

Action of One Who Forgives

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Preacher: BK Smith

[0 : 00] Please have a seat and while you're doing so, please open up the letter to Philemon, please. The letter to Philemon. Last couple of weeks, as some of you may know, we have started a series on the subject of forgiveness.

The subject of forgiveness. I entitled this series, Freedom in Forgiveness, because not only is there freedom in us being forgiven, but there is freedom in us granting forgiveness. Amen?

It frees us of the poison of bitterness, being trapped in the past. It frees us from Satan's grasp and allows us to have wonderful fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ as we forgive those who have wronged us.

It's not quite an easy topic, is it? Just during this past week, I have heard there's been some interesting questions brought up at growth groups. People have asked me various questions.

And I hope you're having some great conversations. Because I want you to consider the whole scope of forgiveness. Because it's not just a small thing.

[1 : 21] It is a huge thing. And as we kind of deal with each type of instance, I pray that the questions you have on the subject will be answered.

For some of you, I pray that you will indeed find freedom in forgiveness. And others that you would be able to instruct others that you know that are trapped in a cycle of unforgiveness.

To go over what we talked about before, I'm going to define forgiveness. Defining forgiveness is a promise to release an offense.

A promise to release an offense. It means to no longer remember. So what that means is, when I forgive you, it means I am no longer going to hold that sin against you.

I am no longer going to remind you of that sin. And I will no longer speak to anybody about that sin. So you get it?

[2 : 27] It's not spoken of anymore. So when I say I forgive you, it's gone. Now, when I deal with you in a relationship, that isn't even taken into consideration.

The other question that we answered was, why do we forgive? And I believe it boils down to two answers. One, we are commanded to by God. And two, it gives us freedom.

Who doesn't want to be free? And I would pray, who doesn't want to obey our God? Fact is, we want healthy relationships.

Amen? We want healthy relationships with our friends, our family members. Sometimes, when we're struggling with being offended, it seems like we are never, ever going to be able to get over something until we actually obey God and forgive.

But one of the things that we know, just from human life, we cannot have ongoing relationships without forgiveness, right? You have to get there.

[3 : 38] If I want to have a relationship with someone, they've offended me, we have to deal with that. Forgiveness has to be offered. It needs to be accepted. One of the best imageries that I want to talk about, and there's actually different types of forgiveness, but the one I'm going to talk about today and that we see in Philemon is the type of forgiveness that is offered to a friend.

Someone that you have a relationship with. We're not talking about vertical forgiveness, which is the vertical forgiveness that happens between man and God and God and man. But I'm talking about more of a horizontal type of forgiveness that we do when someone has hurt us.

One of the imageries, and I talked briefly about this last week, is when someone offends you, it's like they put this big rock in your face, right? It's kind of like you're sitting at a table and someone puts this huge boulder.

And some reason, we're trying to act like we have this friendship and we're trying to act like it's normal, but there's this boulder that's blocking. I might, I know they've sinned against me.

I've been offended, but I love them. But there's still something off with the friendship. Do you guys know what I'm talking about? Do you guys experience that? I think that's kind of a common everyday occurrence sometimes.

[5 : 00] You want to have this great relationship, but you know until this issue is dealt with, it's never going to be the same.

Sometimes we can just say we forgive them and try to go on, but it's still stuck between the two of us. And what we're going to learn today is until that offense has been called out and forgiveness asked for and received, that relationship will not be restored.

Last week, we began looking at the letter to Philemon. In this letter, we met this man named Onesimus. And if you weren't here, let me give you a quick, quick summation of the letter to Philemon.

Philemon is a leader in the church of Colossae. We believe he was a wealthy man, and he was at his home the first century church met at. Onesimus used to be his slave, had ran away and took something with him.

Something of great, valuable to Onesimus. So Onesimus, thinking he's running away, finds himself in Rome, and who does he happen to run into? This guy by the name of Apostle Paul, right?

[6 : 12] Here's Paul preach, guess what? He gets saved. He then starts serving Paul. This discussion start happens. Oh, yes, Onesimus, I have this friend named Philemon that you're talking about that you ran away.

