

## The Other Side of Peace

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In the 1850's, two brothers came to America from Scotland to try to make a better life for themselves. One moved to Virginia and another to New York. The two brothers, James and Alexander Campbell, would send letters back and forth to each other because they were close. The Civil War broke out in 1861 and they both joined to fight the war. At the battle of Secessionville in 1862, Alexander would plant the United States flag at the fort and kept it there in the face of massed musket fire and canon fire until he was ordered to withdraw. James, being in the same battle, ran to about the same area unarmed and rolled a log down into a mass of the enemy. He then seized a rifle from a dead enemy and continued fighting. The problem was these two brothers were fighting on opposite sides (James – Confederate / Alexander – Union) and they didn't know at that time they were in the same battle. They could have been shooting at each other. It was brother against brother. What I find interesting is they continued to try to communicate to each other during the war, which was very hard to do. After the war, they would still send each other letters even though they fought on opposite sides during the Civil War. They didn't allow a war to break their brotherly love for each other. Look how things are today. Families are torn apart because one family member hates another and when this happens, it affects the rest of the family as well. When a family member dies, some don't come to the viewing just to show how mad they are with the other side. If they do show up, the whole family feels like they're sitting on a time bomb ready to go off. If it doesn't go off, it doesn't matter because the funeral has not been able to do what it's supposed to do – bring healing for the family. The family was too focused on the division of the family. Forgiving someone is one of the hardest things for us to do as human beings. There are many reasons for this. One, forgiveness fights against our pride. Second, our culture teaches us to get even with those who are holding a grudge against us. Third, people can do horrible things to other people that are humanly unforgivable. Another reason is satan will try to keep us from forgiving someone. He likes it when we bring resentment against someone. He'll continue to supply the firewood because we usually will supply the gasoline. Last

week, we talked about how God's peace can help us in times of trouble. It's one of the benefits of being a true follower of Jesus. His Spirit can give us peace that will guard our hearts and minds against any type of trouble. However, unforgiveness on our part is what keeps God's peace away from us at times. This is why so many Christians have no peace in their lives. I'm not saying it's easy to forgive people. People can do some of the most horrible things to people. Just look at Hamas and how they have treated the Israel hostages. How can one forgive a terrorist? It's not humanly possible, but with God anything is possible. Let's spend some time today looking at forgiveness.

Let's turn to Paul's letter to Philemon. We read this, "<sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—<sup>2</sup> also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home:

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

### **Thanksgiving and Prayer**

<sup>4</sup> I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. <sup>7</sup> Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

### **Paul's Plea for Onesimus**

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, <sup>9</sup> yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—<sup>10</sup> that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,<sup>b</sup> who became my son while I was in chains. <sup>11</sup> Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

<sup>12</sup> I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. <sup>13</sup> I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup> But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. <sup>15</sup> Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—<sup>16</sup> no

longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup> If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. <sup>20</sup> I do wish, brother, that I may have 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 ask.

<sup>22</sup> And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

Apostle Paul is in house arrest in Rome. A runaway slave comes to him and Paul leads him to Jesus Christ. Paul would never waste an opportunity to present the Gospel message to someone. This slave is named “Onesimus” which means useful. His slave owner goes by the name of Philemon, who is a Greek that lives in Colosse, a city that was once located in what we call Turkey today. It appears Philemon was converted during Paul’s ministry. Philemon is somewhat a new convert and he is a slave owner. This was a common practice during the days of Rome. Slavery would start to get more negative as Christianity grew throughout the region. However, Paul wants to send Onesimus back to him. Paul doesn’t want Philemon to treat this slave harshly because now this slave is a true follower of Jesus, the same as Philemon. Slaves could be tortured or killed for being a runaway slave. I remember in Gettysburg Seminary, I had one professor who loved to put Civil War history into lessons. He taught us that during the battle of Gettysburg, most of the black population left town and traveled up north to safety. Many of them were small farmers at the time. The reason for leaving was as the Confederate Army was making their way North taking food and goods, if they saw black people, they would go after them. If caught, they would send them back down south to their owners which could mean punishment or death. So, Paul wants to do the right thing here, he doesn’t want Onesimus to keep running. He wants to send him back, but Paul wants Philemon to forgive his slave. Paul could have pushed the issue and forced Philemon to be kind to him since

Paul was a leader in the Church of Christ, but Paul wrote this crafty letter through the Holy Spirit to give Philemon the chance and opportunity to forgive his slave.

So, Paul makes an important statement and it's in verse 9 where he states, "yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul – an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus. NIV)" Paul is letting Philemon know in a nice way that forgiveness is part of the love of Jesus. If we say we love Jesus, but can't forgive people, then do we really have the love of Jesus within us? In the story of the sinful woman who comes to wash the feet of Jesus in Luke 7: 47, Jesus makes this important statement, "I tell you, her sins – and they are many – have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love. (NLT)" This woman had done many sins against God and Jesus forgave her out of love. This woman washed the feet of Jesus out of love. She didn't deserve forgiven, but Jesus set the example for us. Forgiveness comes from the love of Jesus that should be flowing through us. Jesus gives us a more stern statement in Matthew 6: 14, "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others; your Father will not forgive your sins. (NLT)" Again, forgiveness is part of the love of Jesus. If we don't forgive, we have cheapened the grace that comes from the cross. The cross is all about forgiveness for the unforgivable. We are the examples. We live out this example by showing forgiveness through Jesus.

Then, Paul makes another statement in verse 15 and 16 that we need to look at. Paul states, "Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever – no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. (NLT)" Paul is challenging culture here. He's telling Philemon that he should treat his slave no longer as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. In other words, Philemon is going to have to humble himself to his new brother in Christ. Treat him as an equal. You see, forgiveness also requires humbleness from the one doing the forgiving. Paul makes this statement in Philippians 2: 5 that supports this, "Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. (NLT)" Again, we go back to the cross. Not

only was love shown there by Jesus, but humbleness was shown there. Jesus took the position of a slave and appeared in human form. Then Jesus humbled Himself more by dying a criminal's death on a cross. Philemon was going to have to humble himself. He had to lower himself down from a slave owner/ master and treat his slave as an equal through Jesus Christ. He was going to have to forgive his former slave just as Jesus had forgiven both of them. This was a learning moment for Philemon or we can say it was a faith growing moment. The reason we usually can't forgive is our pride. Humbleness from Jesus puts that human pride in check. Humbleness has to be one of the elements of our character after we become a follower of Jesus.

Finally, Paul makes this statement in verse 20, "I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. (NIV)" Paul wants Philemon's actions to refresh his heart in Christ. Unforgiveness not only hurts the person who can't forgive, but hurts all those around them. If a family member can't forgive another family member, the other members hurt as well. However, if there is a humble family member who forgives another family member, it brings healing to all and all benefit from this humbleness. The story of the two soldier brothers is a nice refreshing story. Even though, they were on opposite fronts, they humbled themselves and kept writing to each other out of love for each other. Paul wants Philemon to humble himself, and love his former slave like a brother even though they were in different classes and one was a run-away slave. Plus, since the church met at Philemon's house, this humbleness and harmony would spread through the church as well. Boy, do we need more humbleness and love from Jesus in the churches today. We need to continue to pray and ask the Lord to help us to be a humble and loving people. This is what Jesus wants from us. It sure is hard to forgive when you're not humble. I'll close with this from 1 Peter 5: 5, "And all of you, serve each other in humility, for God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble. So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and in his good time he will honor you. (NLT)" Let's be more like Jesus.

*NLT Life Application Study Bible.* Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996