Love And Forgiveness

MAIN POINT

When others treat us wrongly, we are to relate to them with forgiveness. In so doing, we treat others as Jesus treated us.

INTRODUCTION

Ask volunteers to share an experience in which they did something as a child or teenager that their parents did not want them to do. Did their parents find it easy or difficult to forgive them? Explain why.

What makes forgiveness hard in some cases and easier in others?

A variety of things contribute to how easy or difficult it can be to forgive someone who wrongs us. Paul addressed the issue of forgiveness in his letter to Philemon. A slave named Onesimus had run away from his master Philemon and perhaps had even stolen money from him. Paul acknowledged that Philemon had been wronged. Yet, he also challenged Philemon to forgive Onesimus. As we study this text, we do so hoping that God will help us let go of any unforgiving attitudes we may be harboring. To forgive those who mistreat us is not easy, but it is always important, for this is precisely what He did for us in Christ.

UNDERSTANDING

read philemon 1-7.

Why did Paul say he was thankful for his friend Philemon?

Paul cited evidence of love and faith in Philemon’s life. How are love and faith apparent in your life, both at church and in the community?

What affect was Philemon having on the believers in his church? Who are some Christians in whose presence you are refreshed? What is it that makes these people refreshing to be around?

What might be the opposite of being a person who refreshes others by his or her fellowship? How can we avoid being that person?

Just as Paul had observed Philemon and the positive impact of his service to Christ, people are watching believers today to see if our walk matches our talk. We should seek to have a positive impact on others, refreshing and energizing them in the faith.

read philemon 8-13.

What does it appear Paul wanted Philemon to do, based on these verses? Why do you think Paul appealed to Philemon on Onesimus’ behalf? What was the basis of Paul’s appeal to Philemon?

Should our forgiveness of others depend on whether the person deserves our forgiveness? Explain. Is that how God forgives?

Is love something we feel, or something we do? What about forgiveness—is it an emotion or a choice? Explain.

We can offer our forgiveness to others on the basis of love, as we have experienced God’s grace. This forgiveness must be given willingly, not under compulsion. As believers, we can grow in love as we do what is right because it’s the right thing to do.

read philemon 14-16.

Why did Paul decide to send Onesimus back to Philemon? How might this have turned out if Philemon were unwilling to forgive his runaway slave?

Philemon might have responded skeptically, saying he was not convinced he could trust the slave who had stolen from him and run away. What advice would you have given Philemon?

How do you think Onesimus felt about his upcoming reunion with Philemon?

Why might it have been difficult for Philemon to think of Onesimus as a dearly loved brother?

As Christians, we share with other believers the experience of having been forgiven by God. This transforms the relationships we may have had when we were apart from Christ. We are now related in the family of God and should relate to one another in love.

read philemon 17-22.

Paul wanted Philemon to think of him as a partner. The Greek word translated “partner” is related to koinonia, which means fellowship, in the sense of partnership. It describes one who shares responsibility or experiences with another. Paul referred to Titus as his partner in 2 Corinthians 8:23.

What would it look like if each member of your class considered himself or herself a partner in the ministry of the gospel? What would need to change before that was true?

What benefits are there when we partner with other believers to accomplish the work of Christ?

How does this partnership or fellowship hinge on the forgiveness we extend to one another?

How did Paul want Philemon to accept Onesimus? How did he acknowledge the harm Onesimus’s sin had caused?

APPLICATION

How does your expression of forgiveness picture the grace of Jesus Christ to those around you? How can you do that without calling attention to yourself?

What are you doing to remind yourself of God’s grace to you in Christ? How will you express your gratitude to Christ for His forgiveness?

PRAYER

In prayer, ask God to help each person recognize and appreciate how great is His grace in forgiving us. Pray for gracious hearts to forgive those who have wronged us, and the ability to accept one another and labor together for the Lord.