

**Text: Philemon 8-11 (Pew Bible pg.1183)**

**Title: “Reconciliation”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Relationships are so important in our walk with Christ.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Missy Franklin was one of the most productive medal-winners for Team USA in this year’s swimming competition. She’s an amazing young lady, and she has some amazing parents. In the middle of the swimming competition at the Olympics they gave their daughter some important advice: "Enjoy yourself. Do your best. We'll always love you." Do you know what that says? It says, “No matter what happens, the relationship is not on the line. No matter how you perform, there’s nothing you could do or not do that would make us love you any less.” Now that’s great in families. And it’s important for our relationships as believers in the church.

Again, relationships are a vital part of our walk with God.

**Matthew 22:37-39** - **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**

**Galatians 5:6** - **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**

Let’s open our Bibles to the little book of Philemon. One of our men asked me last week why I didn’t give some directions on how to find the book of Philemon. It’s so short (just 25 verses) that it’s easy to flip right by it. But if you get to Hebrews just hang a left and you’ll be in Philemon. As you turn I want to remind you that next week we start a new year in Sunday Morning Bible Studies for all ages. We still need volunteers in preschool and children’s area, as well as some other needs you see listed in your worship folder. For our SMBS leaders we’re providing an excellent training opportunity for you next Saturday here at our church. It starts at 9am with a general session here in the sanctuary, then there will be breakout sessions for various age groups, a lunch break and then more sessions after lunch until 3pm. If you can’t come for the whole day, at least come for the morning sessions. Read Philemon 8-11.

Last week we were introduced to Philemon, a wealthy man in whose house the church at Colossae met each week. He had a slave named Onesimus who apparently stole from Philemon and then was on the run. Onesimus travelled to Rome where he probably thought he would get lost in the crowds there, but somehow he encounters the Apostle Paul who leads Onesimus to Christ. Paul also led Philemon to Christ and so he wants to help the two men be reconciled. For that purpose Paul writes this letter and he sends it to Philemon in the hands of Onesimus to ask Philemon to forgive the runaway slave.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Even nonbelievers struggle with forgiveness. Don Henley of the rock band The Eagles wrote a song a few years ago about a broken relationship in his life. In the song he said:

“There are people in your life who've come and gone  
They let you down, you know they hurt your pride  
You better put it all behind you; cause' life goes on  
If you keep carryin' that anger, it'll eat you up inside,  
I've been trying to get down to the heart of the matter  
But my will gets weak and my thoughts seem to scatter  
But I think it's about forgiveness ... forgiveness.”

It's not a matter of if, but of when. Someone will offend us. Someone will sin against us. It happens in families. It happens in churches. It happens everywhere people relate to each other. We're sinful humans; so we sin against God and we sin against each other. But as Don Henley says, “I've been trying to get down to the heart of the matter ... and I think it is about forgiveness.” Today from our text I want to answer the question, “Why forgive?” Last week we talked about the “who” of forgiveness and redeeming relationships. Today, we'll talk about the “why.” Why forgive?

## 1. IT'S THE OBEDIENT THING TO DO (v.8).

**Philemon 8 - Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do,**

In other words, forgiveness is what you “ought to do.” As believers we are “in Christ” and we are under the authority of His Word which teaches us to forgive others. If for no other reason, we are to forgive because God's Word commands us to forgive. Believing the Gospel changes our hearts and we relate to others who have sinned against us.

Now I mentioned last week that Paul is writing from a Roman prison from which he also wrote other Prison Epistles ... Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians. Interestingly, the theme of forgiveness seems to be on his mind in each of those letters, as it is in the letter to Philemon.

He mentions it to the Ephesians:

**Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

And Paul mentions it to the Colossians:

**Colossians 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.**

And it was on his mind in Philippians. There were two women in the church who were at odds with one another and Paul wrote:

**Philippians 4:2 - I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.**

There's a powerful parable that Jesus taught that drives home the lesson we learn in Philemon. In Matthew 18 Peter asked the Lord...

