

# Motivations for Forgiving

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*Philemon 4-6*

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Text: Philemon 4-6

Proposition: Understanding the motivations to forgive will help us all to see that a person who is unwilling to forgive is self-centered and self-destructive.

Introduction: The story of Philemon is really an amazing story of God's grace and sovereignty. This is as dramatic an illustration of God ruling in the affairs as is God directing the servant of King Ahasuerus to find just the right scroll to bring to the King's attention the news he needed about Mordecai which eventually led to the saving of God's people. This little book is all about forgiveness. Paul is writing Philemon to forgive and restore this runaway slave, Onesimus.

We started our study of this book with a precaution. We tried to be clear in explaining the warnings we find in Scripture about what happens when a person has an unforgiving, resentful spirit.

1. Produces Bitterness
2. Opens to door to the Devil's attack
3. Means God will not forgive us

Obviously, God is very serious about you and I being willing to forgive those who wrong us. Remember what we have said. We are never more like the Lord Jesus than when we are willing to forgive. Conversely, we are never more unlike Christ than when we are unwilling for forgive.

We have shared with you some of the word pictures the Bible uses to illustrate forgiveness.

- The arrow

- The clay pot
- “Nothing Owed”

As we begin today I want to share a few more.

- To forgive is to turn the key, open the cell door, and let the prisoner walk free
- To forgive is to bundle up all the garbage and trash and dispose of it, leaving the house clean and fresh
- To forgive is to loose the moorings of a ship and release it to the open sea
- To forgive is to relax a stranglehold on a wrestling opponent.

In today’s message we are going to learn more specifics about Philemon. We already know he was a godly man. He was a man of wealth. The church in Colossae met in his home. He has a godly family (v. 2).

In verses 4-6 Paul is going to commend Philemon for his godly character and in doing so will help us to understand some of the primary reasons we should continually display a spirit of forgiveness.

Understanding the motivations to forgive will help us all to see that a person who is unwilling to forgive is self-centered and self-destructive.

#### I. Concerning Others

Explanation: The construction of this verse makes the first statement correspond to the last statement.

“Hearing of thy love...toward all the saints.”

A. It takes love to forgive

Explanation: This first point is nothing new.

We know it takes love to forgive. We see this demonstrated by our Lord.

**Nehemiah 9:17** They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

Explanation: This is a great verse for illustrating why love is so necessary.

1. They disobeyed His Word
2. They ignored His works
3. They wanted their own way

Application: After all the good things God had done for them and all the ways He provided for them and all the ways they insulted Him; He was still willing to forgive. We could list several hurts just like these. Yet unlike our loving God, some of us are unwilling to forgive those who have insulted or disobeyed or rebelled against us.

Explanation: We also see the laser beam power of this kind of love demonstrated by our Lord Jesus.

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.** And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Application: This is the ultimate act of betrayal, false accusations, lies, rejection, mockery, ridicule...we could go on. Every offense you have ever suffered, Jesus suffered on the cross. Yet, He was suffering our mockery, ridicule, rejection, scorn and betrayal. Think what that means, He was willing to forgive us for things for which we are not willing to forgive others.

Application: This is one of the reasons why we can say that a person who is unwilling to forgive is very self-centered.

- B. It takes a forgiving spirit to be able to help others (v. 7)

Explanation: This is where we have to understand the language of the New Testament era. This word bowels can be somewhat offsetting. This is vernacular of the day to express how we would say their hearts were refreshed. If you lived in those days your Valentines would say, "I love you with all my bowels." I am glad we changed that one.

Explanation: So what Paul is saying is that Philemon was a great encouragement to the believers in Colossae and probably other places. He had shown others great kindness, can he do the same for Onesimus?

Application: This word “refreshed” is very helpful to understand how we are to be involved in this ministry of encouragement. The root for this word is used to describe the ministry of our Lord in Matthew 11.

Matthew 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Application: Without a forgiving spirit we cannot minister encouragement to other believers. Think about what that means. If we cannot help other believers, we really are not fulfilling Christ’s commission to us. We can share in the ministry of Christ when we are able to refresh and encourage other saints.

## II. Concerning You

Explanation: We can see from the character of Philemon some of the personal reasons we should forgive.

### A. For Faith

Explanation: For his faith to continue to grow, he is going to need to forgive Onesimus.

Application: There are Christians who may be frustrated that their Christian life isn't going anywhere. They don't feel like they are making any spiritual progress. The problem could be an unforgiving spirit.

