

## Transcription of 20TS204

Philemon

"Paul's Postcard to Philemon"

May 13, 2020

All right. Let's open our Bibles this evening to the book of Philemon. Hopefully you've found it by now.

Paul's little note - and it is a note by comparison to some of the letters he writes, it's only twenty-five verses in all - was written to a fellow named Philemon, as you might have guessed. He lived in Colosse. And it is written by Paul on behalf of a runaway slave that Philemon had, whose name was Onesimus, whom Paul had met in jail and then led him, there in Rome, to the Lord. It is the shortest of Paul's writings. It is the only one of his prison epistles that is addressed to an individual.

It has, really, one major topic - the topic of forgiveness - the kind of forgiveness that God offers to you and me. And you know what that forgiveness is all about. And then, having received it, the kind of forgiveness that God demands that we then offer to one another.

Twenty-five verses, but there are several players, I think, in the story that can teach us. From Philemon's perspective, it is an address in the Bible of the issue of a Christian having to deal with the politics of the day; the Christian and, here, with slavery. Paul asks of him to forgive this runaway slave, Onesimus, and to restore him to a place of honor and relationship, though he had run away and had stolen from his owner; and, at least under the current law that Paul was living under, would probably have qualified to be crucified for his crime. For Onesimus, the runaway slave, he's only known the other side of slavery; that's been his life. He greatly feared now having to go back and to face the music for going AWOL. Though he had been forgiven by Jesus because of his salvation, you can only imagine the trepidation, I think, in his heart that would have caused him to wonder if this was a good idea. Paul counseled him to go back and to stand before his master, even to deliver this letter. But that's really Onesimus' struggle. For Paul, who was no stranger to slavery, he knew about it in a scholarly sense from the benevolent form of slavery in the Old Testament history to the current kind of abuse of slavery under the Roman Empire, where many were enslaved, at least in the known world. Paul viewed this wickedness and this wicked social practice and the suffering that it brought, but he viewed it from Calvary. He believed - and you can read it for yourself - that the only way a heart could be changed and man

delivered from sin was to come to Calvary and meet Jesus. And so he preaches Jesus. He preaches the love of God. He preaches the sacrifice of the cross. He doesn't get into the weeds of the politics of slavery, which he might very well have done - made a good case for it. But his interest was if the heart is changed, then the practice is changed as well.

One of the first things, I think, most Christians learn when they get saved - they learn of God's forgiveness. When Moses asked the LORD to reveal Himself to him, and the LORD put him in that cleft of the rock (there in Exodus 33), as the LORD passed by him, He declared, "The LORD God, He is merciful. He is gracious. He's longsuffering. He's abundant in goodness and in truth. And He keeps mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquities, forgiving transgression, forgiving sin; no means clearing the guilty but even visiting their iniquities upon their fathers and on their children to the third or fourth generation." But God's own revelation of Himself to Moses was His forgiveness. The truth is found - of God's forgiveness - from page to book, from cover to cover.....in a thousand ways.

You probably are well familiar with the story of the prodigal son, and I think you would be amiss to miss maybe the greatest lesson. It isn't so much the son who went home, because the son who went home after taking his inheritance and kind of burning through it and alienating himself from the father was not that he was going home looking for restoration, if you will, or forgiveness. He was, in his mind, just making a plan to somehow be able to get from his father some mercy. What he found was a father watching for him, running to him, and forgiving him lavishly and eagerly and totally.

It is only when you're saved and been forgiven by the Lord that God then calls upon you to apply that forgiveness in your relationship with others. You might remember that prayer we call the "Our Father," and it really is the disciples' prayer. But Jesus, in teaching the disciples to pray, one of the lines in there was "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." And then Jesus went on to explain at the end of that prayer, that outline (Matthew 6:14-15), "If you forgive men their trespasses, the Father will forgive you. But if you will not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours." Startling, stark, arresting verses! But only to say until you receive the Lord's forgiveness, you can't really offer to others any forgiveness either. But the minute you receive from God that which you now stand with, with great joy, the Lord has an obligation laid upon you to extend that forgiveness to others. James would write, in chapter 2:13 of

his little letter, "He would have judgment without mercy to those who have shown no mercy. But mercy always triumphs or rejoices over judgment." So, a forgiveness that is demanded only once we come to know the Lord. Not so that we can maintain our relationship with God because that doesn't change; but so that we can maintain our fellowship with God and avoid His chastening hand. You might remember to go back and read Matthew 18:23-24 - one of those verses there in the middle - about the fellow who received such mercy but wouldn't extend it to someone who owed him so much less.

