

Philemon 17-25

May 15, 2022



SCRIPTURE

¹⁷ So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

²² And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. ²⁴ And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

COMMENTARY

Verse 17. The word “if” has the force of “because.” Paul assumed Philemon considered him as a partner—a co-laborer in Christ’s service. The apostle made his direct appeal: He wanted Philemon to accept Onesimus in the same manner as Philemon would receive Paul if he were to visit.

Verses 18-19. Onesimus may have wronged Philemon and owed him something. Onesimus may have stolen money to fund his getaway. Philemon may have entrusted him with money to make purchases. Whatever the case, Onesimus was indebted to Philemon.

Verse 20. The Greek particle rendered “yes” gathers up the entire previous request on behalf of Onesimus. “Brother” was a warm term of Christian relationship. The implication is that if Onesimus and Philemon were Paul’s Christian brothers, they also were brothers to each other. The phrase “may I have joy” literally is “may I have profit” and is a play on the name Onesimus (“profitable”).

Verse 21. Paul was convinced of Philemon’s obedience to the apostle’s request. Paul did not assert his apostolic authority (see vv. 8-9) but instead asked that Philemon



graciously grant his request. Paul added his confidence that Philemon would do even more than the apostle asked.

Verse 22. On the surface, Paul merely asked Philemon to prepare lodging in anticipation of a future visit. Underneath may be the implication that Paul well might come and check to see whether Philemon had granted the request for Onesimus. Throughout the letter, Paul gently and tactfully nudged Philemon to do what was right

Verse 25. All of Paul's letters begin and end with a reference to grace (Gk *charis*), God's unsought and undeserved favor, His free and unmerited saving action. Salvation and all its associated blessings were brought by Christ (2Co 8:9; 12:9). Although in Paul's benedictions Christ is the sole source of *charis*, in his salutations (as in Philemon 3) God the Father and Christ are generally mentioned as the joint and unified source of *charis*.

MAIN POINT

When standing at the crossroads of discipleship, consider God's love, your partners in Christ, and how you can show what you know.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Has forgiveness ever been offered to you? Have you ever forgiven someone?

Share about an impactful moment of forgiveness in one of your relationships, whether given by you or offered to you.

What are some struggles or questions people might have when witnessing or receiving undeserved forgiveness?

How do these moments bring us to a crossroads of discipleship?

We all have times when we stand at a crossroads of discipleship and must decide whether we will put what we say we believe into action. There is perhaps no act of Jesus more difficult to put into practice in our own lives than forgiveness. So, Paul, speaking truth into Philemon's struggle to forgive Onesimus, speaks to us all. He appealed to Philemon to consider his partner in Christ, God's love, and gave him guidance to choose a road and walk according to those truths.



UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILEMON 17-25.

Are you more drawn to people who affirm every whim of your heart and won't oppose you or call you out for Christ's sake or those who will point you to Christ when you're stuck at the crossroads? Explain.

Do you consider yourself a partner with other believers in Christ? Explain.

What would it look like if each of us considered ourselves partners in the ministry of the gospel?

What about us, as individuals and as a group, would need to change for that to be true?

What is a crossroad of discipleship you're currently facing?

Who has permission to give you confident accountability in that situation as Paul did for Philemon?

Paul wanted Philemon to think of him as a partner. The Greek word translated "partner" is related to *koinonia*, which means "fellowship," in the sense of partnership. It describes one who shares responsibility or experiences with another. Paul referred to Titus as his partner in 2 Corinthians 8:23. The point is that we need each other. When we stand at the crossroads of discipleship, and we all do, we need the encouragement and accountability of other partners in Christ so that we will choose the path that glorifies God.

Why did Paul care so much that he would pay Onesimus's debt for him (vv. 18-19)?

What was in it for Paul?

How does our obedience in Christ benefit one another?

Give an example of a time someone else's obedience at a crossroads benefitted you in some way.

In the most confrontational moment of the letter, Paul reminded Philemon of the great spiritual debt he owed to the apostle. In case that was too harsh, Paul followed with another pun, saying that he wanted some "benefit" in the Lord from Philemon. (The word benefit in Greek sounds like the name Onesimus.)



Paul advocated for the person at a social disadvantage by helping the more powerful party develop Christ like empathy. Paul was nuanced; he did not indulge in a simplistic culture-war mentality. He lovingly spoke truth into a volatile situation. Paul found a way to be disarming while also holding Philemon accountable. He affirmed Philemon, elevated Onesimus, and helped them both see that their shared identity in Christ was the only identity category that mattered.

What picture of the gospel do you see in verses 18-19?

When you are standing at a crossroads, which are you more likely to allow to impact you the most: God's love, your circumstances, your feelings, others' opinions, or something else?

Considering the crossroads of discipleship you're currently facing, how would making God's love your highest priority affect things?

In Christ, we're called not only to receive grace but to extend the grace we receive to others. In verses 20-21, Paul essentially called Philemon to "show what you know." God pours His love into you so that it might flow through you into the people around you who need it most. Paul's response to Philemon's crossroad of discipleship reveals that true partnership in Christ hinges on the forgiveness we extend to one another by living out Christ's commands even in difficult circumstances.

How does the letter to Philemon speak to you about the relationship between faith and works?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is a situation where you've been struggling to "show what you know" in relationship with Christ?

Of the three appeals we saw in Paul's letter to Philemon, which is God speaking to you about the most: consider your partners in Christ, consider God's love, or show what you know? Explain.

How do you seek to remind yourself of God's grace to you in Christ?

What is a practical way you need to express your gratitude to Christ for His forgiveness?



PRAYER

Thank God for His love toward us and the privilege we have to relate to one another as partners in Christ. Ask Him to help you consider those partnerships and His great love every day so that you might be emboldened to show what you know, acting as a funnel of His love for those who need it most.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group members to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we begin a new series – Real Life Prayer and Praise: a 5 Week Study on Selected Psalms of David:

May 22, 2022 --- Psalm 3

