

Sermon Series: “Embracing Forgiveness”–Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—7/1/07

Title: “Beyond Forgiveness: Reconciliation”

Text: Philemon verses 1-21

Intro.: *Ills.: Man transformed after dealing with his anger*

Theme: God, the Father, not only wants us to forgive with a willingly spirit; he want us to go the further step of reestablishing the lines of communication and reconciliation so that God’s grace can flow between the two.

Understanding the context of the conflict

- Wisdom, not knowledge, is needed in a thorny situation
 1. *“Men of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” 1 Chronicles 12: 32*
 2. *“Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” Proverbs 29:20*
- Believers are often conflicted between faith values and cultural expectations
 1. Philemon was a new believer and strong church leader which Paul assumes and acknowledges
 - a. **Print vss 1-3**
 - b. *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1*
 - c. That requires finding/losing yourself in Christ so that the conflict isn’t about you or your feelings
 2. Philemon was a slave owner (slave=Onesimus) with societal permission to punish/kill a runaway slave
 - a. **Print vss. 4-10**
 3. Justification for our legalism or unforgiving attitude often is based on man’s word/not God’s
 - a. *“Everything is permissible for me”--but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”--but I will not be mastered by anything. 1 Cor. 6:12*
 - b. **In terms of eternity** — is this leading toward this person’s eternal life in heaven and am I assisting that goal?
- When we are humble before the Lord, we can be gracious with each other
 1. Paul brings Philemon back to a Christ-centered perspective by saying, *“I am a bond-slave of Christ.” (vs. 1)*
 2. *So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:12-13*

Maximize grace while not minimalizing the offense

- Grace-based reconciliation is not about reparations but starting over, anew in Christ **Print vs. 11, 16**
 1. Play on the name of *Onesimus* = *“useful”* — even though had name before, now in Christ was new person
 2. Do you see yourself and the other as useful in Christ? *If any person is in Christ, he is a new creation. 2 Cor. 5: 17*
 3. Reconciliation is not about rehabbing old worn out ways but risking new and uncharted territory in Christ
 - a. *“No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”Mark 2:22*
 - b. Reach out/step across the divide by taking on attitudes/actions which demonstrate a yielding spirit
 - c. **Ills.: What do you do when you reach the stop sign at the same time as another?**
- Reconciliation is about being compelled with love rather than propelled with guilt **Print vss. 12-14**
 1. ***“Forgiveness the scent the flower gives off when crushed under the heel of a shoe.”***
 2. For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 2 Cor. 5:14
 3. Motivating someone to repent or reconcile or come back cannot be law driven but must be “love led”
Print vs. 17
 4. *He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor. 3:6*
- Reconciliation is seeing God’s hand and plan in the midst of broken relationships **Print vs. 15**

1. Even in your hurt looking for what God is accomplishing for your good
 2. *We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God—those whom he has called according to his plan. Romans 8:28*
- Reconciliation acknowledges the loss by bringing Christ's resource to fill it **Print vs. 18-20**
 1. Paul hints that not only the runaway issue stood but also something was stolen to finance the trip
 2. Get the issue/debt out of the way by filling the need from the resources of God's storehouse in Christ
 - a. **Ills.: the story of Zaccheus from Luke 19**
 - b. *And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philip. 4:19*
 - c. Expect much because you have a great God who has and can give much (**Print verse 21**)

Man transformed after dealing with his anger

In his book *It Came from Within*, Andy Stanley tells of a man whose faith sprang back to life once he dealt with his anger. Stanley writes:

I met Joe at Starbucks. He was sitting in one of those overstuffed chairs with headphones on and a scowl that said, "Don't anybody come near me." Everything about his countenance and posture communicated anger. So when I saw him, I avoided eye contact and went on about my business. As I was waiting for my soy latte, Joe approached me and said, "Aren't you Andy?" At that particular moment, I wasn't sure if I should be Andy or not.... "Somebody gave me one of your CDs," he said. "I've been listening to it. But I've got to tell you, I have a real problem with God, and the church, too, for that matter." Joe had been through two difficult divorces. His first wife had been sexually abused as a child and was never able to face the issues involved. After 30 years of marriage, the memories of abuse surfaced and eroded their marriage, which ended in divorce. His ex-wife passed away suddenly two years later. Joe then remarried, but after three years, this too ended in a heartbreaking divorce. Joe was lonely, a recovering alcoholic. There was no evidence of the existence of God as far as he could see.... I got Joe's phone number and connected him with one of our pastors, John Woodall. John called Joe, met him for coffee, and struck up a friendship. That was the last I saw of Joe, for a while. Three months later, I was sitting in that same Starbucks, talking to a student pastor from another church, when I walked Joe. When he saw me, he headed straight for my table. The first thing I noticed was that he was smiling. The second thing I noticed was that he was carrying a Bible, a notebook, and a book on marriage. "I'm getting remarried next week!" he announced. I wasn't sure what to think. "To who?" I asked. "To Susan!" he exclaimed. Susan was his ex-wife. "Susan and I are getting remarried. John is doing the wedding." I could see in Joe's eyes that something remarkable had happened. And it had. Over the course of several meetings with John, Joe found the courage to quit blaming and, instead, take a look at what was rattling around in his heart. He had been an angry man, with reason to be angry. But like so many people, Joe had no idea what to do about his anger. And his unresolved anger had eroded his faith to the point where it was almost nonexistent. John had helped... Joe's faith come to life. With his renewed faith came the motivation he needed to address other issues in his life. The transformation was so remarkable that Susan noticed and began asking questions. Soon after, she put her faith in Christ. The week before Susan and Joe were remarried, John baptized her in one of our morning services. **Andy Stanley, It Came from Within (Multnomah, 2006), p. 58-60; submitted by John Beukema, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania**

Philemon 1:1-21

¹Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, ²to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. ⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. ⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints. ⁸Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and

order you to do what you ought to do,⁹ yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul--an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus--¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. -- ¹⁶no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹²I am sending him--who is my very heart--back to you. ¹³I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. ¹⁴But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.

¹⁵Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good

¹⁷So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

¹⁸If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back--not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰I do wish, brother, that I may have 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 ask.