Well, getting back to our story here, Philemon - we know Philemon was a wealthy businessman. We know he owned at least one slave. He lived in Colosse. We know that his slave, Onesimus, had stolen away from him somehow and maybe taken from him to be able to afford to travel from Colosse to Rome, I guess maybe to get lost in the crowds. For some reason he had been arrested and imprisoned and, as the Lord would have it, he ran into Paul in prison. Paul, as he was known to do, shared the gospel with him, would lead him to the Lord, and by the time that this letter was written, Onesimus had asked Jesus to be the Lord of his life, his Savior. Add to that understanding, Paul had also, years earlier, led his owner, Philemon - to whom this letter was written - to the Lord as well in Ephesus. And, to add even more intrigue, his current pastor, whose name was Epaphras, who oversaw the church in Colosse, was now in prison in Rome there as well. In fact, Philemon's son (his name is Archippus) had, it seemed from what we read in the letter to the Colossians, stepped in to fill Epaphras' role in the church while he had gone to Rome to consult with Paul about the gnostic heresy that was invading the church (Paul had written about it in the Colosse letter), and somehow that pastor was arrested as well. So in jail we have Paul, and we have Onesimus, who now is saved. We have Philemon who, it's his pastor but also Paul who had led not only Philemon to the Lord but his slave that had run away. So all of these paths cross in jail, and Paul sends this note to Philemon asking him to do what only God would and could require. He's asking a brother in the Lord to restore a runaway slave who had now come to know Jesus. And Paul will say, "He's your brother now." And he asks in a way that I don't know how anyone could have said "no" to Paul or said "no" to the request.

Paul had been able to convince this runaway slave, Onesimus, to go back to stand before his master and then to present this letter of Paul's, imploring him to do the right thing. Would it be a scary move, I think. Paul is pulling out all the stops. "Whatever the Lord wants to do," but Paul's got his arm like this (Pastor Jack's hands are up and fists are clenched) and kind of twisting it just to be sure

that.....he's not going to force his hand, but he's certainly going to make it hard for him to do anything but the right thing. Paul was a good salesman, I think, and in this book there're lots of levels that you can learn from, and I hope that something in this short letter will improve your walk with the Lord.

So verse 1, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house." Notice just the way Paul always does - he puts his name first. I think it would have stirred Philemon's heart. This was a personal note from a great apostle that he had had the opportunity to listen to years earlier in Ephesus and had come to know the Lord because of Paul's ministry. So I think when he reads "Paul," in Philemon's mind his mind is taken back to Ephesus, to the three years Paul spent planting the church there, to eventually the riot of Diana's followers in town, to the demon hunters who were trying to cast out demons and the Jesus that Paul was preaching, and the demons had turned on these folks, to the two years of meeting that Paul had in the house of Tyrannus - the schoolhouse - after Paul had been asked to leave the synagogue where his studies had begun. All of that is where Philemon and Paul were there.

Notice also that Paul doesn't use the authoritative title of apostle, which he would use oftentimes. This was personal. This wasn't he was writing as an authority, although he'll mention he should or he could use it; he hoped it wouldn't be necessary. But it's like the letters to Timothy or to Titus. They're an appeal from a brother and fellow minister to a friend and fellow laborer.

Paul adds of himself that he is a "prisoner of Jesus Christ." And, by the way, just as a side note, Paul always, when he was in prison - and a lot of these letters were written from prison - he's never a prisoner of Rome or a prisoner of whoever he ran into. It's always a "prisoner of Jesus." He felt like his life was ordained divinely by the Lord's hand. But just trying to read it from the standpoint of receiving this from Paul, it seems very subtle. It's almost as if he said, "I'm in prison for Jesus. What I'm about to ask you to do is not nearly as much suffering as I'm going through," but I could just be reading into it. But I know that this is a letter of persuasion. Paul wants this fellow to take his slave, Onesimus, back and restore him or, even better, "release him so he can come back and serve with me." So, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother." Timothy had been with Paul in Ephesus. I think it's extremely likely that Philemon would know Timothy as being Paul's sidekick or chief aide. He's mentioned in a lot of the

letters that Paul writes. He's a leader in training. Paul would eventually send Timothy to Ephesus to be the senior pastor there. So, Timothy seems the heir apparent. But notice he calls him, here, a brother; he's "our brother." "We're family, Philemon," and before he is done, he'll be calling Philemon, in verse 20, our "brother" as well.

