

PHILEMON 8-16
MAY 1, 2022



INTRODUCTION

What do people mean when they say, “Hurt people hurt people”?

Why do you think forgiveness is such a hard thing to do—both in general and specifically for you?

Many different factors contribute to how easy or difficult it can be to forgive someone who wrongs us. In some cases we might wonder, “Can friends who hurt each other ever really be friends again?” In Paul’s letter to Philemon, he addressed a situation that included this kind of hurt. Paul’s words remind us that forgiving those who hurt us is not easy, but it is always important, and is exactly what God did for us in Christ.

DISCUSSION

> **HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILEMON 8-16.**

Based on verses 8-9, why did Paul think it was his place to speak to Philemon about his relationship with Onesimus?

How was Paul’s understanding of what it means to love people different from the way many today think about what it means to love others?

Does this mean you also have responsibility to call others to forgiveness when relationships go wrong? Explain.

What would change in your life if your relationships were driven by love above all else?

From these verses, what did Paul want Philemon to do?

Should your forgiveness of others depend on whether or not the person deserves your forgiveness? Explain. How has God forgiven you?

Is love something you feel or something you do? What about forgiveness—is it a feeling or a choice? Explain.

What did Paul mean when he wrote that perhaps the reason for Onesimus’s betrayal was so that Philemon might “have him back forever”?

GOING DEEPER

Read Matthew 6:14-15. On a scale of 1 to 10, how serious is God about you forgiving other people?

These verses in Matthew 6 are part of Jesus’s model prayer. What does prayer have to do with forgiveness?

APPLICATION

When is it hard for you to forgive? How is God speaking to you about that?

How do you regularly remind yourself of God’s grace to you in Christ?

What are some ways you can express your gratitude to Christ for His forgiveness?

PRAYER

Thank God for His forgiveness in your life. Ask Him to help you recognize and appreciate His forgiveness so that you might forgive those who have wronged you.

COMMENTARY

PHILEMON 8-16

Verse 8. Here Paul began his appeal for Onesimus. The phrase “for this reason” translates a Greek term that means “therefore” and refers to evidences of Philemon’s love and graciousness. Paul could have commanded Philemon to forgive Onesimus. The words “great boldness” in Christ emphasized Paul’s apostolic authority. As Christ’s emissary, Paul spoke and acted in Christ’s authority. He reminded Philemon that he was foregoing his right to demand obedience. The phrase “what is right” referred to Philemon’s accepting Onesimus as a Christian brother.

Verse 9. Instead of making a demand, Paul appealed to (entreated, implored) Philemon on the basis of love (agape, Christian love). Love was a dominant characteristic of Philemon's life, and Paul wanted him to extend that love to Onesimus.

Verse 10. Paul appealed to Philemon for his (spiritual) son, whom he fathered while in chains. In confinement, Paul had won a new convert to Christ. After establishing his close relationship with the new Christian, Paul gave the convert's name—Onesimus. We only can imagine Philemon's shock.

Verse 11. Paul employed an effective wordplay on the name "Onesimus." The name means "profitable" or "helpful." As Philemon's slave, he had not lived up to his name. By running away, he had shown himself to be useless (unprofitable). Christ had transformed Onesimus, however, so that he was useful to both Philemon and Paul.

Verse 12. Although Paul was sending Onesimus home, the letter gives no indication that Onesimus was returning against his will. The phrase a part of myself expresses Paul's strong emotional tie to Onesimus and is the equivalent of "my heart."

Verse 13. Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him. Evidently, Onesimus already had rendered valuable assistance to Paul. Again, the apostle stressed his imprisonment was for the gospel—because of his missions ministry. If Onesimus stayed, he could serve Paul in Philemon's place—on Philemon's behalf. Paul could have justified keeping Onesimus with him on the grounds that Onesimus really was representing Philemon, who thus was rendering service to Paul.

Verse 14. Paul could have kept Onesimus and merely have informed Philemon that he had done so. He would not make that choice, however, without Philemon's consent (literally, "mind"). Paul wanted Philemon's good deed (literally, "kindness") to be done willingly, not out of duty.

Verse 15. Paul saw the possibility of a positive result from what appeared to be a negative situation. Everything hinged on Philemon's forgiving Onesimus. Onesimus's separation from Philemon for a brief time resulted in the slave's conversion. Now Philemon would get him back permanently in a new relationship—an eternal relationship.

Verse 16. Paul did not direct Philemon to set Onesimus free but opened the door to the possibility. Paul urged Philemon to welcome Onesimus home and—by implication—to forgive him. Paul wanted Philemon to receive Onesimus no longer as a slave, but more than a slave. Onesimus had been mere property. Now Philemon was to accept Onesimus as a dearly loved brother—a fellow Christian toward whom Philemon was to extend God's kind of love.