

Series: A More Excellent Way**Today's Message: Forgiveness and Reconciliation; Philemon 1:1-25**

As Christians need to drill TRUTH into our hearts and minds concerning forgiveness and reconciliation. We don't easily gravitate toward an attitude of forgiveness, or a readiness to forgive. But we should.

We wouldn't have to talk about forgiveness and reconciliation if we never experienced the pain of hurt feelings, resentment, the constant rehashing in our minds of wrongs we have had committed against us or for that matter that we have committed against others. We wouldn't have to talk about forgiveness and reconciliation if there were not actual sins and offenses committed against one another. But we do.

We have to talk about forgiveness and reconciliation. Actually, we have to—or rather, we are compelled to talk about forgiveness and reconciliation because as Christians we love God because He first loved us. As the benefactors of His love, we rejoice because “He sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10).” We love that God, who according to the riches of His grace and mercy, has forgiven us of our sins and offenses against Him. Did you hear that? God has forgiven us of our sins and offenses against Him through faith in the shedding of the blood of His dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

Therefore, we know that we are to love one another in the spirit of 1 John 4:7-8. But we often struggle with how we are to love. Forgiveness and reconciliation are one of the expressions of the God-kind-of-love described in 1 Corinthians 13. We know that He planted His love in our hearts through the Holy Spirit and that we are to work out that love by faith! In fact, there is a truth statement concerning this God-kind-of-love that dovetails perfectly with forgiveness and reconciliation. In 1 Corinthians 13:5 we read, “[love] keeps no record of wrongs.”

Today we will delve into three ideas concerning forgiveness and reconciliation. First, why do we need to forgive? Second, what is the difference between readiness to forgive and granting forgiveness? And third, Becoming a peacemaker. The book of Philemon as a *peacemaker's* guide to facilitating reconciliation.

I) Why do we need to forgive?

- A) Forgiveness and reconciliation are at the heart of the Gospel.
 - 1) Ephesians 4:32: (A readiness of heart and willing to act!): “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.”
 - 2) Colossians 3:13: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”
 - 3) 2 Corinthians 5:18-19: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, **not counting men's sins against them.**”
 - (a) Romans 14:19: “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”
- B) Forgiveness sets the repentant person free. (Let's look at it from two directions.)
 - 1) Case 1: The offended Christian can either obey Christ and have a *readiness-of-heart* to forgive the “offender,” or can stew in the juices of hurt feelings, anger, bitterness, rage, malice, brawling, slander, etc. (Eph. 4:31) and suffer the heavy hand of God's displeasure.
 - (a) Matthew 6:12: “Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.”
 - (b) Matthew 6:14-15: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

- 2) Case 2: The offender repents seeking your forgiveness. You release them from their guilt.
 - (a) Where there is repentance (whether toward God or toward the offended person) forgiveness **must** be granted and reconciliation **can** begin.
 - (i) Acts 2:38: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the Holy Spirit.'"
 - (ii) Matthew 18:21-22: "The Peter came up and said to Him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"
- II) **The difference between readiness to forgive and granting forgiveness.**
- A) Readiness to forgive means, as discussed in the above section, having your heart and mind right before God by taking into account His readiness to forgive you, and being willing to forgive.
 - 1) A yearning or desire to be forgiving and to be reconciled to the person who offended you.
 - B) Granting forgiveness should only be given when the offender repents and agrees that they have offended you.
 - 1) It is not right to forgive an offender without repentance. The Lord Jesus commands the offended person to confront the offender in order to bring about reconciliation.
 - (a) Matthew 18:15: "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens, you have won your brother over."
 - 2) That is the first step toward reconciliation. But Jesus goes on to say in Matthew 18:16-17 that if he will not listen to you take two or three witnesses in order to establish the matter. And if the offender will not listen after that, take the offender before the church. The goal is reconciliation.
 - C) How not to handle an offense:
 - 1) The offended should not simply the person and say, "I forgive you" before the matter is brought forward. Once you forgive the person you cannot bring it up again and you cannot use it against them by speaking against them with other people. That is, in itself, an offense against them!
 - 2) The offender should never "gaslight" the offended by saying, "I'm sorry your feelings were hurt," or "I'm sorry you reacted that way."
 - (a) The offender should repent, taking responsibility for their words or actions, which offended the other person. The offender should confess an understanding of their actions.
 - (i) It works the same with God who is offended by our sins, which are ultimately against Him.
 - (a) "That if we *confess our sins*, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." **Confession and repentance run hand in hand!**
- III) Becoming a peacemaker. The book of Philemon as a *peacemaker's* guide to facilitating reconciliation.
- A) Forgiving and reconciling is difficult. Sometimes we need the help of a *peacemaker* (Matt. 5:9).
 - 1) This would be someone who is committed to a biblical approach to reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19).
 - B) Paul loved both Onesimus and Philemon. He graciously appeals to Philemon, the offended brother, to remember several truths so that he and Onesimus can walk together as brothers in Christ:
 - 1) (8-9) Forgiveness is an obligation of the gospel! To forgive for the sake of love.
 - 2) (10-13) Forgiveness will facilitate restoration and prevent bitterness.
 - (a) Forgiveness is the pathway to restoration and is blessed by God.
 - (b) Bitterness and wrath incur God's displeasure. Onesimus was deeply loved by Paul.
 - 3) (14) Forgive freely not by force. This is God's will and He gives the grace to do it!
 - 4) (15) Forgiveness is a faithful response to God's sovereignty in all things! (Rm.8:28)
 - 5) (16-17) Forgiveness must be granted to the repentant Christian! Onesimus was both!

- 6) (20) Forgiveness granted has a grace-giving, refreshment aiding effect on others!
- 7) (21) Forgiveness granted to the repentant is an act of obedience to God.
- 8) (Summary) Forgiveness sets the offender free from the burden of guilt.