So we read, in verse 2, that Philemon's house was the meeting place for the church in Colosse. Paul recognized Philemon as a "beloved friend" and as a "fellow laborer." He even greets his wife, Apphia - her name means fruitful - and his son, Archippus. Archippus, in Greek, means the master of a horse. I don't know. But he was the fellow that, in the absence of Epaphras - the pastor who had gone to see Paul about these weird doctrines that were floating around - this is the fellow that had stepped into the responsibilities as pastor. In fact, Paul writes in chapter 4:17 of Colossians to Archippus by name, "Take heed to the ministry that you've received from the Lord. Be sure you fulfill it." And it does seem like the Lord had given to Archippus a tough job for a young man facing a lot of false teachers in this little town. So Paul calls him a "fellow soldier," and I guess he'd have to continue to be that, fighting for the faith, especially if it appears that Epaphras, the pastor, had now been arrested and been held in Rome with Paul as well. So Paul writes to Philemon, acknowledges, notice, the church that was in his house, acknowledges his wife and his son, and of the meeting place that they were together. All churches in the 1<sup>st</sup> century - in fact, for the first 300 years - met in homes. The very first, earliest church building that we have discovered was on the Euphrates River in Syria. It was called Dura-Europos, and it was basically early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and they had really combined two rooms into one by removing the wall between them and platforming the room. It was unusual in building, and it is believed that that might very well have been the first church building. So, for the most part, every church met in a home.

We read, in verse 3, that Paul then says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." And it is Paul's kind of opening, standard greeting. It appears in almost all of his epistles. Grace is the means of salvation. Peace is the result that comes when you receive God's grace through His Son Jesus, the Lord. And they're linked together. So God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is God. It refers to the Lord and to the triune God constantly.

But I don't want to just skip over the word "grace" here because this is a book about forgiveness. Grace.....let me illustrate grace as God gives it to you. If your car is stolen, and you report it to the police, and they say to you, "Well, the odds of finding it are pretty slim," if a few hours later, you receive a call from the police department, and they say, "Hey, we found your car, and we've arrested the man who was in it; we're going to ask you to come down to the police station and identify the car," and when he shows up, they ask if he wants to press charges. If this man, whose car was stolen, said, "Yes, he stole my car, and he deserves punishment," that would be defined as justice. If you were to say, "Well, there's no harm, and there's no foul, you can let him go, I hope he learns from this terrible experience," that would be forgiveness. But if you were to say, "Look, I'm sorry you don't have a car, take mine, I have another one, and here's my gas card so you can fill up your tank when it gets low, and before you leave, let's call my insurance agent, and let's put your name on the policy so if there's trouble, you'll be insured," that's grace. That's the unmerited favor, the things that we don't deserve. And I think it is important to - each of us and especially here to Paul - that we understand Paul's call to Philemon was to extend God's grace that he'd received to this runaway slave, to give him something he didn't deserve, to go beyond the justice call or even the forgiveness..... "Well, we'll just forget it this time." No, no, no. To give him more than he deserves or could ever hope to ask for.

Paul begins his letter, in verse 4, by saying, "I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints." Paul begins by thanking the Lord for Philemon. He knew this was a man who had been with the Lord. Paul had led him to the Lord. He would have heard from his pastor who was now in prison with him, Epaphras, about how he had been serving the Lord, how his home was open to the teaching of God's Word, how his entire family - his son, his wife - had been involved in ministry. And, no doubt, a lot of extra prayers had been going up for Philemon and for the church in Colosse and, no doubt, for Paul, in particular, hoping that he could get a resolution for this runaway slave. So Paul starts by pointing out that he knew Philemon was a man of great love and faith in the Lord. He was a genuine believer. He lived his life seeking to please the Lord, to honor Him, to obey Him. And this would be important for what he was about to ask him to do because Christians forgive because they're forgiven. The world doesn't have that capacity because they don't know that to be so. So their forgiveness has to only be extended to the sense of their human heart having some kind of a natural compassion. But only believers can extend real grace. And that's what Paul is going

