



Freedom Through Forgiving Studies in Philemon

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Though forgiveness is one of the greatest challenges in any culture it lives as one of the most powerful ideas in the Kingdom of God, positioned as it is at the very heart of God's message to the world. Without the rudder of forgiveness we will be at the mercy of offence. Without the treasure of forgiveness we will be impoverished the thief of pain, and without the presence of forgiveness we are alone with only our disappointment for company. As Paul's letter to Philemon teaches, given a chance, forgiveness will change us as individuals and the world we inhabit, for as we embrace it, freedom awaits!

Session 1	What are you asking me?
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1.What are you asking me?

With only 25 verses and 335 words in its original language, the book we call Philemon in the New Testament is by far the shortest of Paul's letters. Although it is primarily addressed to Philemon, within the introduction Apphia, Archippus and the wider Christian community are mentioned. As a result the message contained within this *little* letter is both immensely personal, containing sensitive details about a particular individual, while at the same time packing a huge punch with a message that has application to the whole church. At the core of this letter is the challenge of forgiveness, as one man appeals to another for the exercise of forgiveness on behalf of someone who has through their actions, brought great offence. Forgiveness is not explicitly mentioned in the text, yet we feel its call in every word... it is hidden in plain site.

But what is Forgiveness? What is Paul asking of Philemon (and us)?

Actually he asking two huge things from Philemon... ***Forgiveness of*** and ***Reconciliation with!*** We'll deal with both separately in this mini series.

When it comes to understanding what forgiveness is there are essentially two dominant ideas within the NT.

#1 Matthew 6:12 _____

#2 Luke 7:42-43 _____

In essence, Paul it could be argued is alluding to both ideas:

"So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me."
(v17)

"If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self." (v's 18-19)

2. Why is it so hard?

Romans 12:17-19

There is not a simple answer to this... but at the heart of forgiveness is a very challenge idea... namely, **'letting go' of control!** From this challenging exhortation of Paul's, I want to lift two phrases, which touch on the issue of control. They are, **"Do not take..."** and **"... but leave room..."** These are easy words to read but tough words to live by.

"Do not take revenge..."

Let's dispel some myths about revenge:

Myth #1 _____

Myth #2 _____

Myth #3 _____

Three areas we love to have control and which may have impacted Philemon:

R_____

V_____

C_____

"... leave room..."

When it comes to Forgiveness we are faced with a trust challenge.

God will do things in His time

Can we trust His *timing*?

God will do things in His way

Can we trust His *tactics*?

3. Staying out of jail

Matthew 18:23-35

The scenario described in Matthew 18... potentially awaits Philemon. Even though he is a good man... he is faced with the dilemma of having to 'cancel another's debt', having had his great debt cancelled. In fact, Paul not only alludes to this, but also to Philemon's personal indebtedness to him, presumably through the Gospel: *"I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self."* (v 19)

One of the main reasons we need to embrace forgiveness is so that we (the victims) can be released from the prison of the offence. Aware of such a dilemma Jesus addresses the issue through a very provocative story. The parable is recorded in Matthew 18:23-35 and was told in response to a question asked by Peter, one of Jesus' disciples.

"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21)

When thinking of forgiveness our focus is often on the 'one we are forgiving', but the benefits for the 'one forgiving' are great. We forgive for our own freedom not just for theirs!

"In anger the master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." (v's 34-35)

What 'torture' awaits us in the prison of unforgiveness?

W _____

A _____

I _____

W _____

P _____

B _____

4. The invitation

Within his letter, Paul not only makes an extraordinary offer, but in doing so he extends a life-giving invitation to Philemon.

The Offer

Paul's offer is extraordinary on two counts.

Firstly, Paul is asking Philemon as a follower of Jesus to react to this offence in a way opposite to the cultural norm of his day.

Secondly, Paul is prepared to be a personal guarantor for Onesimus.

The Invitation

L _____ not L _____

"Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love." (vv 8-9)

F _____ not F _____

"But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do will be spontaneous and not forced." (v 14)

P _____ not P _____

"So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me." (v 17)

R _____ not R _____

"... not to mention that you owe me your very self." (v 19)

5. Forgiveness and beyond

When we started this journey together we talked about the fact that Paul was asking two things of Philemon:

The first was his *forgiveness of Onesimus*.

The second was his *reconciliation to Onesimus*.

The call to reconciliation is seen in 3 dynamic pictures:

From S _____ to S _____

"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus who became my son while I was in chains." (v 10)

From U _____ to U _____

"Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me." (v 11)

From F _____ to F _____

"No longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord." (v 16)

Is reconciliation part of the forgiveness equation?

#1 Forgiveness is _____

Reconciliation is _____

#2 Forgiveness is _____

Reconciliation is _____

#3 Forgiveness is focused on _____

Reconciliation is focused on _____

#4 Forgiveness can _____

Reconciliation cannot _____

6. Freedom and fracture

Is reconciliation part of the forgiveness equation?

I think we have shown... no... but yet reconciliation is something that is where possible, encouraged. However, if we are to approach the possibility of reconciliation, we must take certain ideas seriously or it will never truly happen. Too often in Christian circles we 'force' the idea of reconciliation and this can be counterproductive and even destructive on the freedom journey.

Beware of premature expressions of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is premature _____

Reconciliation is premature when _____

Reconciliation is premature when _____

Reconciliation is premature when _____

Is it possible to be live in freedom while contending with fracture?

And finally...

Sometimes reconciliation just isn't *possible*

Sometimes reconciliation just isn't *profitable*

Where reconciliation is not possible or profitable, freedom is still attainable. Forgiveness brings freedom, which may lead to a restoration of what was fractured, but even if it doesn't...you are still free!

Forgiveness gives us personal freedom

Reconciliation can give us relational wholeness.

Did Onesimus come home?

Did Philemon allow him back?

Paul concludes hopefully:

"Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask." (v 21)

Notes

Deeper 2022

15th, 16th, 17th March — Speaker and topic TBC

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