



Philemon 1:1-25 “Reconciled to Reconcile”

Introduction

The heart of the Gospel is this: though we deserved eternal punishment for our sins against a holy God, He chose to extend forgiveness. He saved us through the blood of His only Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Yet His saving grace extends far beyond forgiveness – it transforms believers into agents of reconciliation. As 2 Corinthians 5:18 declares, “All this is from God, who through Christ **reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.**”

Through this deeply personal letter, God gives us a living picture of reconciliation; one where we can see ourselves in Paul, the intercessor who **pleads**; in Onesimus, the offender who **proves** his repentance; or in Philemon, the offended who is called to **pardon**. The beauty of this is that all three roles converge on one glorious opportunity, to bring glory to God: “Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Rom. 15:7

V.1-10 Paul’s Plea – Reconciled with Christ to intercede

In his opening greetings, Paul reminds Philemon that we are part of the body of Christ, and that obeying God and reflecting His character should be the goal of every Christian. While pleading for Onesimus, Paul illustrates key elements in the role of an intercessor. Paul models three practices worth emulating:

- Pray for the brethren constantly, thanking God for His transformative work in their lives.
- Appeal to the evidence of a transformed heart as the “reality check” of someone’s professed faith (1 John 3:14, James 2:17)
- Be humble and season your words with salt, trusting that it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13)

V.11-13 Onesimus’ Proof – Reconciled with Christ to repent

This letter is being delivered in person to Philemon by Onesimus himself. Even beyond Onesimus’ service to Paul and to the ministry, the proof of true repentance is manifested by his willingness to go back to Colossae to amend his wrongdoing, despite the risk of imprisonment or worse. Through Onesimus, we are reminded that:

- Before Christ we were useless, but we are now useful in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- We need to ask for forgiveness when we wrong others (James 5:16, Matthew 5:23-24)
- True repentance will manifest in the desire and ability to obey God and to live for His glory (1 John 2:3, Ephesians 1:13-14, John 8:31)

V.14-22 Philemon’s Pardon – Reconciled with Christ to forgive

Tradition and the historical record confirm that Philemon forgave Onesimus — evidenced by this letter’s preservation in Scripture and the continued witness of the church at Colossae. Being able to forgive those who wrong us is the core evidence that we have received God’s forgiveness and have been born of the Spirit.

- Forgiveness is based on sacrificial obedience and not on emotion (Mat. 6:14-15, Col. 3:12-13)
- We’re commanded to forgive from the heart; we’ve been forgiven and become debtors (Mat. 18:21-35)
- Forgiving shouldn’t be conditional or limited, the Lord said forgive as many times as necessary (Mat. 18:22)

V.23-25 Evidence of reconciliation

As Paul closes his letter, he mentions Mark among his fellow workers, a significant detail given their sharp fallout a decade earlier (Acts 13:13, Acts 15:36-40). Once again, the evidence of

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having been reconciled to God by Him is that we receive the ability to become agents of reconciliation, to ask for forgiveness when we do wrong, and to forgive.

Main Idea:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:17-19



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