

FAITH SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

December 11th, 2011

Forgiveness

Focal Passage: Philemon (ESV)

Cross References: Col 4:17, Esther 4:14, Eph 4:32, Col 3:12-13

Central Idea: Paul is encouraging Philemon to receive a runaway slave and to forgive the slave as a brother in Christ.

Lesson Idea: The Christian life, is a life that is different from the world. We must offer forgiveness, grace, love and service, regardless of circumstances. We have all been forgiven, therefore we must forgive.

Background: Taken from MacArthur's Commentary:

Philemon had been saved under Paul's ministry, probably at Ephesus (Vs. 19), several years earlier. Wealthy enough to have a large house (cf. v. 2), Philemon also owned at least one slave, a man named Onesimus (lit. "useful"; a common name for slaves). Onesimus was not a believer at the time he stole some money (Vs. 18) from Philemon and ran away. Like countless thousands of other runaway slaves, Onesimus fled to Rom, seeking to lose himself in the imperial capital's teeming and nondescript slave population. Through circumstances not recorded in Scripture, Onesimus met Paul in Rome and became a Christian.

The apostle quickly grew to love this runaway slave (vv. 12, 16) and longed to keep Onesimus in Rome (v. 13), where he was providing valuable service to Paul in his imprisonment (vs. 11). But by stealing and running away from Philemon, Onesimus had broken Roman law and defrauded his master. Paul knew those issues had to be dealt with, and decided to send Onesimus back to Colosse...Along with Onesimus, Paul sent Philemon this beautiful personal letter, urging him to forgive Onesimus and welcome him back to service as a brother in Christ (vv. 15-17).

The New Testament nowhere directly attacks slavery; had it done so, the resulting slave insurrections would have been brutally suppressed and the message of the gospel hopelessly confused with that of social reform. Instead, Christianity undermined the evils of slavery by changing the hearts of slaves and masters. By emphasizing the spiritual equality of master and slave (v. 16; Gal 3:28, Eph 6:9, Col 4:1, I Tim 6:1-2), the Bible did away with slavery's abuses. The rich theological theme that dominates the letter is forgiveness, a featured theme throughout the New Testament Scripture (cf. Matt 6:12-15, 18:21-35, Eph 4:32, Col 3:13). Paul's instruction here provides the biblical definition of forgiveness, without ever using the word.

Bible in a Year Readings

November 27-December 4, 2011

December 11: Rom 14-16

December 12: Acts 20:4-23:35

December 13: Acts 24-26

December 14: Acts 27-28

December 15: Colossians, Philemon

December 16: Ephesians

December 17: Philippians

December 18: I Timothy

Highlights of the Week:

Romans 14: Principles of Christian liberty

Romans 15: Practices of Christian liberty

Rom 16: Paul's praise and greeting

Acts 21: Paul arrest

Acts 22: Paul's defense before the centurion

Acts 23: The plan to kill Paul

Acts 24: Paul before Felix
Acts 25: Paul before Festus
Acts 26: Paul before Agrippa
Acts 27: Paul and the shipwreck
Acts 28: Paul's witness in Malta and Rome
Colossians: The preeminence of Christ
Philemon: Forgiveness
Ephesians: Building the body of Christ
Philippians: To live is Christ: joy
I Timothy: Instructions to a young pastor

Read the entire book before beginning the discussion questions.

Philemon 1-7

The prayer of thanksgiving for Philemon

Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our beloved fellow worker² and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ 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. 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.

DISCUSSION:

- Paul refers to himself as a prisoner for Christ, what significance does this have to the rest of the book? To our relationship with Christ?
- Who was Onesimus?
- Who was Philemon?
- Who was Archippus? Col 4:17.
- Philemon's name means "one that is affectionate", read Vs. 5 and 7, how did he or didn't he live up to it?
- Names used to have deep meaning, names were given as a picture of events or traits that the parents worked for their children to grow into. What does your name mean? Do you live up to it? What does the name Christian, mean? How do you or don't you live up to it?
- What compliments does Paul have to Philemon? What could we learn from these compliments?

Philemon 8-16

The petition of Paul for Onesimus

⁸ Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹ yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵ For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ 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.

DISCUSSION:

- Read Vs. 8-9, Paul says he could have commanded Philemon to "do what is required", yet he says "I prefer to appeal to you". What is the difference? Why would Paul say this? What is he looking to accomplish through asking, not commanding?
- Onesimus means "profitable" or "useful".

- Paul calls Onesimus “my child”, why would he do this? In this context, are there any your could call your child?
- In Vs. 11 Paul says Onesimus was once unprofitable, but now is profitable to you and to me. What changed to cause him to be profitable? Why would that make him profitable?
- What did Paul want to do with Onesimus? Why didn't he do it?
- According to Vs. 15, what did Paul see as the possible reason for Onesimus' running away? Compare with Esther 4:14.
- How did Paul want Philemon to receive Onesimus? What difference would this make in the return of Onesimus? How are we to treat a brother in Christ?

Philemon 17-25
The promise of Paul to Philemon

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

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

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

²⁵The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

DISCUSSION:

- In Vs. 17 what basis is Paul telling Philemon to accept Onesimus on? What significance does this play in the response of Philemon?
- In Vs. 18-19 Paul tells Philemon to put anything Onesimus owes to Philemon, on his account. What could Onesimus have owed Philemon? What does Paul use as leverage against Philemon to cause him to write off any debts?
- Paul seeks to be refreshed through the proper actions of Philemon in Vs 20-21. How can other people's actions of doing right, encourage and refresh us? Share an instance of this in your life.
- Vs. 23-24 are the greetings from other believers, laboring in Christ, just as Philemon was. What is the significance of greetings from those in similar situations as us?

APPLICATION

- In what ways have you encouraged others this past week? Read Vs. 4-7. In what ways will you encourage others in this next week?
- Philemon is a book about Forgiveness, what grudges are you holding onto that you need to forgive? Who has hurt you, that you need to “receive him forever...as a beloved brother”?
- We need to remember to forgive, as we have been forgiven! Eph 4:32. There is nothing so great that has been done to you, that is surpasses what we have done against God, therefore, if God can forgive us, we can forgive them!
- This week, if there is forgiveness that needs to be granted, commit to forgive! Col 3:12-13,