

Lessons from the life of Paul

1) Last week; Life of Onesimus

- a) A picture of our “lostness” and enslavement to sin and culture
- b) A picture of restoration and hope
 - i) Useless to useful
 - ii) Slave to free
 - iii) Enemy to friend
 - iv) Distant to beloved

2) Also looked at the life of Philemon

- a) An example of godly conduct and service
 - i) Built a godly household; a God honoring household (vs 1)
 - ii) Gave of his material goods for God’s use (vs 2)
 - iii) Trusted companion and friend (vs 1)
 - iv) Lover of God and of His people (vs 5)
 - v) Obedient to God and to His word (vs 21)
 - vi) A “refreshment” to the saints; a place of rest and refuge (vs 7)
 - vii) A man of prayer (vs 22)
 - viii) But an ordinary man... just Philemon... just like us

3) This week we will look at the lessons from the life of Paul

- 1. A prisoner; likely in Rome under house arrest. If so, in his third year or fourth of imprisonment

- a. Phl 1:1 *“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus”*

- b. After 10+ years of ministry

- i. Phl 1:9 *“since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus”*

- 1. πρεσβύτης, from presbuteros, “elder”

- ii. Tempered by hardship, deepened through obedience, humbled through submission, imprisoned for his faith, emboldened in the midst of false accusations and questionable counsel.

- c. We see the evidence of this maturity in Paul’s letter to Philemon.

- 2. As we have seen, Paul is writing to Philemon to ask a favor, but more than a favor. He is **asking Philemon to forgive Onesimus’ wrongs against him.**

- a. As a favor to Paul (for he is Philemon’s spiritual father, coworker, and beloved friend) (vs 1,19)

- b. Out of love for Onesimus and Philemon, his brothers in Christ

- c. In obedience to his Lord and his calling (vs 21)

3. In some sense, what he is asking should be fairly easy

- a. Should a desirable outcome for Philemon
 - i. Consistent with Philemon's love for Paul
 - ii. Consistent with Philemon's love for, and obedience to, Christ
 - iii. Consistent with Philemon's love of the brethren
- b. And, Paul knows the right thing here...the godly outcome.
 - i. First, that Philemon forgives Onesimus and welcomes him back as a brother in Christ; perhaps to be freed from slavery... perhaps to be sent back to Paul as a gift of love... but certainly to be forgiven. Just as we looked into the probable mindset of Philemon last week, we want to do the same this week in regards to Paul. These words of Jesus are likely echoing in the mind of Paul as he writes....

1. Matt 6:14ff (after the Lord's prayer) *"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."*
2. Matt 18:21ff *"Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?'" 22 Jesus *said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' 27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 Then summoning him, his lord *said to*

him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." You see, this attitude and behavior cannot happen in the kingdom of heaven.

3. Or his own words to the Ephesians under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; Eph 4:32 *"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you"*

ii. Second, that Onesimus puts himself back under the rightful authority of Philemon and provides restitution.

1. Num 5:5ff *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 6 "Speak to the sons of Israel, 'When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty, 7 then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged."*

4. Why might it be hard? We touched upon this last week focusing on these verses from Philemon's viewpoint...

- a. Philemon's "legitimate" righteous anger?
- b. Philemon's personal hurt and sense of betrayal?
- c. Perhaps the well meaning commiseration of friends?
- d. Of lesser likelihood, perhaps Onesimus' inability to make restitution for Philemon's loss?

5. Aware of possible resistance, Paul begins by commending him...and it is not simple and shallow flattery. Rather, it points Philemon to a remembrance of who he is and what God has done.

- a. Phm 1:4ff *"I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; 6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. 7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother."*

- b. This is not a new theme for Paul, calling his readers to live out a life of faith based upon what God has done...calling them to remember His great grace. This is at the heart of Paul's letter to Philemon, which we will look at this more fully next week
- 6. He appeals to the possibility of a sovereign plan of God in Onesimus' escape
 - a. Phm 1:15ff *"For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord."*
- 7. He guarantees Onesimus' restitution
 - a. Phm 1:18ff *"But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it"*
- 8. He appeals to Philemon's own salvation and Paul's part in it... that he has been the recipient of **God's** forgiveness.
 - a. Phm 1:19 *"(not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well)"*
- 9. He appeals to Philemon's personal love for him (Paul)
 - a. Phm 1:17, 20 *"If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me..."*
- 10. So, does this show that Paul had serious concerns about Philemon's willingness to forgive?
 - a. I don't believe so. vs 21 *"Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say."* So why all the appeals? Guarantees?
 - i. The reconciliation between Onesimus and Philemon is of such importance to Paul because it will be a demonstration of, and testimony to, the love and transforming work of Christ. And that heart of reconciliation... of forgiveness... will have effect far beyond this individual matter. And lest we forget, the display of godly character brings God glory
 - 1. These realities are what lie behind not only Paul's appeals, but behind Paul's prayer in vs 6 *"I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake."*
 - a. That the fellowship of your faith may become effective; powerful. We will look at this verse in greater detail next week, but for now...
- 11. Let me repeat a question from last week... can we understand why Paul did not just order Philemon to reinstate Onesimus and take him back into his household? In vs 8,

Paul says he could have. *“Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, I yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you”*

- a. Would it have resulted in a testimony to the power of forgiveness and transforming love?
- b. But by making it a matter of an appeal to love... to what is right... to what God has done in Philemon’s life... it increases the risk of disobedience, of selfishness, of failure... but it also maximizes the opportunity to display God’s glory.

12. That is really what underlies all of Paul’s appeals to Philemon. He wants to eliminate any foothold that Satan might use to derail the loving and godly relationships between Philemon, Paul, and Onesimus. And, more importantly, to eliminate anything that might compromise their testimonies and the “fellowship” of their faith or the simple declaration of Jesus, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

- a. The risk that Paul took is much the same as the risk that God takes with us; He appeals to love, to what is right, to what He has done.
 - i. Deut 10:12 *“Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear (revere) the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul”*
 - ii. John 14:15 *“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”*
 - iii. Ps 34:8 *“O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!”*
 - iv. Which is more desirable as a parent...your child’s grudging obedience out of fear of punishment or their obedience out of love and respect?

13. This week we have taken a relatively brief look at the power of forgiveness and the “fellowship of faith” talked about in vs 6. Next week we will take a deeper dive into both, seeing how they play out on the life of the believer and their importance to our sanctification and the display of God’s glory.

- a. But to close for this week, what have we discovered from the life of Paul?
 - i. His deep love of the brethren, illustrated by his love for Philemon and Onesimus
 - ii. His zeal for their edification and testimony
 - iii. His selfless viewpoint
 1. Far more concerned about the reconciliation of Philemon and Onesimus and their testimony to God’s power than his own

imprisonment and upcoming trial. He is far more concerned with magnifying God's glory than magnifying his own.

- b.* And let us understand something... The beauty of Paul's life was formed through endurance, trial, and humility, and boldness. We read of his disappointment and unrealized hopes... of his sleepless nights and wearisome toil... of his shipwrecks, beatings, and persecution. Paul did not emerge fully formed and mature when he came to faith in Christ. The same is true of us... we are brought to Christlikeness when we lean on God's comfort in trial and persevere in obedience. In closing, I remind you of the words of James, *"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing"*

Let us pray