

# **Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

## **The Motivation of One Who Forgives**

*Philemon 19-25*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

August 21, 2016

# The Motivation of One Who Forgives

## Scripture

Three weeks ago I started a short sermon series called “Forgiveness and Reconciliation” on the letter of Paul to Philemon. I plan to conclude this series today.

Philemon was a wealthy, godly Christian who lived in the city of Colossae. He had a slave named Onesimus. Some conflict arose between them, although we don’t know the nature of the conflict. Onesimus fled from Philemon, perhaps stealing money from him in the process, and went to Rome. While in Rome Onesimus met Paul, who was in prison. Paul shared the gospel with Onesimus, who became a Christian. He served Paul very well, but Paul knew that Onesimus had to return to Philemon. So Paul wrote a personal letter to Philemon asking him to forgive Onesimus and to be reconciled to him.

I should make a comment about slavery. Slavery was common in the ancient world. And while slavery meant that a person was property of another person, it was not altogether like slavery in this country more than 150 years ago. Slavery in this country was based on ethnicity. However, in ancient times people became slaves because they were war captives, born into slavery, or debtors. By the time of the New Testament, slaves were often better off than freemen. They were assured of food, clothing, and shelter. They could become doctors, musicians, teachers, artists, and so on. And, slaves could also purchase their freedom.

Interestingly, the New Testament never directly attacks slavery. The institution of slavery was widespread, and a direct attack against it would have caused chaos and immediate social upheaval.

Nevertheless, biblical Christianity sowed the seeds for the destruction of slavery by teaching a message not of institutional

change but of changed hearts. Paul's letter to Philemon does not request him to free Onesimus from slavery but rather to treat him as a brother in Christ. And by doing so, Paul was effectively crushing the abuses of slavery. As Marvin Vincent notes, "The principles of the gospel not only curtailed [slavery's] abuses, but destroyed the thing itself; for it could not exist without its abuses. To destroy its abuses was to destroy it."<sup>1</sup> And, of course, eventually slavery was abolished in many places around the world.

Previously, in our study of Philemon, we examined the character and the actions of one who forgives. Today I would like to look at the motivation of one who forgives. Again, I am leaning heavily on John MacArthur and his commentary on Philemon.<sup>2</sup>

Let's read the entire letter of Paul to Philemon, although my text for today is verses 19-25:

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,  
To Philemon our beloved fellow worker <sup>2</sup>and Apphia our  
sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your  
house:

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord  
Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> I thank my God always when I remember you in my  
prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have  
toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, <sup>6</sup> and I pray that the  
sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge  
of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. <sup>7</sup> For I have  
derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother,  
because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to  
command you to do what is required, <sup>9</sup> yet for love's sake I prefer  
to appeal to you – I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for  
Christ Jesus – <sup>10</sup> I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose

---

<sup>1</sup> Marvin Vincent, as quoted in John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philemon*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 205.

<sup>2</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philemon*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 223-233.

## Forgiveness and Reconciliation

father I became in my imprisonment. <sup>11</sup> (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) <sup>12</sup> I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. <sup>13</sup> I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, <sup>14</sup> but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. <sup>15</sup> For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, <sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother – especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. <sup>18</sup> If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. <sup>19</sup> **I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it – to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.** <sup>20</sup> Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

<sup>21</sup> Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. <sup>22</sup> At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

<sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, <sup>24</sup> and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

<sup>25</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Philemon 19-25)

## Introduction

William Blake once said, “The glory of Christianity is to conquer by forgiveness.”<sup>3</sup> We who are Christians have been conquered by the forgiveness of God. When we come to God in faith and in repentance for our sin, he graciously and mercifully grants us his forgiveness, and it is a glorious thing.

And when we sin against another person and go to him in

---

<sup>3</sup> John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 218.

humility and repentance, and receive his forgiveness, it too is a glorious thing.

This is the beauty and glory of Christianity, that forgiveness conquers sin.

But, we might ask what the motivation is for one who forgives. The Apostle Paul addressed the motivation of Philemon when he asked him forgive to Onesimus.

## Lesson

In today's lesson, let us examine the motivation of one who forgives.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Offer of Restitution (19)
2. The Opportunity of Refreshment (20)
3. The Confidence of Response (21)
4. The Anticipation of Inspection (22)
5. The Maintenance of Fellowship (23-24)
6. The Prerequisite of Grace (25)

### I. The Offer of Restitution (19)

The first motivation of one who forgives is the offer of restitution.