I think what would really be good is for you guys to reconcile. So what he does is, Paul is in prison at this time, has a friend named Tychicus.

So he sends Tychicus with this letter to Philemon back to Philemon along with Onesimus. So Onesimus, all of a sudden he hears that, opens the door.

There's Tychicus and Onesimus, the slave who ran away. And if you remember, we talked about slavery in the first century. If your slave ran away, you had permission to put that person to death.

So here's the man who actually has the legal power to put him to death. But Onesimus shows up at his house with Tychicus with this letter. So what we learned last week is, Paul demonstrates to us what type of person Philemon is.

[7 : 26] So in the first couple of verses, we learned that Philemon is a man who has a great love for the Lord. He's a man who has a great love for people. He has a great love for the church.

He has a great love for the maturity of others. But most of all, he has a great love for God's glory. So here he is with this letter.

So today, I want to take a deeper look at what the actual act of forgiveness looks like. I believe we can learn from it on how we can forgive.

And how are we to respond to one who asks us for forgiveness, which we pray leads to reconciliation, and ultimately to restoration.

So please read along. We're going to read the same verses that Chris read to us today. We're going to be reading in Philemon 8 to verses 19. Notice he starts with accordingly.

[8 : 29] It's another way of saying therefore. So what he's saying now is built on what we learned last week. Because you are this loving man who cares for God's glory, I can now teach you what I'm about to tell you right now.

So he says, Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you. Philemon, I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus, I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.

He says, For this is perhaps why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant, but more than a bondservant as a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

I, Paul, write this of my own hand. I will repay it to say nothing of you owing me, even your own self. So let's go back to verse 8 here.

[10 : 17] And today we're going to look at three essential actions of one who forgives. Three essential actions of one who forgives. And as I just stated earlier, what we see in that according is all based on, accordingly, the love that Philemon has.

So the first thing that Paul is appealing to in Philemon, if you notice both verse 8 and 9, it says, Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake, I prefer to appeal to you.

What he's saying, this whole idea of forgiveness, it's wrapped in love. It's wrapped in love. It is an action of love.

So Paul is communicating this to us. So the first action of one who forgives is one who wants to forgive. The first action of one who forgives desires to forgive.

If you love God, you love what he has done for you, you want to forgive. When someone has offended you, has hurt you, your desire, wanting that friendship restored, is that you want to forgive.

[11 : 33] Both you understand it is commanded by God, and you understand that it is about love. Notice verse 10, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment near the end, it says, But I prefer to do nothing without your consent, in order that your goodness might not be done by compulsion, but by your own accord.

Paul is an apostle, right? When Paul commands something, Christians believe. Philemon was led to the Lord by Paul. So forgiveness means getting to the point of opening our life and our heart to the one who wronged us.

That's what it means. And I know that sounds a little tougher in some situations, but it's that idea, you want that relationship restored, and you're just waiting for that time that this issue can be dealt with so you can open up your heart to be offering forgiveness.

And often, it begins between you and God. It begins in your attitude. It begins in your character.

And it begins with your knowledge of God's truth. You know God wants you there, and sometimes it's tough. Sometimes God forces situations for you to deal with that forgiveness.

[13 : 02] You know that bitterness is not going to go away until you've had forgiveness and you've dealt with the offense, or at other times, is just out of love.

Today I'm going to tell you a little bit of a story of my friend Jack and Diane. Jack and Diane have given me permission to share their story because I believe it wonderfully illustrates what happens in relationships and what happens when forgiveness is offered.

Jack cheated on Diane. He had a horrible pattern of what's going on in his life. And when Diane found out, she was obviously crushed and broken and never thought her life would be the same.

It's interesting to hear her tell the story because she talks about the inability that she had to look at her husband. She could not look at him.

She didn't want to listen to him. She didn't want to hear his voice. That's how it all started out. But something that she will tell you is in the back of her mind is, you have to forgive him, you have to forgive him, you have to forgive him.

