

Series: New Year Reminders

Sermon: Restore Fellowship

Passage: Philemon 1-25

Illustration:

Need: The restoring of broken human relationships is such a beautiful reflection of the love and forgiveness that God through Christ has poured out on us.

I. Background in Colossae.

- Epaphrus, not Paul, was instrumental in planting the first church in Colossae (see Col. 1:7).
- Paul and Epaphrus were partners in ministry and Paul knew some of the believers in Colossae.
- Philemon was a wealthy Colossian who became a believer through the ministry of Paul (likely in Ephesus) and who had a church meeting in his home.
- Onesimus was apparently a runaway slave belonging to Philemon who encountered Paul in Rome.
- Onesimus also became a follower of Jesus through Paul's ministry and began serving Paul in his Roman incarceration.

II. Wrongs Owned

- It seems that Paul wanted Onesimus to continue to assist him in Rome but he had a legal and moral responsibility to Philemon.
- At Paul's leading, Onesimus returned to Colossae with an attitude of contrition and submission to the one he had wronged.
- Wrongs don't have to be intentional to be legitimate. Unintentional wrongs still break fellowship and hurt relationships.
- To apologize is to accept responsibility for the wrong you have caused and truly be sorry for the brokenness that has been caused without excuse or justification of your actions. OWN IT!

III. Offenses Forgiven

- Philemon had rights as a slave owner but Paul wanted him to act in love rather than legality.
- As Philemon's spiritual leader, Paul could have pressured him to forgive but he wanted the forgiveness to be a voluntary act of the will.
- Onesimus was legally a slave but he had become more in Christ - he became a brother.
- Paul knew the powerful example to the church this forgiveness would be and he believed Philemon would do what a follower of Christ should do.
- We have no knowledge of the outcome but it would have been very strange for this letter to circulate if fellowship had not been restored. FORGIVE THEM!

IV. 2023 Reminder #3: Be a champion of restoration!

- Forgiveness does not condone the actions of wrong doers.
- Some offenses are of a severe nature that will need extensive support and some relationships might not ever be restored but forgiveness is still possible through God's grace.
- Ask God to give you a heart that is quick to apologize without defense. Who needs your apology?
- Ask God to give you His grace to forgive those who have offended you even before they apologize. Who needs your forgiveness?