The slave Onesimus had run away from his master Philemon. Philemon suffered the loss of Onesimus' labor, and may have had to purchase another slave to replace Onesimus. Further, it is possible that Onesimus had stolen money from Philemon. So, at this point in the letter, the Apostle Paul took the pen from Timothy (who was writing down Paul's letter), and wrote in verse 19, **“I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it – to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.”**

Last time I mentioned that the Bible teaches that restitution

## Forgiveness and Reconciliation

for lost possessions is entirely warranted (see Numbers 5:6-7). Of course, the person who suffered the loss may graciously cancel the debt, but he is not obligated to do so. That is why Paul offered to make restitution for Onesimus' debt. Paul did not want the lack of restitution to hinder forgiveness and reconciliation, and that was the reason for his offer of restitution.

So, the first motivation of one who forgives is the offer of restitution.

### II. The Opportunity of Refreshment (20)

The second motivation of one who forgives is the opportunity of refreshment.

Earlier in his letter Paul said to Philemon in verse 7, "For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you." The way in which Philemon treated fellow Christians was wonderfully refreshing. And so now Paul said to Philemon in verse 20, **"Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ."** Paul wanted Philemon to refresh his own heart by forgiving Onesimus.

We all know how wonderfully refreshing it is to be forgiven of our sins, not only by God, but by those against whom we have sinned as well.

So, the first motivation of one who forgives is the offer of restitution. The second is the opportunity of refreshment.

### III. The Confidence of Response (21)

The third motivation of one who forgives is the confidence of response.

Paul was very confident of Philemon's appropriate response to his request that he forgive Onesimus. And so he wrote in verse

21, **“Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.”** Paul’s confidence in Philemon’s response of obedience was a motivation to Philemon to do what God required of him: to forgive Onesimus and to be reconciled to him.

Some commentators believe that Paul’s statement in this verse was a call for Philemon to free Onesimus from slavery. That may be so, but it is more likely that he was urging Philemon to welcome Onesimus with open arms, as a brother in Christ. Or Paul may also have been suggesting that Philemon allow Onesimus return to Rome and minister alongside Paul.

Regardless, Philemon was motivated to forgive Onesimus because he wanted to be obedient, and he knew that Paul was confident of his response.

So, the first motivation of one who forgives is the offer of restitution. The second is the opportunity of refreshment. The third is the confidence of response.

#### **IV. The Anticipation of Inspection (22)**

The fourth motivation of one who forgives is the anticipation of inspection.

You may have heard of the saying, “People don’t always do what you *expect*, but they are far more likely to do what you *inspect*.” It almost seems that Paul had this in mind when he wrote to Philemon in verse 22, **“At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.”**

Paul believed that he would soon be released from prison, and then he would visit the Colossian church meeting in Philemon’s home. That of course meant that Paul would be able to see firsthand how Philemon received Onesimus. Would Paul find that Onesimus was forgiven or not forgiven? It was this

## Forgiveness and Reconciliation

anticipation of inspection by Paul that motivated Philemon to forgive Onesimus.

So, the first motivation of one who forgives is the offer of restitution. The second is the opportunity of refreshment. The third is the confidence of response. The fourth is the anticipation of inspection.

### V. The Maintenance of Fellowship (23-24)

The fifth motivation of one who forgives is the maintenance of fellowship.

Paul closed off his letter to Philemon with some final greetings. He said in verses 23-24, **“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.”** Philemon apparently knew each of these men. By mentioning them to Philemon, Paul wanted him to recognize that the Christian life is not lived in isolation from other believers, but rather it is lived in fellowship with other believers. Certainly, these five men knew that Paul was asking Philemon to forgive Onesimus and to be reconciled to him. Failure to do so would result in broken fellowship with other believers, including these men. And so a motivation for Philemon was to maintain fellowship with fellow believers.

So, the first motivation of one who forgives is the offer of restitution. The second is the opportunity of refreshment. The third is the confidence of response. The fourth is the anticipation of inspection. The fifth is the maintenance of fellowship.

### VI. The Prerequisite of Grace (25)

And the sixth motivation of one who forgives is the prerequisite of grace.



By the time Philemon had read to this point in his letter from the Apostle Paul he had been reminded of the character of one forgives, the actions of one who forgives, and the motivation of one who forgives. Perhaps he might have wondered where in the world he might find the strength to do so. That is why Paul ended his letter with these familiar words in verse 25, **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”**

Paul’s closing benediction really was a prayer that reminded Philemon that he could do nothing in the Christian life apart from the enabling grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do nothing in our Christian lives in our own strength. It is only by gospel-empowered grace that any of us are ever enabled to forgive anyone from the heart. That is why we all need God’s enabling grace on a daily basis to do what he has called us to be and to do.

So, the first motivation of one who forgives is the offer of restitution. The second is the opportunity of refreshment. The third is the confidence of response. The fourth is the anticipation of inspection. The fifth is the maintenance of fellowship. And the sixth motivation of one who forgives is the prerequisite of grace.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the actions of one who forgives, we should ask God to enable us to forgive others and to be reconciled with them.