[14 : 28] Here we have this interesting situation with Onesimus, who's before Philemon. Sometimes, when we have someone before us wanting to forgive, we are so bitter, we do not even want to receive them, right?

We don't want to. We don't want to speak to them. We don't want to hear them. We don't want to think about them. Often, we can feel hate, betrayal, and disrespect among other things. What my friend Jack did upon dealing with this issue is he came to our church.

He came to our pastors and he told us about what he had done and he confessed his sin. He then told us that he wanted to use this as an opportunity to go to his wife to ask forgiveness.

Was Diane willing to receive him? By all biblical standards and more than that, she had every right to divorce him and not have anything to do with him for as long as she lived.

Now this begs a question. When you and I forgive someone, does that mean we just allow that person back into our life?

[15 : 44] Think about it, right? There's this idea that's out there that we're supposed to forgive and forget, which means that if someone asks for forgiveness, we have to allow them back in our lives.

Well, the question is, many of us, sometimes what that person has done has hurt us over years, if not decades, and we're under this notion that we have to let them back.

But the Bible actually doesn't tell us that we have to let them back into our lives. So the question, or the answer to this question is, when we forgive, do we allow someone back into our lives?

The answer is, it depends. It depends on, A, what was that original relationship? Was that a close relationship? Or was it a hurtful relationship?

So here, in this situation that I shared with you about Jack and Diane, Jack did the right thing. He recognized he had committed offense, and he believed that his wife had every right to leave him and have nothing to do with him, and he wanted the guilt to be removed, and he wanted forgiveness.

[16 : 55] So how do we determine if we are to let someone back into our lives, right? For them, at one point, this was a healthy relationship, but somewhere it went awry.

So I believe we have three questions to ask when someone comes and says, hey, I want to be forgiven. And we have to give them forgiveness, but that doesn't mean we need to talk to them again.

So I believe we need to ask three questions, and you'll see the outline in your bulletin today. The first one is, are they repentant? Are they repentant?

Sometimes we want to offer forgiveness so bad to someone that they actually haven't gotten the point of repenting of it. So we're so excited to get them back into our lives.

Hey, I forgive you. We let them back. They really haven't repented, and they just do the same old hurt all over again, right? So the first question is, I think, are they repentant?

[17 : 55] Let's take a look at Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. I think the fact that Onesimus, standing in front of Philemon, under the penalty of death, shows that he's repented.

Amen? Like, he knows, this guy, Philemon's got every right to put him to death, or at least give him a severe beating. But he's there. There's this action.

Before even saying anything, Philemon's action declared that he is. Paul goes on to tell us that he considers Onesimus is a child of the faith, a fellow believer now.

Just like Paul, just like Timothy, just like Philemon, Onesimus is a child of the faith, and he understands what it is to repent. Now, I'm using this word, repent, and I want to use the worldly word that is usually used.

It's called apology, or I'm sorry, right? There's a difference between repenting and saying I'm sorry. See, when someone asks us for forgiveness, forgiveness, the action demands a response, right?

[19 : 10] When I say I forgive you, I am no longer going to hold that sin against you. I will not longer speak to you about that sin, and I will not dwell on that sin. So, until we're able to negotiate that, this relationship can't happen.

But seeking forgiveness is a two-way street. You are actually asking the person to do something. The one seeking forgiveness has acknowledged that they have sinned both before you and God, and they are going to turn away from that.

Repent means I am turning away from that. I am turning away from every situation that led me to that problem, that led me to that defense. That's what repentance is before God, amen?

We're turning our back on the world, and we're turning towards God. And it's the same thing when we're offering that. We're asking. So, when we have sin, we don't say, hey, I was late for an appointment, or I offer an excuse, right?

What I literally say when I'm asking forgiveness because I was late for the meeting that was really important to you, it actually states with, I'm repenting of the sin of thinking of myself greater than I am of you.

[20 : 29] Please forgive me. The act of repentance actually calls for us to name that sin that we're asking forgiveness for. I'm going to tell you why this is really important.

Because sorry doesn't cover it, right? One author on the subject says apologizing or saying sorry is the word substitute for forgiveness.