Explanation: This verse also indicates to us the fact that we can by God's grace forgive any wrong committed against us.

Application: Because of the knowledge that is in us; knowing what Christ has done for us we should be willing to do the same for others.

#### B. For Fellowship

Explanation: I want to key in on this point. This verse not only helps us to understand the importance of forgiveness but also we learn something about the power of fellowship and how the two work together.

Explanation: This verse explains that one of the powerful benefits of unified Christian fellowship is that it results in helping one another to grow in our knowledge of Christ. Now think with me about what this is saying. Paul is saying that when we gather here for services or when we fellowship outside of these walls we are to do so that we are increasing in our knowledge of Christ. In other words we are to help each other grow spiritually.

Application: An unforgiving spirit will destroy both fellowship and the edification process. Remember the warning Paul gave to the church at Corinth.

**2 Corinthians 2:10-11** To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it* in the person of Christ; **(11)** Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

**2 Corinthians 2:10-11** Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, **(11)** so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

Application: I hope there is no one here who is holding a grudge against someone else in here.

Explanation: “the communication of your faith:”

Κοινωνία - koinōnia

**Thayer Definition:**

1) fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse

1a) the share which one has in anything, participation

1b1) the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship (in fulfilling the apostolic office)



Application: This word means more than just being in the same room and enjoying each other's company. It has the idea of "belonging." In this case Philemon and Onesimus were now brothers and both belong to the family of God. We who have trusted Christ all belong to God's family. God's family should get along. This may be why God is so insistent that we be a forgiving people.

### III. Concerning Christ

Explanation: You have heard me say many times that the Christian life is all about God. Because of that, everything I say and do reflects upon Christ. Let's think of how the practice of forgiveness fits into that statement.

#### A. Praise

Explanation: The literal reading at the end of verse 6.

**Philemon 1:6** That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you **in Christ Jesus**.

In Christ Jesus (εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν)  
Connect with *may become effectual*, and render, as Rev., **unto Christ**; that is, **unto Christ's glory**. (Vines Word Studies)

Application: We have said several times that we are never more like Christ than when we forgive. Something else we could say is that one of the most powerful ways we can demonstrate the glory of Christ is to forgive. The idea behind the word glory is opinion. When people know we have been hurt or wronged and can still forgive; that makes a powerful impact for the sake of the Gospel and the glory of Christ.

Application: The fact is we cannot forgive apart from Christ so we would be insulting our Lord to take any kind of credit for being able to truly forgive. We sometimes say things like, "I am not a resentful person." "I don't have the kind of personality that harbors resentment." These may be true statements but they are only true because the grace of God has worked in you. Still, there may yet come a circumstance that is difficult to forgive even for some who would not normally have trouble.

## B. Power

Explanation: We have touched on this idea in previous messages. That is, the idea that forgiveness is one of the most powerful displays of the grace of God.

Illustration: Joseph

**Genesis 50:20** But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.

Application: I would also like to think of this idea in relation to those who are lost. Think of the influence this can have on their lives. Let them see the process of forgiveness and the grace that makes it possible.

Illustration: Jacob Deshazer was a pilot during WWII. He was one of Doolittles Raiders. This squadron led the bombing raids on Tokyo only six months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Deshazer by his own testimony hated the Japanese. "I didn't care if every person in Japan got killed." "The more that got killed the better." He was bitter and resentful for what the Japanese had done to the U.S. During one of his raids his plane ran out of fuel. After parachuting to the ground he was captured by the Japanese and spent the next three years in a prisoner of war camp. During that time he was beaten, starved and tortured. In the midst of his despair and bitterness he was given a Bible. While reading one day, he came across Romans 10:9.

**Romans 10:9** That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

That day he trusted Christ and everything about his life began to change. He no longer hated his captors; he says that he began to feel sorry for them.

Three years after his release Deshazer went back to Japan as a missionary. He says many come to Christ but there was one particular convert that stands out, Mitsua Fushita.

Fushita was the pilot that led the attack on Pearl Harbor. Fushita read a tract written by Deshazer and trusted Christ. These two men who were once bitter enemies joined together to become traveling evangelists preaching the Gospel throughout Japan.

Conclusion: See what Paul says in verse 3.

Philemon 1:3 Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is exactly what some of us need this morning. We need the grace that it takes to be able to forgive and we need the peace that comes when we do.