Perhaps you have the following question in mind: *Did Philemon forgive Onesimus?*

Philemon almost certainly forgave Onesimus, for the following two reasons.

First, it is not likely that this letter would have found its way into the New Testament canon if Philemon did not forgive Onesimus. Paul eventually did get out of prison and most likely

## Forgiveness and Reconciliation

visited Philemon and the Colossian church. If Paul had discovered that Philemon was not forgiven, he would undoubtedly have corrected Philemon, and we would know about it. But there is no record of that, most likely because Philemon forgave Onesimus and was reconciled to him.

And the second reason Philemon almost certainly forgave Onesimus is really wonderful. Several decades after Paul wrote to Philemon there was a man named Onesimus who became bishop of the Ephesian church. Many believe that this Onesimus was the same Onesimus Paul asked Philemon to forgive. We know about Bishop Onesimus from Ignatius, who, on his way to Rome to be martyred, wrote to the church in Ephesus: “In God’s name, therefore, I received your large congregation in the person of Onesimus, your bishop in this world, a man whose love is beyond words. My prayer is that you should love him in the Spirit of Jesus Christ and all be like him. Blessed is he who let you have such a bishop.”<sup>4</sup>

Friends, the gospel not only empowers one to forgive but transforms the one who is forgiven as well.

John MacArthur tells a rather long story from this past century that also illustrates the power of forgiveness. It began at 7:55 a.m. on Sunday, December 7, 1941. In a daring surprise air raid, the Japanese attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In less than two hours, 2,403 American soldiers, sailors, and civilians were killed, and another 1,178 wounded. Aircraft losses totaled 188 planes, and much of the United States Pacific Fleet was destroyed or damaged.

The raid was led by a brilliant thirty-nine-year-old Japanese Navy pilot named Mitsuo Fuchida, whose idol was Adolf Hitler. Although his plane was hit several times by ground fire, he survived the raid. The attack on Pearl Harbor led to the United

---

<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 388-389.

States' entry into World War II, and ultimately to the devastation of the Japanese homeland by American conventional and atomic bombs.

After the war, Fuchida was haunted by memories of all the death he had witnessed. In an attempt to find solace, he took up farming near Osaka. His thoughts turned more and more to the problem of peace, and he decided to write a book on the subject. In his book, which he intended to call *No More Pearl Harbors*, he would urge the world to pursue peace. Fuchida struggled in vain, however, to find a principle upon which peace could be based.

His story is picked up by Donald A. Rosenberger, an American naval yeoman who survived the Pearl Harbor attack. He writes:

[Fuchida] heard two stories about prisoners of war that filled him with excitement. They seemed to illustrate the principle for which he was searching.

The first report came from a friend – a lieutenant who had been captured by the Americans and incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp in America. Fuchida saw his name in a newspaper, in a list of POWs who were returning to Japan. He determined to visit him. When they met, they spoke of many things.

Then Fuchida asked the question uppermost in his mind. “How did they treat you in the POW camp?”

His friend said they were treated fairly well, although they suffered much mentally and spiritually.

But then he told Fuchida a story which, he said, had made a great impression upon him and upon every prisoner in the camp.

“Something happened at the camp where I was interred,” he said, “which has made it possible for us who were in that camp to forego all our resentment and hatred and to return with a forgiving spirit and a feeling of lightheartedness instead.”

There was a young American girl, named Margaret “Peggy” Covell, whom they judged to be about twenty, who came to the camp on a regular basis doing all she could for the prisoners. She brought things to them they might enjoy, such as magazines and

## Forgiveness and Reconciliation

newspapers. She looked after their sick, and she was constantly solicitous to help them in every way.

They received a great shock, however, when they asked her why she was so concerned to help them. She answered, "Because my parents were killed by the Japanese Army!"

Such a statement might shock a person from any culture, but it was incomprehensible to the Japanese. In their society, no offense could be greater than the murder of one's parents.

Peggy tried to explain her motives. She said her parents had been missionaries in the Philippines. When the Japanese invaded the islands, her parents escaped to the mountains in North Luzon for safety. In due time, however, they were discovered. The Japanese charged them with being spies and told them they were to be put to death. They earnestly denied that they were spies, but the Japanese would not be convinced, and they were executed.

Peggy didn't hear about her parents' fate until the end of the war. When the report of their death reached her, her first reaction was intense anger and bitter hatred. She was furious with grief and indignation. Thoughts of her parents' last hours of life filled her with great sorrow. She envisioned them trapped, wholly at the mercy of their captors, with no way out. She saw the merciless brutality of the soldiers. She saw them facing the Japanese executioners and falling lifeless to the ground on that far-off Philippine mountain.