to ask for. "Look, Philemon, I know your love for Jesus is real. I've heard even from your pastor how it's been extended to all of the people." This word "*agape*" is a word that describes a love of conscience, of self will, of determination, of humility. It's the kind of love that God has for us. There's nothing lovely in us. But God has chosen to love us. He made that choice. So, when you come to the Lord, it is He who puts His love in your heart. Galatians 5:22 says it is a fruit of the Spirit, the "*agape*" love of God shed abroad in our hearts. It is the true manifestation, according to the Bible, of the fact that you've been saved. John would write, in his little epistle towards the end of your Bible, "We know we've passed from death to life because we '*agape*' the brethren, and he that doesn't love his brother still abides in death" (1 John 3:14). In other words, his heart hasn't been changed. So it is one of those living kinds of manifestations of God's saving faith, and God teaches our hearts to love as He does. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, in chapter 4:9 of the first letter, "But as tenderly having brotherly love, yet you don't need that I write to you about that because you yourself have been taught by God to love one another." So, it is a work of God's Spirit. And what does Paul say to the Romans? "Hope doesn't make us ashamed because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us" (Romans 5:5). So it's a work of God. Here's the ability to love as God loves, which is where grace starts. We forgive, we love, we offer grace because of what we've received from the Lord.

So Paul begins by saying, "Hey, Philemon, I know you're saved, I know that you're walking with the Lord, I know that you love Him and that you're loving His people." And then he says, in verse 6, I'm praying "that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgement of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus." Or, in other words, "not only have I been hearing how good things are, but," (back in verse 4) "I've been praying that you might continue to be a witness for the Lord in the way that you're living your life." And he adds, in verse 6, the words, "you might be effective" as he acknowledges God's goodness in his word. The word "acknowledgement" is an important word here because it is the word "*epignosis*," which means a knowledge that comes from experience; not something you read about in a book but something that you have lived through and, as a result, possess this knowledge by experience. Philemon could read about forgiveness. He could teach about it to others. But until he forgave, he really didn't know, by experience, what God had made available to him. Look, there's a huge difference between reading about skiing and puttin' on some skis and trying to get down the mountain. Acting upon the truth of God's words will lead to

experiential knowledge. Now, look, Paul says, "I know your heart, I know the testimony of others about you, and I'm praying that that love that you have and that walk with the Lord that you have will effectively acknowledge that you have experienced that in your life" - this forgiveness of God and His grace. "I want others to be able to see that in you." I'm sure all of this to lead to, "What am I about to ask you to do?"

So, verse 7, "For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother." Paul realized and knew Philemon to be a man by whom, just by reputation, his love for the Lord had refreshed a lot of weary saints over the years. He had a reputation. Paul said it was a source of great comfort and joy for him and for others. So Philemon was God's man. He wasn't a pastor, as far as we can tell, in the Bible. He wasn't even a teacher. He was a godly businessman whose life had been made available to the Lord, and God had used him mightily. He had a wonderful reputation. So Paul was on pretty comfortable ground, but he still wasn't sure how he was going to act or respond to this offense that had taken place with this slave.

Verse 8, "Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you - being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ." Though the letter is about forgiveness and grace - the kind that the Lord offers to us - the word "forgiveness" is not found in the letter and neither are any kind of theological arguments for it. Paul's appeal, rather, is to God's love, and he believes that Philemon knows the Lord's Word, that he knows the Lord's love, and he can be appealed to, at least by Paul, on the basis of that truth. So notice, in verse 8, that he turns to the subject matter in verse 8 and the purpose of his writing, and though he isn't going to coerce Philemon to do the right thing, Paul will almost do anything short of it to pressure this guy to do it right. So, this decision I'm sure would have been made much more difficult by the fact that if we get the picture that Onesimus had delivered this letter from Paul, and he is now standing before the master that he had run from (maybe stolen from), and put in a very difficult spot. So Paul said, "I could lean on you," verse 8, "authoritatively as the apostle so that you would do what is fitting." The word "fitting" is proper, that you would do what is right. "But I think we can resolve this in love, and so I'm asking you in love." And then he almost hedges his bet a little bit. He says, "After all, I am the old guy." "Paul, the aged." Now Paul was about 60 years old when he wrote this; probably not much older than Philemon. But Paul had lived a hard life, and I



suspect that he looked the part. You read 2 Corinthians 11, beginning in verse 23 or so, there's that description of the life that.....man, Paul had packed several lifetimes into one. I'm sure he had scars and the stories to go along with them. "I'm the warrior, battle-fatigued brother, and I'm asking you for this favor. I could have asked you as Paul the apostle, but I'm just going to ask you in love. However, I am the aged one who's paid a lot of price, and I am a prisoner." If his body appearance and suffering weren't enough to persuade Philemon, maybe the rattling of his chains would elicit some kind of sympathy from him. "I'm still in jail for Jesus. I'm just asking you to be merciful to this young man."

