemon to forgives.

3 Steps to Forgiveness

1. Reconcile the relationship

**vv 10-14**—I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart, 13whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my [[l](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=philemon+1&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29952l)]imprisonment for the gospel; 14but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

* Even when people do not ask for it

**Matt 18:22**—Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

* The name Onesimus means “useful” (v. 11)

**Col 3: 22-23**—Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,

**Eph 6:5-8**—Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7With good will 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.

1. Restore to service

**v 11**—Who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.

**vv 15-16**—No longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

**v 17**—If then you regard me a partner, accept him as *you would* me.

* Onesimus is far more useful because of the providence of God.

**1 Cor 7:22**—For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave.

**Col 3:11**—*a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, [[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=col+3&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29529j)]barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

**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.

**Titus 2:9-10**—*Urge* bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

1. Restitution of wrong

**vv 17-18**—If then you regard me a partner, accept him as *you would* me. 18But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

**Col 3:25**—For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

* 1. The OT laws required restitution and demanded justice
  2. Justice deserved full restitution
  3. Onesimus could not pay, so Paul offers to paid his debt
  4. Christ pays our debt to restore us to God