**Matthew 18:21 - Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"**

The Jewish teachers said you should forgive up to three times, so Peter thought he was being very magnanimous.

**Matthew 18:22 - Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.**

So we are taught to put no limits on our forgiveness. Do as many times as you are offended. And then Jesus gets into the parable that shows how God forgives us as sinners, and how we should forgive others. Jesus said there was a king who wished to settle up accounts with slaves who owe him money. One slave owed the king ten thousand talents, which in biblical times was an enormous sum of money ... like saying someone owes a million dollars. Of course, there's no way a slave could repay that amount; it's an unpayable debt. So he is brought before the king. And the king orders that the slave, along with his wife and children be sold to recoup some of his loss. The slave begs for mercy.

**Matthew 18:26 - "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'**

Well, as willing as the servant might have been, there's still no way he could repay the debt. So the master did something amazing. He felt compassion for the slave and released him from his debt. The unpayable debt was paid in full.

And that's the way it is with God and us as sinners. When we come to humbly admit that we owe an unpayable sin debt, God is moved with compassion and forgives us through His Son Jesus Christ.

But in Jesus' parable, that slave who had been forgiven so much then immediately goes out and finds a fellow slave who owes him a tiny sum of money compared to what the first slave owed his master. The first slave demands payment. He grabs the guy and begins to choke him. His fellow slave asks for mercy: "Be patient and I will pay you back" (the very words the first slave said to his master whom he owed a million dollars). The first slave says, "No way. You're going to prison until you pay back every penny."

This is unthinkable. Here is a man who has been forgiven so much, but he will not even think of forgiving the debt of a fellow servant who owes such a small amount. Well, word gets back to the king and he was furious. He said...

**Matthew 18:32-33 - 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'**

The king rescinded his offer to forgive the first slaves huge debt of a million dollars. Instead he was thrown in prison and tortured until he paid the last penny. And Jesus summarized the truth in this way:

**Matthew 18:35 - "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."**

What an incredible story! And what it shows us is that the Lord will sometimes deal very harshly with His own children who will not forgive someone else. God disciplines His children in this way sometimes when we need to learn to forgive. He does that because He knows what an unforgiving spirit can do to us and to the people around us. So forgive. It's the obedient thing to do.

In what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to pray...

**Matthew 6:12 - Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

That tells us that our experience of forgiveness from God is connected with our forgiveness of others.

QUOTES: A man in conversation with John Wesley once made the comment, "I never forgive." Wesley wisely replied, "Then, sir, I hope that you never sin."

The Bible says that God bore our sins and our sorrows and our griefs on the Cross. Just stop to think about all the pain that is in this room. At any given time most of us are hurting over something ... perhaps something someone did or said to us. Multiply that millions of times over, and you get a picture of the sin, sorrow and grief that fills the world. And Christ bore all of that upon the Cross. But when we continue to harbor unforgiveness toward someone else, we are in essence saying, "Christ, your death on the Cross wasn't sufficient to forgive every sin we've ever committed. There's something someone else did to me that I can't forgive. No you can't forgive; but Christ can forgive through you.

So why forgive? Forgive because it's the obedient thing to do. But also...

## **2. IT'S THE LOVING THING TO DO (vv.9-10).**

**Philemon 9 - yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—**

**Philemon 10 - I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.**

Paul admits that he's an old man. And as he's come to the end of life he says, "Trust me. It's better to forgive than to go on holding an unforgiving spirit toward someone else. It's better to let the love of Christ prevail than to hold on to hate."

Note: Twice now Paul has said to Philemon, "I appeal to you..." This means an urgent request. Paul knows he can appeal to Philemon on this basis because he knows that Philemon has experienced the forgiveness and love of Jesus Christ. Something extraordinary is possible because Paul knows

Philemon has been saved and will have the power to do what Paul is asking Him to do. Christ love is living in him which is what it will take to be reconciled.

This love (agape) is a sacrificial giving for the ultimate good of another. This love is not emotional or sensual; it is rooted in the will.