So here, beginning in verse 10, Paul then lays out his request. In the process, he gives us three steps that you can use to go forward to forgiveness: reception, restoration and then restitution. We'll begin with reception, in verse 10, "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary." Paul is good at putting your arm behind your back and twisting it just a little.

Reception. Step one. I've got to be willing to meet with the person who needs forgiveness. I have to be willing to receive back the one that is offensive. There has to be access. And so the word reception. Onesimus, the runaway slave, had come home. Notice what Paul says about him in verse 10. The former runaway slave has come to know Jesus in prison. Paul had the opportunity to lead him to the Lord. He calls him "my son, whose been begotten in my chains." By the way, Paul would refer to Philemon and to Timothy and to Titus and to the pastor, Epaphras, and many others the same way. Paul had a hand in most of these lives as far as turning them to the Lord. And he now says, reducing it to the language of the street, "Hey, your slave got saved, bro. He's come to the Lord while he was in prison with me. And he's been transformed," notice in verse 11. Onesimus was being sent back, but it isn't the same man that he had lost. He "was once unprofitable, but now he's profitable, not just to you, he's profitable to me." In Greek, this reads a little better because it's kind of a play on words. The name "Onesimus" means useful. So it literally reads "useful used to be useless, but now he's useful to all of us because God has changed his life." And we read, in verse 12, Paul saying, "He is sincere and serious about following the Lord, evidenced by the

fact that I was able to talk him into coming back to see you," which I don't think anyone would have gone to an uncertain future to face.....who knows what might have come. It could have been death waiting for him, but he listened to Paul's counsel. "So, look, receive him, Philemon, as my own heart." And the word for "my own heart" is the word for bowels. It means a fellow that I feel for; not just have a commitment to but I feel it in my bowels. It is the expression of feelings in the deepest level. A heart of mercy that is felt. Paul had a great love for this former fugitive that he has now sent back to his master.

Verse 13 and verse 14, Paul said of him, "He's been such a good servant to me. He's been so helpful. I'm chained up. I'm unable to travel. I can't run errands." Prisons in Paul's day were not places where the government would feed you. If you didn't have someone on the outside bringing you things, you didn't get anything at all. And so Onesimus had been faithful to help Paul as he got out of prison, apparently; had stuck around, had been a real help to Paul. And Paul said, "I thought about keeping him to serve me in the ministry as your contribution to the outreach that God has set before me." And Paul said, "But I couldn't do it. I couldn't just keep him because then you're being forced to let him stay here. I made a decision for you. That's not good. I'd like you to make that kind of decision on your own. So I wouldn't presume upon our friendship. I'd rather you choose to do the right thing here." Paul's pretty good at applying some pressure.

So he mentions that there should be a receptiveness. "Receive him," first step.

Second of all, restore him. Verse 15, "For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, 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." So, receive him and now restore him. "Maybe God allowed him to run away just so he'll end up in jail with me in Rome, and this was the opportunity that he had to be saved. It was a horrible event for you, but look how it turned out. God had good in mind. And now he's back with you, no longer a slave but a brother to you, a brother to me. He's going to be a good servant to you in the flesh. He's certainly a good servant in the Lord. He's not just an employee, he's family. So welcome him back. Restore him for service. It could very well be that this was the providence in God's plans to just bring this sinful, rebellious man to a place where he would submit himself to the Lord and to you. So now you have a physical servant, a faithful man, and you have the spiritual service of a fellow

believer, a brother in the Lord." See, it's hard to argue with Paul. He's really piling it on, isn't he? But rightfully so.

Well, his third kind of advice to him, in verses 17 and 18, was restitution. Reception, restoration, now restitution. Verse 17, "If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account." Philemon had been wronged by Onesimus, probably in the things he might have stolen, the resources he might have taken to allow him to travel to Rome. Paul says this, "If I'm your partner in the ministry, if I'm your friend, would you just take him back? And if there's any debt that he's left - maybe he's taken from you, maybe you've had to replace him and his service at a cost to you - put the debt on me. I'll pay the debt in his behalf so that the restitution," which is biblical (by the way, read Numbers 5 - restitution has to be part and parcel to repentance and forgiveness). But Paul wanted to be sure that nothing stood in the way of Philemon offering forgiveness. "Look, if it's just a matter of he hurt you, he owes you, you've taken a real hit because of his.....I just want to cleanse his debt. I'll take it on the chin. I don't want you to feel that you can't forgive him because restitution hasn't been made, and maybe he's not able to make it. I'll make it for him. If you and I are partners in this, I'd like to just pay his debt." Look, here's a quote you can remember: you're never more like the Lord than when you forgive or when you're willing to pay the price for restoration, even if that means you swallow your pride, you lay down your demands, you don't have it your way, or even you lose your rights for the sake of God's kingdom. So Paul didn't have to do any of this, but he so wanted Philemon to do the right thing, he wanted Onesimus to get through this thing, and he hoped that he could be a catalyst to do all of that. And he was willing to be the one to bring the restitution.