We often hear, I'm sorry I offended you. I am sorry I hurt you. That actually isn't the act of repentance.

The act of repentance is actually stating the sin which I did. It's taken responsibility for that offense. I am sorry I sinned against you.

This is the acknowledgement of the offense. forgiveness. And we all know what our human nature does, right? We always, we want forgiveness but we want to minimize the offense.

[21 : 30] But it's actually not bad to minimize it. It actually cleans the slate so much better. Hey, I'm sorry I was angry at you. I'm sorry I spoke ill of you today my love.

We could give excuses, right? I got stuck in traffic. Things didn't go the way I wanted to at work and I'm coming home and I'm grumpy and I'm tired. Those things really don't matter.

Now, when a person says, I'm sorry I sinned against you, you actually have a responsibility. That responsibility is, oh don't worry, forget about it.

That actually is the wrong thing to do and I'll tell you why. It's because you're releasing them without giving them forgiveness. I call it the false release.

When we say, oh don't bother, it was no big deal, we're actually minimizing the sin and therefore not removing the guilt. When you forgive something, don't you want them to be free?

[22 : 37] When you forgive someone, do you not want them to be free? You guys are supposed to say a yes in there. Come on, you're Baptists, right? When you forgive something, do you not want them to be free?

Yes, right? And we want to say, hey, I hear you and I forgive you for the sin of you thinking greater than me in that moment.

I forgive you. That releases it. So that's what happens. It's kind of a transaction is going on. sometimes because we want to keep this relationship, we'll make excuses, right?

Oh, they're always like that. It's the way they are. They didn't really mean it. When we keep doing that, we're actually making it harder for our relationship to function.

Please remember, repenting is not shifting the blame or not taking responsibility. responsibility. It's accepting responsibility. So Philemon being here, or Onesimus before Philemon, he's accepting responsibility.

[23 : 42] So the first question I want you to ask is, are they repentant? The second question you want to ask is, are they transformed? Are they transformed? Notice Paul says, verse 11, says, formerly he was useless to you.

By all accounts, Paul's accounts of Onesimus, he was a useless guy. Horrible slave, right? The guy was probably happy that he ran away. Don't have to deal with this guy. But something happens to him.

And he says, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me. So the man that Philemon sees before him was no longer the same man. Even Paul states that Onesimus was formerly useless and now he's useful.

Something has happened. He's been transformed. What's interesting, the situation between Jack and Diane, Diane just didn't forgive him. She forgave him, but she had to wait for a period of time to see if her husband was going to transform.

A few of the things that he had to do was one, go to counseling. And he did. He went to a year's worth of counseling. Number two, he actually had to quit his job because his job left him with no responsibility.

[24 : 49] He had one of those traveling jobs and that was part of the problem. So Jack made the right decision. He just left that job, which he was pretty high up in the company because he wanted to demonstrate that he was indeed, it wasn't that he wanted to, he was indeed repentant and he didn't want to have anything to do with that reminded him of that lifestyle.

And ultimately, did he change? So the first thing is, are they repentant? Two, are they transformed? And here we see number three, are they faithful?

Are they faithful? faithful. Note how Paul states that he is sending back his heart. Imagine that, isn't that great? Someone shows up, he's got a letter and Paul says, I'm sending you back his heart.

That's how close he had become to Onesimus and how much he meant to him. In fact, Onesimus had served Paul so faithfully that he wanted to keep him.

This is part of the transaction. The person who commits the offense comes and repents. And we need not confuse this with those who've hurt us, who we've forgiven, but that means we do not go back to trusting them.

[26 : 03] What I mean by that, I've got a friend, he married a beautiful wife who came from a abusive background. They always say they're sorry, always say their story. And they always want her and the kids and the family to stay over at the house.

And he will never let them stay overnight at her parents' house. In fact, he will not let her visit her parents without him being there. Because they're very emotionally, physically abusive people.

And although they always say, hey, forgive us, forgive us, they've seen no change, they have not repented, and they have not transformed in any sort of way. see, there was no transaction.

