

- 1) This morning we come to our fourth study from Paul's letter to Philemon. Up to this point, we have examined the lives of the characters involved
 - a) Life of Onesimus
 - i) A picture of our "lostness" and enslavement to sin and culture
 - ii) A picture of restoration and hope
 - b) Life of Philemon
 - i) An example of godly conduct and service; a man very much like us
 - c) Most recently, the life of Paul
 - i) His deep love of the brethren
 - ii) His zeal for their edification and testimony
 - iii) His selfless viewpoint
 - iv) His absolute commitment to glorifying God
- 2) This week we take a deeper look at the "fellowship of faith" and the centrality of forgiveness in the Christian life.
 - a) Phm 1:4ff Paul prays this... *"I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers...that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake."* (NASB)
 - (1) "Fellowship of your faith" *koinōnia*, speaks of joint participation;
 - (a) So, what is in mind is this joint participation and interaction in the expression and enjoyment of mutually held faith. Let me show you an example...
 - (b) What Paul is praying for is what we see in Acts 2:42ff. *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people."*
 - (i) This expresses the heart of our Christian interaction
 - (ii) This expresses the heart of our unity
 1. Our unity is not a result of our tolerance of diverse viewpoints or acceptance of cultural differences. We are not called to "create" unity, but to maintain and keep what already exists.
 - a. Eph 4:1ff *"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

2. On the contrary, it is found in our “one mindedness”, united in purpose and perspective
 - a. Rom 15:5ff *“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”*
 - b. Phil 1:27 *“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”*
3. And what is the origin and basis of our “one-mindedness”?
 - a. 2 Cor 2:16 *“For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.”*
 - i. To the extent that we have the mind of Christ, we will have unity. To the extent that we have the mind of Bob...or Diana...or Gary... in opposition to the mind of Christ, we will not.
 - ii) Back to the verse... *“I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers...that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ’s sake.”*
 - iii) “fellowship of faith may become effective”; *energēs* effective, powerful, energized
 - (1) Not really effective or not effective. The idea is becoming more effective; more powerful; energized
 - iv) “through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ’s sake.”
 - (1) Not ginosko, but epiginosko; speaks of “deep experiential knowledge”
 - (a) Something deeply considered, not casually held
 - (2) This speaks to the means... of how this “fellowship of faith” happens
 - (a) It is not fundamentally a result of effort... or even obedience
 - (i) Not to disparage effort or obedience; we are called to both
 - (b) It is not even fundamentally a result of brotherly love
 - (i) though it will be present
 - (c) It is fundamentally a result of understanding... remembrance of... what God has done. And specifically, it is what God has done in Philemon... and in us
 - (i) Not “for” us... not taking us through trial or comforting us in loss
 1. Not bad things, certainly. And they are things for which we should be thankful...what God does for us certainly affects our relationship with Him

2. But that is not what Paul has in mind. Paul focuses on what God has done “in you” ; “every good thing which is in you for Christ’s sake”
3. Paul’s prayer for Philemon is that, as he contemplates and considers what God has done **in** him, the outworking of his faith would be strengthened... energized... to lead him to do that which honors God. He will, in his contemplation, learn to love and trust God more. In this specific instance, it will lead him to have a forgiving heart toward Onesimus and an enhanced testimony of God’s grace and power in that forgiveness. As we have seen in previous lessons, that is why Paul seeks to remind Philemon how God has shaped and transformed him.

b) A familiar theme in God’s word

- i) External behavior is viewed as a natural expression of an internal condition and understanding.

(1) Eph 1:18ff *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.”* Then, in chpt 4...

(2) Col 1:9ff *“For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”*

(3) Gal 2:20 *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”*

(4) We see this same truth in the OT as well...Jer 31:31ff *“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. 33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”*

- ii) But, external behavior is no guarantee of internal condition.

(1) Beloved, I would caution you, do not try to live a “Christian” life apart from a redeemed life; apart from having surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus. It is a

fool's errand and an exercise in futility and failure. It leads to pride in accomplishment and despair in failure... a descent into Pharisaism and ineffectual works. At best (or should I say, worst), it provides a false sense of security and hope. We see the necessity of God's forgiveness in righteous living... now we look to the necessity of our own.

3) Forgiveness is central to the expression of true faith

a) God's word doesn't really recognize the thought of a true faith without a forgiving heart.

i) We touched upon this last week, looking at Jesus words...

