

# The Hope of Reconciliation

## Philemon Part 2

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Part two of our study in Philemon brings us to yet another major biblical theme, that of reconciliation. In verse 17 Paul writes, “welcome him as you would welcome me” and in verse 16 he adds, “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother”. This is a pretty amazing picture of reconciliation. In scripture, reconciliation refers to the doing away of hostility, the bridging over of a quarrel. In reconciliation, parties which were formerly at odds are brought together again. The fruit of reconciliation is restored relationship and the scope of reconciliation is any relationship in which unity is restored: brothers (and sisters) in Christ, prodigal to father, the lost back to God. The need for reconciliation touches all of us, be it in our marriages, our relationships at work or school, with family and friends, even with the Lord. The message of Philemon is a message of hope for reconciliation.

### New Covenant Hearts—The True Hope for Reconciliation

Last week we looked closely at Paul’s understanding of the new heart of a person who has been transformed by Jesus Christ. This theme emerges again in the manner in which Paul appeals to his friend Philemon. He begins his plea with, “although in Christ I could be bold...yet I appeal to you on the basis of love” (8&9). Not only does Paul bring the reality of Jesus Christ squarely into view, but the nature of his request is an “appeal”, not a demand of rights or a threat of sanctions. As an apostle of Christ Jesus, Paul had every right to command and demand—to yield his Apostolic Authority. He chose instead to encourage and urge. He chose instead to make his request “on the basis of love” within a community whose members trusted and respected each other. Paul believed in the goodness of Philemon’s heart and in the significant influence of his church community. Paul had **hope** that Philemon would “do the right thing”.

### Philemon and Onesimus—A Better Picture of Forgiveness

You can’t speak of reconciliation to any significant extent without dealing with the issue of forgiveness. In the return of Onesimus and the letter that he carries, we see a refreshing picture of true forgiveness. Again, the request of Paul to “welcome him” carries with it the assumption of forgiveness. We can be certain that Onesimus had wronged his master Philemon. His return brought with it the possibility of severe punishment. Paul’s request would have seemed unreasonable to even the most charitable slave owner in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. We already know that Paul has a very different hope for those who have been transformed and themselves forgiven of Christ. In Paul’s mind, it can be expected that the forgiven forgive. Those who have experienced true repentance and a deep understanding of the grace, mercy and forgiveness that has been given them, are those who most freely forgive (Mat. 6:15, Luke 11:4). This is not to minimize the wrong that has been done. In fact, Paul does just the opposite. Paul openly acknowledges that Philemon has every right for justice and full-payment of debt. He even offers to pay this debt himself (a beautiful picture of substitution). In this we see a much better and a much needed definition of biblical forgiveness. Forgiveness never means that you simply forget the wrong that has been committed to you. It actually doesn’t even mean that sin and wrong go unpunished. The bible clearly teaches that Yahweh never lets sin go unpunished. Forgiveness is best understood as a personal act in which I release the person who has sinned against me from my personal right to “pay him or her back”. Forgiveness means looking to God for His justice and mercy.

### Jesus Christ: Where Hope, Forgiveness and Reconciliation Come Together

Not surprisingly, all of this points to the person and the work of Jesus Christ. The very act of the incarnation, the coming of Christ in the form of a man, is an act of **reconciliation**, for in it the Father sent his Son to draw the world into the true community of the Godhead. Similarly, the true and ultimate act of **forgiveness** is found in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the gift of grace and life we receive through His resurrection. Yahweh never lets sin go unpunished. He atones for sin completely at Calvary. He forgives completely those who accept Christ’s gift of salvation. This is amazing, and it is in this that we have great

**hope**, not only for the life to come, but for the wholeness, justice, peace and reconciliation that are meant to be a part of our experience and our ministry as Christ's ambassadors today.

#### **A Plan for the Week**

This week, consider reading through Philemon each day. Spend time in praying, meditating on and journaling about the themes you find there. Ask the Lord to weave these things into your life.

### **Happenings this Week @ River West**

#### **Opportunities for Prayer @ River West Church**

##### **Wednesday, May 7th Parent Prayer Group 7-8pm @ RW**

Come and join other parents of Jr. High or High School students to pray for our students and the Student Ministries leaders. For more information contact Cynthia Weston @ 515-1464 or [cwweston@juno.com](mailto:cwweston@juno.com)

##### **Saturday, May 17th Saturday Morning Prayer 8-9am @ RW**

Join us during this amazing time of seeking and rejoicing in Gods plans for us as a church and community of believers. For more information contact Jeff Nopper @ 245.1841 or Ryan Lee @ 235.9388

##### **Thursdays Men's Bible Study RW @ 6:30-7:30am**

The Thursday morning Men's Bible Study group is starting a new study on May 15th. Lead by Mark Drum & Carl Casanova, this is a great opportunity to connect with other men on a deeper level through studying Gods word. For more information contact Mark Drum at 699-0778 or [markmdrum@gmail.com](mailto:markmdrum@gmail.com)