



Tweets from Heaven

#2 Philemon: Forgiveness

I. The Story

Verse 1 – Notice how Paul describes himself: “A prisoner of Christ Jesus.” NO apostolic authority as in Romans 1:1, Galatians 1:1. He is entreating, rather than commanding (1 Cor. 5:3, 2 Cor. 10:13, 14, 12:12).

Verse 4 – Note how a number of words reappear with the effect in following verses: Agape (verses 4-9), prayer (verses 4-22), fellowship (verses 6-14), hearts (verses 7, verses 12-20), brother (verses 7-20).

Verses 9 – 10 – Finally, he gets to Onesimus’ name. Paul plays on the name of Onesimus: “I beseech you for *Profitable*, who used to be *Unprofitable* but now is *Profitable*...yes, let me have *Profit* of you.” (verses 11, 20)

Verse 12 – “One of the surest evidences of the presence of grace in the heart is the resumption of neglected duties.”

Verse 16 – Philemon has a brother for a slave and a slave for a brother.

Verse 17 – Receive – “To take to one’s self” – like Priscilla and Aquilla took themselves to Apollos.

Verse 18 – The wrong debt was not magically removed by Onesimus’ becoming a Christian. New life does not cancel old debts.

Note: Paul took the pen from the Amanuensis and interjected a promissory note – “Put that down to my account.”

Verse 21 – Obedience – hearing and heeding.

Will do more – second mile – Matthew 5:41

II. Forgiveness

A. The basis of our forgiveness of others: Christ has forgiven us!

Eph. 4:32 “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Col. 3:13 “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

B. What forgiveness is and is not:

1. Forgiving is not necessarily forgetting. Our minds don’t work that way. But knowledge and a repeated focus are two different things.

2. Forgiveness is not tolerating sin. No one should be a doormat for someone else's continual sin. "It's okay to forgive another's past sins and at the same time take a stand against future sins."
3. Forgiveness does not demand revenge or repayment for offenses suffered. "You mean I'm supposed to let them off the hook? Yes, you let them off your hook, realizing that they aren't off God's hook. Unforgiveness keeps you hooked to that person and your past."
4. Forgiveness is setting the captive free and then realizing that you were the captive. God is the just judge who will make everything right – Romans 12:19.
5. Forgiveness is resolving to live with the consequences of another person's sin. The choice is to live in the freedom of forgiveness or the bondage of bitterness. "If we are to forgive as Christ has forgiven us (Eph. 4:31 – 32), then we, like Him, must take the offenses of others upon ourselves."

C. When should we confront?

1. Forgiving unilaterally (without confrontation)
 - a. When the offense is petty or unintentional – a Christ-like attitude calls for a gracious spirit (Eph. 4:1-3)
 - b. If you are the only injured party
 - 1) Remember Joseph's attitude towards his brothers (Gen. 45)
 - 2) Note David's reaction to the taunting of Shimei (2 Sam. 16)
2. Forgiveness with a confrontation is necessary...

When there is a serious offense against someone other than yourself, the offender must be confronted (probably by legal authorities) – see Deut. 16:20, Isa. 1:17, Jer. 22:3 and Lam. 3:35 – 36.

D. Consider the various kinds of consequences...

1. Physical consequences
2. Emotional consequences
 - a. "Depression is one of the most significant consequences of refusing to forgive the people who wrong us. It requires emotional energy to maintain a grudge. Just as we become weary when our physical energy is exhausted, so we become depressed when our emotional energy is exhausted."
 - b. "Bitterness and resentment create an 'emotional focus' toward the person who offended us. This focus is the chief cause of becoming just like the one we resent. The more we focus on his actions toward us, the more we resemble the basic attitudes which prompted his actions."
3. Spiritual consequences

- E. Turning bitterness into forgiveness will require a larger frame of reference.

Matt. 18:31 "When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened."

1. When an offense results in a broken relationship and reconciliation is sought:

Luke 17:3 applies if you are the offended party

Matt. 5:23-24 applies if you are the offender

But remember: "Our need to forgive is a completely separate issue from the other person's responsibility." (Anderson)

2. When you have offended someone else and you need their forgiveness, go to them and then go to God.

III. So what?

Steps to forgiveness:

Note the principle: As long as we continue to hang on to the past, the person is still hurting us and the pain will remain. We are not primarily a victim of the past, we are primarily a child of God and forgiveness sets us free to live like one." (Look at Gal. 5:1 and 23.)

- A. In prayer, ask God to show you whom you need to forgive (don't forget to include the Lord and maybe yourself). Make a list!
- B. Face the hurt. Be specific. Remember that forgiveness deals with our emotional response toward an offender. We are not pardoning them. A pardon deals with the consequence of a particular offense. Unless we have the authority, we may not be in a position to pardon an offense, but we can always forgive!
- C. Recognize that forgiveness is a choice. It may even be a crisis of your will. As you chose to relive the hurt, say, "Lord, I forgive _____ for _____" (listing every offense that God brings to your mind).

Be clear, it's "Lord, I forgive," not "I want to forgive" or "help me to forgive."

- D. Remember, the reward of forgiveness is freedom, not necessarily reconciliation. Reconciliation is dependent on the other person. Your relationship with God and your freedom from the past are not dependent on other people.

This freedom is a new beginning. But remember, the future is going to bring more pain, we can be sure of that. More confession. More forgiveness. More new beginnings!

(Adapted from Dr. Neal Anderson's material found in the book Victory Over the Darkness)

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss why forgiving and forgetting are two different things. Which is easier? Why?
2. What is the difference between forgiving and pardoning someone?
3. Have you ever experienced a consequence to not forgiving someone? Was it worth it?