



Journey In the Word

February 3

Forgiveness in Philemon—A Case Study

1. Look back through the letter. As Paul makes his appeal for Onesimus, how does he point Philemon back to the gospel?
[Onesimus' conversion in v.10; new brotherhood between Philemon & Onesimus in v.15-16; reminding Philemon of his own conversion through Paul's influence in v.19]
2. In v.17, Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus just like he would welcome Paul. In what ways would doing this also fulfill the commands Paul gives in Romans 12? [You may want to re-read the sermon passage: Romans 12:17-21]
3. In vv.8 & 14, Paul mentions that he is unsatisfied to simply *compel* Philemon to receive Onesimus back. Instead, he hopes to make an *appeal* so that Philemon will choose to forgive & restore Onesimus of his own volition. Why do you think it's so important that Philemon not simply perform the external acts of forgiveness, but that he do it from his heart?
4. Assuming Philemon forgave Onesimus & welcomed him into friendship, how would that affect the church that gathered in his house? How would it affect the church if Philemon *refused* to grant him forgiveness & fellowship?
5. How might Philemon's forgiveness, or failure to forgive, have affected his slave-holding friends outside the church? How might it affect other, unbelieving slaves in Philemon's household? Specifically, how would the gospel have been displayed or distorted in Philemon & Onesimus' relationship?
6. How does *our* forgiveness of offenders, or lack of it, affect those around us who aren't directly involved in the situation? Has anyone seen specific examples in people you know?
7. Paul says the test of whether Philemon actually forgives Onesimus will be seen by the very practical way he welcomes Onesimus back into his household, and into the Colossian church (v. 17). In what practical, external ways can our forgiveness be displayed? How can we help each other make these reflections of *heart-level forgiveness*, and not merely external acts?