Then Peggy began to consider her parents' selfless love for the Japanese people. Gradually, she became convinced that they had forgiven the people God had called them to love and serve.

Then it occurred to her that if her parents had died without bitterness or rancor toward their executioners, why should her attitude be different? Should she be filled with hatred and vengeance when they had been filled with love and forgiveness?

Her answer could only be, "Definitely not."

Therefore, she chose the path of love and forgiveness. She decided to minister to the Japanese prisoners in the nearby POW camp as a proof of her sincerity.

Fuchida was touched by this story, but he was especially impressed with the possibility that it was exactly what he had been searching for: a principle sufficient to be a basis for peace. Could

it be that the answer for which he was seeking was a forgiving love, flowing from God to man, and then from man to man? Could that be principle upon which the message of his projected book, *No More Pearl Harbors* should be based?

Shortly after this, Fuchida was summoned by General Douglas MacArthur to Tokyo. As he got off the train at Shibuya station, he was handed a pamphlet titled, "I Was a Prisoner of Japan." It told about an American sergeant, Jacob DeShazer, who had spent forty months in a Japanese prison cell and who, after the war, had come back to Japan to love and serve the Japanese people by helping them to come to know Jesus Christ.

Fuchida read the story with interest.

DeShazer had been a bombardier on one of the sixteen Army B-25 airplanes which, under the leadership of General Jimmy Doolittle, had been launched on 18 April 1942 from the deck of the USS Hornet to bomb Tokyo. None of the planes were shot down, but all of them ran out of gasoline before they could be landed properly. The crew of five in the plane in which DeShazer was flying bailed out over occupied China. The next morning, they were captured and incarcerated for the duration of the war.

DeShazer notes that all prisoners were treated badly. He said that at one point he almost went insane from his violent hatred of the Japanese guards.

Then one day a guard brought them a Bible. They were all in solitary confinement, so they took turns reading it. When it was DeShazer's turn, he had it for three weeks. He read it eagerly and intensely, both Old and New Testaments. Finally, he writes, "the miracle of conversion took place June 8, 1944."

DeShazer determined that if he lived until the war was over, and if he were released, he would return the United States, devote a period of time to serious Bible study, and then return to Japan to share the message of Christ with the Japanese people.

That is exactly what he did. . . . Great crowds came to hear his story, and many responded to his invitation to receive Christ.

Fuchida was deeply impressed. Here it was again: a second example of love overcoming hatred.

He sensed the power of forgiveness to actually change the

## Forgiveness and Reconciliation

hearts and lives of people. . . . Excitedly, he sensed that it could be a principle strong enough to be the basis for his projected book.

He determined to learn all he could about DeShazer and his beliefs.

At the train station on his way home, he obtained a copy of the New Testament in Japanese. A few months later, he began to read two or three chapters a day in the Scriptures. . . . Then in September 1949, Fuchida read Luke 23. This was the first time he had read the story of the crucifixion.

The Calvary scene pierced Fuchida's spirit. It all came alive in St. Luke's starkly beautiful prose. In the midst of the horror of his death, Christ said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Tears sprang to Fuchida's eyes; he had reached the end of his "long, long wandering."

Surely these words were the source of the love that DeShazer and Peggy Covell had shown. . . . As Jesus hung there, on the cross, he prayed not only for his persecutors but for all humanity. That meant he had prayed and died for Fuchida, a Japanese man living in the twentieth century. ("What Happened to the Man Who Led the Attack on Pearl Harbor?" *Command*, Fall/Winter 1991, pp. 6-8. Used by permission.)

By the time Fuchida finished reading Luke, he had received the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior.

He did end up writing his book, but titled it, *From Pearl Harbor to Golgotha*.

His life verse, which he signed under his every signature, was Luke 23:34: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."<sup>5</sup>

Forgiveness and reconciliation is only found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. All other religions are dead-ends. They offer no grace to enable us to receive God's forgiveness and, in turn, to extend forgiveness to others. May God enable each one of us to know his

---

<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philemon*, 231-233.

## The Motivation of One Who Forgives

grace that we might receive forgiveness from God and extend it to each one who seeks it from us. Amen.

## Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz)

## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)



## **PRAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for the Apostle Paul's letter to Philemon.

It is such a wonderful letter teaching us about the character, actions, and motivation of one who forgives.

When we sin against one another, enable us to repent of our sin and to seek forgiveness from you and from the one against whom we have sinned.

And grant us all the grace of that is required to forgive one another when we have been sinned against.

And if there are those here today who do not yet profess faith in Jesus, will you enable them to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus so that you can extend your forgiveness to them.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

## **CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!