This woman's parents did not, they haven't changed. They're still into alcoholism. And those are the way we keep some of our family relationships.

But the reason that they can't let those people back in is there's no transaction there. You with me on that one? It's got to go both ways, right? They have to name the offense, and then I forgive you that offense.

[27 : 12] So the question that may come up, are you saying that we are not to forgive others who do not repent? And I say, actually, that's a whole different process that we're going to get to in the next couple of weeks.

There's a whole different thing about releasing it to God and actually forgiving someone in a relationship. But what I am saying, that if someone seeks that transaction, we've seen both repentance, transformation, and faithfulness, we are commanded to forgive them.

I hear a lot of people who've done damage to their families say, well, I know God has forgiven me, right? I've gone to God with that forgiveness. Well, I always say, if you know God and you know you've been forgiven by him, then you need to be like Onesimus and seek forgiveness from those you've wronged, to not do so is to miss the whole point of what God is asking you to do.

And I think you as parents know what I'm talking about, right? When you force one of your kids to say they're sorry and, you know, you know what? You're not going to get the candy like your brothers and sisters did, right?

And they go back and say, I'm sorry. You know, they really don't mean it, right? You don't force anybody into that kind of situation. But one who is faithful and obeying God will do in all areas.

[28 : 39] So how do you know if someone's faithful? They're going to follow God regardless if you grant them that forgiveness or not. You're going to see life change. So that is under the first action in answering the question.

One, they want to forgive. And two, this is how you know three reasons why they've changed. So the second action of one who forgives is one, they want to restore.

The action of one who forgives is that they want to restore. Take a look at verse 15. For this perhaps is why he was pardoned from you, for a while that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave as a beloved brother, especially to me.

How much more to you, both in the flesh and of the Lord. Notice Onesimus is not just being accepted back as a slave and restored to his former position, but that now he is to be seen as a beloved brother.

This is what restoration and true forgiveness happens. It means, one, there's no punishment. There is no shunning. You know what? Onesimus, you can come in, but I'm going to shun you for six months.

[29 : 50] You ever been there? You're going to forgive the person, but you're going to kind of, they have to earn that trust back up, right? They got to earn that place in your life. That is not forgiveness.

That is not restoration. There's no sending him to do the worst job possible. It's not saying, honey, I forgive you, but you're sleeping on the couch for the next six months, right? That's not what it is.

To forgive, remember, it's to no longer call it to attention. It's like it never happened. Remember the story of the prodigal son? Isn't that a wonderful story?

He ran away with everything. And when the son shows up, the father runs out and restores him to his previous position. That's what we are to do with those who've asked for forgiveness and we restore.

Paul even sees Paul's sovereignty in this action. By Onesimus running away, that God used this evil to bring Onesimus to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

[30 : 51] What man meant for evil, God meant for good. By Onesimus running away for a time, he now gets his slave back, his bondservant back, forever as a brother in Christ.

And why are we to restore? Because isn't that what Jesus Christ does to us? You know that? He gives us the most privileged place.

He loves us. And what's really odd that we Christians do sometimes, and Satan is really good, is that he sometimes whispers in our ear that we're not good enough.

You ever go through that? Hey, I sinned, I repent, but you know what? I'm not going to go to Bible study. I'm really not good enough for Bible study. You know what? I can't go to church.

They'll know who I am, man. what I did. We almost think that by punishing ourselves, that we are in some way trying to impress God.

[31 : 56] We seem to want to make it up. You ever been there? Hey, God, I sinned against you. I've come to the Lord, so now I'm going to go be a missionary, tuck to yuck, tuck, right?

We somehow think that there's this condition that for us to be accepted back to God, I have now got to pay God something more. It doesn't work like that. When you're forgiven, you're forgiven. Amen? He restores you to the rightful place that you are as a child, a beloved child of God.

And that is the same thing we are to do with our brothers and sisters who forgiven us. I'll be honest with you. We must be aware that Satan is very good at using our shame and our pride against us.