Let's face it. We do hurt each other. We misinterpret people. We second guess each other. We make the wrong assumptions about one another. We gossip about each other and presume we know the motives of one another. And the Bible says, "For the sake of love that we have experienced in Jesus Christ, let's forgive."

Why forgive? It's the obedient thing to do. It's the loving thing to do. And...

### **3. IT'S THE BENEFICIAL THING TO DO (v.11).**

**Philemon 11 - Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.**

Some times when a slave ran away and was caught, they would put an "F", burn an "F" into his head, F for fugitivus, fugitive. Some of them that we know in history were crucified. Some were tortured. Running away was a serious offense.

Philemon had written Onesimus off, and Paul knew it. We could understand how Philemon might think, "I don't need this Onesimus in my life anymore. He has wronged me and stolen from me and betrayed me. He's useless to me."

But Paul writes to Philemon to say, "I want you to think of Onesimus in a different light. Sure he was probably useless to you; but something has changed. He's a new man. Now he is useful."

There's actually a play on words here. The name Onesimus actually means "useful" or "profitable." He's a brother in Christ and he deserves another chance. Take a risk. Take him back.

Interestingly, the next to last verse of Philemon reveals that one named Mark was with Paul as a fellow-worker. Probably this is the one identified in the book of Acts as John Mark. (Note: Luke is with him as well. So two of the four Gospel writers were with Paul.) But think about Mark. Mark, in the eyes of the Apostle Paul was once like Onesimus was to Philemon ... useless.

The book of Acts explains a heart-breaking fissure that occurred in the relationship between Paul and Barnabas. The disagreement erupted over whether or not John Mark should be included on the missionary team for what is called the Second Missionary Journey. Paul was determined that John Mark would not be on the team because John Mark had bailed out on a previous mission trip. Paul had no time for quitters; the stakes were too high. Barnabas, on the other hand, apparently believed John Mark should have a second chance. Luke explains the outcome: "They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company..." (Acts 15:39). But the story doesn't end there.

Something happened in the months and years to come that changed Paul's mind about John Mark. We see that in some astounding words at the end of Paul's second letter to Timothy: "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry" (II Timothy 4:11). What happened? Perhaps John Mark had matured; or perhaps it was Paul who matured ... or both. Whatever the case, John Mark was back in the game ... an amazing comeback. He went from being one whom Paul considered *useless* on the team, to one who was *useful* to the team. Later John Mark would go on to be one of men chosen by the Holy Spirit to pen one of the Gospel records of the life and ministry of Jesus ... the Gospel According to Mark.

It is the grace and mercy of God that makes such comebacks possible. After all, if God can perform the miracle of raising us out of the deadness of our sins and making us new persons in Christ, is He not also able to restore us when we falter and fail.

Is there a John Mark in your circle? Is there a Philemon in your circle? Who needs you to believe in them and to trust them with a second (or third or fourth) chance? Who needs you to say, "You're important to the team; let's get you back in the game"?

## CONCLUSION

Now here's a big question. How do we know if we've really forgiven someone? I've heard people say, "Forgive and forget." Well, sometimes the forgetting just isn't possible for us as humans. And that's not really what God asks us to do. He's the only one who can truly forget. The Bible says that when He forgives us He remembers our sins no more. But as humans we are not capable of truly forgetting something like this. So what does forgiveness look like? Let me give you three things:

- You remember the offense without reliving the hurt. That spouse walked out on you. You'll never forget that, but you know you've forgiven when you no longer relive the hurt that just about destroyed you.
- You remember the offense without holding a grudge. You remember what was said or what was done, but you can let it go. You no longer nurse a grudge or that bitterness that made you want to get even with them.
- You remember the offense, but you still show them love. That person hurt you, and you may never be best friends, but you can still show love to them. Notice I didn't say, "Love them." I said, "*Show* love to them." That means that you can still sacrifice for them; you can still show kindness to them; you can still pray for God to bless them.

Just think of Jesus on the Cross praying, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. Sin has so blinded them. Forgive them."

You are never more like Christ than when you forgive.