

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH
PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON
PHILEMON 1-25
WEEK OF FEBRUARY 23 – FEBRUARY 28
FORGIVENESS

The shortest of Paul's letters, Philemon is one of the prison epistles, along with Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. The letter to Philemon was written at the same time as Colossians. Philemon was saved under Paul's ministry, probably while Paul was in Ephesus. Philemon was a resident of Colossae. He was wealthy enough to have a home large enough to serve as the meeting place for the Colossian church. Philemon owned a slave, Onesimus, who was not a believer. Onesimus stole from Philemon and ran away to Rome, violating Roman law and defrauding Philemon. While in Rome, Onesimus providentially met Paul and through Paul's proclamation of the gospel was saved. Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon to deliver this letter to his master who he wronged.

In this very personal letter to his beloved brother Philemon, Paul, through this real-life situation, teaches the importance of forgiving others. "Forgiveness is so important that the Holy Spirit devoted an entire book of the Bible to it. In the brief book of Philemon, the spiritual duty to forgive is emphasized but not in principle, parable or word picture. Through a real life situation involving two people dear to him, Paul teaches the importance of forgiving others."

MacArthur Commentary Colossians & Philemon, p. 209

Read Philemon 1-3 and Colossians 4:17:

1. What do you learn about Philemon and his household from these passages?
2. What does Paul say about each member of this family that communicates Paul's deep affection and common bond with them?

Read Philemon 4-7: Paul's Description of the Character of One Who Forgives

3. In verses **4 and 5**, what is it about Philemon that causes Paul to give thanks to God?
4. From **verse 6**, what does Paul pray for Philemon?

The Greek word *Koinonia* is usually translated "fellowship" as it is in the NASB and LSB versions. "it means much more than enjoying each other's company. It refers to a mutual sharing of all life and could be translated "belonging." Believers belong to each other in a mutual partnership, produced by their faith in Christ."

MacArthur Commentary Colossians & Philemon, p. 213

5. In **verse 7**, what was it about Philemon that brought Paul "much joy"?

Read Colossians 4:9 and Philemon 8-16: Paul's Plea for Onesimus

6. From **Philemon 10-16** and **Colossians 4:9**, what does Paul say about the faith of Onesimus, Paul's relationship with Onesimus and Paul's deep affection for Onesimus?

7. Paul desired Philemon to receive Onesimus back into his home and forgive him. From **verses 8 -10**, why did Paul not simply tell Philemon what to do?
8. From **verses 9 and 10**, how does Paul appeal to Philemon?
9. In **verse 11**, what point did Paul make about Onesimus? Also read **2 Cor 5:17** for your answer.
10. In **verses 12-14**, why was it that Paul did not insist that Onesimus stay with Paul to minister to him?
11. What attribute of God is inferred in **verse 15**?

“Paul knew who rules over the affairs of men and women. We cannot infallibly discern God's purpose, particularly in events involving wrong human actions. Sometimes, especially with the benefit of hindsight, we can guess at God's purpose in what happens to us, in the difficult situations that life brings.”

Colossians & Philemon, John Woodhouse, p.292

12. In **verses 15-16**, what does Paul suggest about God's providence (God's sovereign governance by which He with wisdom, love and care directs all things) in Onesimus wrongfully running from Philemon and now returning to him?

Read Philemon 17-25: Paul's Appeal to Philemon

13. In **verses 17 – 21**, Paul, confident in Philemon's love for Paul and his love for Christ, makes several appeals to Philemon to encourage him to receive and forgive Onesimus. What appeal does Paul make to Philemon in:
 - **Verse 17**
 - **Verses 18-19**
 - **Verse 20**
 - **Verse 21**
14. In **verse 22**, Paul expresses his desire to visit Philemon upon release from jail. How would the prospect of Paul's visit provide spiritual motivation to forgive Onesimus?
15. In **verse 23-24**, how would the mention of Epaphras, Philemon's pastor, and the additional men serving Paul in Rome, motivate Philemon to forgive and accept Onesimus?
16. Paul opened this letter to Philemon with a word of gospel grace (**vs.3**) and closes with the reminder of Christ's provision of His grace (**vs. 25**). Why is that so important for Philemon to consider?

Forgiveness is a deliberate act of love, mercy and grace; a decision to not hold something against another despite what he or she has done.

“Never are we more like God than when we forgive.” MacArthur Commentary Colossians & Philemon, p. 224

17. Who do you need to forgive for having wronged you? Spend time to ask God for the grace to forgive as you have been forgiven by Christ.