And sadly, many people see that they are acting honorably when they're just being foolish. So that's the second act of forgiveness is they want to restore.

The first action is they want to forgive. And the third action of one who forgives is that they have the right to restitution. The right to restitution.

[33 : 04] We don't really cover that very well in Christian circles very much. But do you realize that it was Philemon's place to ask for restitution for what was taken from him?

Do you know that? Don't we want to do that once we've hurt someone? We want to pay it back, right? We want to do something for them. I remember this guy got this very kind letter. And it included like this \$100 gift card for my wife and I go to dinner.

And apparently I was mad. He was mad at me for something. And I didn't even know what was going on. But once that forgiveness, he had spoken ill of me, he sends me this card. And I didn't even know he had an issue with me.

But in it, he wanted to make that up. He wanted that relationship for him and I to be great. And, you know, of course I forgive you. But he said, hey, I want to pay for this dinner for you guys.

There's something special in that. We don't know what Onesimus took from Philemon. We don't know if there was a large amount of savings or something, a valuable family heirloom.

[34 : 12] But Philemon had the right to expect restitution. Why? Sin costs us, doesn't it? There's a cost to us emotionally.

There's a cost to us with our energy, our time. Sometimes it's our money and business. There's this man that I know. I don't know him very well, but at one point he was considered the wealthiest evangelical in the world.

And he, near the end of his life, he hurt a lot of people and he hurt people's businesses. If you didn't agree with him theologically, he would take your business out.

And what was a really sweet story is that after he died, his wife went back and paid everyone back tenfold. Completely restoring the wrong that was done by her husband.

Ten times. Imagine that. You know, that was true asking forgiveness. He was a blessing of forgiveness. So take a look at verse 17. So if you consider me your partner, receive him, Onesimus, as you would receive me.

[35 : 26] If he has wronged you at all or owes you anything, charge it to my account. Were many people here last week? Not that I'm calling a...

But you guys heard a pretty powerful testimony, right? Just quick, my friend Nathan shared how the Lord brought him to saving faith in Jesus Christ and eventually he met his future wife who became saved and she was formerly married and her ex-husband had done horrible things to her.

And after she became saved with Nathan, he had owed her thousands upon thousands of dollars and in order to show him that she forgave him, she released him of all that debt.

Didn't have to. It was legally hers. But she released it because she knew it was a millstone around his neck and she wanted him to eventually find what forgiveness really looks like.

The reality is forgiveness does not come easy. We tend to be driven by our emotions and because of this, forgiveness gets frustrated by negative emotions, lingering resentment, and what I call unquenched anger.

[36 : 41] The reality is forgiveness is not an emotion. It's an action. Forgiveness is a voluntary, rational decision to set the offense aside and desire only the best for the offender.

The reality is forgiveness is forgiveness is tough, but once the decision has been made to forgive, God will give you and grant you the strength.

To this day, my friend, Jack and Diane, guess what they do together? They counsel couples. God has redeemed their marriage, redeemed their relationship with their kids through what was horrible, horrible sinful waters.

See, Paul is doing this with Philemon. He's willing to pay the debt. Scripture tells us that God is a holy God.

Scripture tells us that our actions are evil in his sight and that every evil is sin. Romans 3 tells us, Romans 3.23, that all have sin and fall short of the glory of God.

[38 : 06] God. See, we were meant to pay something, but someone paid it for us. And he paid it on a cross with his son, Jesus Christ.

That is the love that God has for you and I and the reason he wants to restore us. That goodness of Jesus Christ was now accounted to us, his perfection.

My prayer, when we forgive someone, we would desire to not only forgive, but we would open up our arms wide open to welcome those that hurt us.

The reality is, Scripture tells us no more about Onesimus and Philemon, but Christian history does. And actually, history tells us that Philemon, the slave master, released Onesimus.

And church writings tell us that Onesimus became a bishop and was known as a man of great love. This was a man who owed a debt he could not pay, a debt that deserved his death.

[39 : 30] Now tell me, how would you react to someone who needs such forgiveness? Please pray with me.

Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.ultura