So, receive him, restore him, and then there's restitution to be paid.

And then he says this, in verse 19, "I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay - not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides." I love that. Now Paul often used a secretary. It's called an amanuensis, to whom he would dictate his letters and then oftentimes would sign them. But here he said, "Look, I'm writing this on my own." Paul had some eye issues, and it was difficult for him to write, apparently. But he said, "First of all, this is so important to me, I'm writing this myself." And then he throws in a little barb, and he says this, "It isn't like you don't owe me," and then he mentions the spiritual life that Philemon had found in the Lord through the ministry of Paul. Onesimus might owe Philemon a

material debt, but Paul says to Philemon, "You owe me a spiritual debt, Philemon, that you could never repay. The Lord brought you to Himself through my life. So you kind of owe me." I love the pressure.

Paul then adds, in verse 20, "Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say." "So, come on, dude, bless me! Do the right thing. And I just, in my heart before the Lord, knowing you, know that you'll do the right thing. And I suspect you'll do even more." Even more? What is Paul looking for? Well, from what we can gather, Paul would really like to have him emancipated and sent back to him in Rome so that he could be a servant to Paul - not by law but by love. "If that's what you would do."

Paul goes on, and he says in verse 22, "But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you." Well, here's, at least, one more indicator in Paul's letters that he believed his first imprisonment in Rome would end with him being released. And indeed he was. We know, historically, that for about eighteen months or so Paul got out of prison. We are far less confident as to where Paul went during those eighteen months. There are some indicators, just they're hard to trace down. We do know that he was rearrested a second time by Nero, and then, when he wrote his last letter to Timothy, he knew his death sentence was going to be carried out. He said (2 Timothy 4:7), "I'm going to the Lord. I know my race is run, my time has come." So, in the meantime, Paul, in his first imprisonment - where all this had taken place - he really believed he was getting out. And notice what he says, "Prepare me a room. I'm going to come see you personally, and then I'll know what you've decided to do with Onesimus." And I thought, "Oh, no, a home visit from the great apostle Paul." Not such a subtle pressure at all, is there? "I'm going to be coming to check this out myself." Oh, my goodness.

Well Paul ends, in verse 23, by saying, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner" (that was their pastor, there in Colosse) "in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." So, he sends greetings from his pastor, Epaphras, several others. And by putting this in the public eye, Paul now brings that accountability to bear as well. "Hey, everybody says, 'hey,' and we're all praying." And these are names of early church leaders. And then he ends by just saying, "May God's grace be with you." Do the right thing.

So you get to the end of verse 25, and you say to yourself, "How did this end?" And the answer is I don't know. What did he do? We assume, of course, that all went well for this man of God; that he knew the Lord and His love for him. We do know it would have been the will of God to restore him. Did he or didn't he? I don't know. But the lesson doesn't change. Forgiveness brings life.

I don't know if you've ever read the little book written by Mitsuo Fuchida. He was a fighter pilot - a Japanese naval pilot, actually - who was involved in the Pearl Harbor bombing. I think he was 39 years old at the time. He got saved eventually through the ministry of many. He died in the mid-70's with diabetes. But if you ever get a chance to Google him.....or better yet, look up the book "From Pearl Harbor to Calvary." It's a short book. It's a wonderful, living example (like Philemon's) of the work of God in bringing forgiveness in the heart of someone who didn't forgive, who hated, was angry, and yet, meeting Jesus, saw the changes that God could bring.

Do you need forgiveness from God? Jesus is available. You turn to Him, and He will give you grace. If He has given you grace, then you should be willing to extend that to those who want to turn away from their sin as well. And we probably need to hear it a lot, this little book. Do the right thing. Because we're never more like Jesus than when we forgive.

Shall we pray?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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