(1) *But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*

(2) *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."*

4) Forgiveness is central to the expression of true humility, kindness, and compassion

(1) Col 3:12ff *"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*

(a) These traits are of a piece...they express themselves together and harmoniously

5) Forgiveness is central to the expression of true love and godliness

a) Luke 6:27ff, (Jesus great sermon on the mount) *"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. 31 Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. They*

will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

- 6) You must practice these things and have these attitudes in order to have a forgiving heart
- i) When there is a failure to forgive, there is first a failure in these areas.
 - ii) Are we men and women who are quick to forgive? Slow to judgment and condemnation? Merciful? Long suffering and patient when wronged?
 - (1) Maybe we need to start with this question...do I even desire these things?
 - (2) If so, we are brought back to the truths found in Philemon... that they result from what God does in us... as we remember His goodness and mercy toward us... and yield to His transforming work in us. This would be an appropriate place to end, but...
- 7) There is one more question that intrudes on our consciousness as we reflect upon forgiveness and it is this... What does forgiveness look like? What are its demands?
- a) Multiple ideas of what forgiveness looks like and what it requires. Some say:
 - i) Five types of forgiveness... three types... two types...
 - ii) Forgiveness should only be offered if there is repentance...no, it's freely given and not contingent upon repentance
 - iii) Some speak of forgiveness as distinct from forbearance... as distinct from grace
 - (1) All those arguments have some degree of validity. But the confusion comes in when we fail to understand the reason for forgiveness...it's purpose and design.
 - b) The ultimate goal of forgiveness is to bring reconciliation... to bring those which are apart and broken back together. **Forgiveness is a release of that which would hinder or prevent reconciliation.**
 - (1) In the case of God's forgiveness of our sin, it is to bring reconciliation with God
 - (i) 2 Cor 5:17ff *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them”*
 - (ii) God's desire for reconciliation with His people stands in tension with the demands of His holiness. Hence the need for a perfect sacrifice.
 - (2) In the case of forgiveness between Christians, the exposure of, and forgiveness of, our offenses between one another restores unity and brings us back into fellowship. (whether our offense, or our brother's) Jesus addresses both...
 - (a) Matt 5:23ff *“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your*

offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

(b) Mark 11:25 *“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.”*

(c) Both have loving reconciliation and restoration as its goal

c) But forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things!

i) Differences between forgiveness and reconciliation

(1) Reconciliation cannot exist without repentance; forgiveness can.

(2) Reconciliation seeks to heal and mitigate consequences; forgiveness not as much.

(a) heal and mitigate consequences, not ignore and eliminate consequence

(3) Reconciliation requires closeness and connection; forgiveness does not

(4) Reconciliation requires the efforts and commitment of all parties; forgiveness can be unilateral.

(5) Wisdom is needed to know which can be achieved and how it is to be achieved.

(a) We cannot be reconciled to someone who unavailable or deceased. But we can forgive. But to what purpose if not for reconciliation? Heb 12 gives answer.

(i) Heb 12:14 *“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled”* We forgive to restrain and eliminate bitterness.

(b) We can forgive an offense yet still enforce or allow penalty or consequence (from either the repentant or unrepentant) with an eye toward reconciliation.

(i) 1 Tim 1:19ff *“some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. 20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme”*

1. Quite a penalty... but done in service of repentance and reconciliation

(c) We can forgive an offense but put off reconciliation to test the validity of the offenders repentance. We see a sense of this in 1 Tim 5:22

(i) 1 Tim 5:22 *“Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.”*

(d) We can forgive and not seek reconciliation if the risk to self and others is too great

(i) Acts 15:36 *“After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along*

with them also. 38 But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.”

- a. It is hard for me to imagine that the issue here was a lack of forgiveness. It is likely that Paul saw a greater risk to the ministry than did Barnabas.

(6) There is no “one size fits all” path to forgiveness and reconciliation. But it should always be the desire of our hearts and pursued with wisdom

(a) Forgiveness without reconciliation should always leave us with a sense of incompleteness and a sorrow over that which remains broken and apart

(i) The estranged child who will not reconcile

(ii) The broken marriage, even if on biblical grounds

(iii) The close friend and coworker that abandons his faith and remains unrepentant and out of fellowship (you can fill in the blank...)

(7) But our sense of sorrow and loss must not be allowed to steal our joy in Christ

(8) Do you see the tension in pursuing forgiveness and reconciliation? The difficulties in walking the worthy walk? The need for godly wisdom and direction?

8) Our takeaways?

a) As we look to walk worthy of our calling and resources in Christ, we must understand that it comes from internal transformation and yielding, moment by moment, to the Spirit of God residing in us.

b) We are called to have hearts inclined to forgiveness and reconciliation, as that is an important part of the “worthy walk”... the walk that honors and glorifies God

Let us pray