

# The Book of Philemon – Part 3 – Summary & Study Guide

## Summary

This teaching provides the concluding audio in a series on the **Epistle to Philemon**, emphasizing that the book's central theme is **active forgiveness**. The speaker suggests that the profound spiritual implications of this letter are often "**hidden in plain sight**" until a believer looks beneath the text to understand the mandatory nature of forgiving others.

## Study Guide

This study guide focuses on the final segment of the study on Philemon, examining the **necessity of active forgiveness**, the severe consequences of withholding it, and the scriptural warnings regarding the cost of sin.

## Definitions of Key Words

- **Active Forgiveness:** Forgiveness that is not just a feeling but is demonstrated through **changed actions** and serves as the primary evidence of a believer's faith.
- **Brother:** A term used for a **fellow believer** or Christian, regardless of whether they are male or female.
- **Denarius:** A silver coin representing approximately **one day's wages** for a common labourer.
- **Hidden in Plain Sight:** Scriptural truths that are clearly written in the text but remain misunderstood or overlooked until the **Lord opens one's eyes**.
- **Living Tool:** The 1st-century Greco-Roman definition of a **slave**, signifying that they were considered the absolute property of their master.
- **Talent:** A massive unit of currency; one silver talent was worth roughly **6,000 denarii**, making 10,000 talents an astronomical, unrepayable debt.
- **Wicked Slave:** The label Jesus gives to a believer who, after being forgiven much, **refuses to show mercy** to others.

## Expansion of Key Points

## 1. The Essence and Context of the Appeal

Paul writes to Philemon, a fellow worker and slave owner, regarding **Onesimus**, a runaway slave who became a believer under Paul's ministry in prison (**Philemon 1:1, 10**). Though Paul has the apostolic authority to order Philemon to do what is right, he chooses to **appeal on the basis of love** as an "old man" and a "prisoner of Christ Jesus" (**Philemon 1:8-9**). He requests that Philemon receive Onesimus back no longer as a slave, but as a **dear brother** (**Philemon 1:16**).

## 2. Unlimited Forgiveness: The 70 x 7 Standard

When Peter asked for a limit on forgiveness, suggesting "up to seven times," Jesus responded with "**up to seventy times seven**" (**Matthew 18:21-22**). This signifies that for the believer, there is **no limit to forgiveness**; it must be a continual mindset of mercy rather than a calculated tally of wrongs.

## 3. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Jesus uses a parable to illustrate the high stakes of forgiveness (**Matthew 18:23-35**):

- **The King's Mercy:** A king forgives a slave an unrepayable debt of **10,000 talents** out of compassion (**Matthew 18:24-27**).
- **The Slave's Wickedness:** That same slave refuses to forgive a fellow worker a tiny debt of **100 denarii**, even choking him to demand payment (**Matthew 18:28-30**).
- **The Spiritual Transfer:** Because of this lack of mercy, the Lord becomes angry and **transfers the original massive debt back** onto the unforgiving slave (**Matthew 18:32-34**).
- **The Warning to Us:** Jesus explicitly warns that the Heavenly Father will do the same to any believer who does **not forgive their brother from the heart** (**Matthew 18:35**).

## 4. The High Cost and Wages of Sin

Sin is described as the **most costly action in life**, with severe consequences in this life or the next.

- **The Wages:** Scripture is clear that the **wages of sin is death** (**Romans 6:23**).
- **The Progression:** Lust gives birth to sin, which then **brings forth death** (**James 1:15-16**).

- **The Remedy:** Jesus taught that believers should take radical measures—such as **plucking out an eye**—to avoid the trap of sin.

## 5. Paul's Intercession and Substitution

Mirroring the character of Christ, Paul offers to act as a substitute for Onesimus's debts.

- **Charge it to Me:** Paul tells Philemon, "if he... owes you anything, **charge it to my account**" (**Philemon 1:18**).
- **Motivation:** Paul reminds Philemon that he owes Paul his **very self** due to the gospel, using this as leverage to encourage spontaneous goodness (**Philemon 1:19**).
- **Refreshing the Saints:** Paul asks Philemon to "**refresh my heart in Christ**" just as Philemon had refreshed other believers (**Philemon 1:7, 20**).

## 6. Old Testament Foundations of Love

The requirement for forgiveness is rooted in the Law, which commanded that Israelites **not hate their countrymen** or bear a grudge, but **love their neighbour as themselves** (**Leviticus 19:17-18**).

### Study Questions

- Why does Paul choose to appeal to Philemon on the basis of love rather than his apostolic authority?
- In **Matthew 18**, what does the term "wicked" specifically refer to in the context of the servant?
- What is the "transfer" that the teaching describes occurring when a believer refuses to forgive?
- How does the teaching describe the status of a slave in the 1st-century world, and why does this make Onesimus's return dangerous?
- What lesson does the teaching draw from the life of Demas mentioned in **2 Timothy 4:10**?
- According to **James 1:15-16**, what is the end result when sin is "accomplished"?
- How does Paul use Philemon's spiritual "indebtedness" to him to encourage the forgiveness of Onesimus?

## Answer Key

- **Paul's Appeal:** He wanted Philemon's goodness to be **spontaneous and not forced**, acting out of love rather than mere compulsion.
- **Definition of Wicked:** It refers to someone being **unwilling to forgive** others after having been forgiven by God.
- **The Transfer:** The debt the believer refuses to forgive others is **transferred back onto their own account** before the Lord.
- **Slave Status:** They were "living tools" or property; as a runaway, Onesimus was in a **life-endangering situation** upon his return.
- **Demas:** He serves as a warning because he **abandoned the faith** due to his "love of the world".
- **End Result of Sin:** It **brings forth death**.
- **Spiritual Indebtedness:** Paul reminds Philemon that he owes Paul his **"very self"** for the gospel, implying that Philemon's debt to Paul is far greater than any debt Onesimus owes to Philemon.

## Complete List of Biblical References in the Source

- **Philemon 1:1-25**
- **Matthew 18:21-35** (Parable of the Unforgiving Servant)
- **Matthew 25:1-13** (The Ten Virgins)
- **Romans 6:23** (Wages of sin)
- **James 1:15-16** (Progression of sin)
- **Leviticus 19:17-18** (Old Testament command on grudges/love)
- **Acts 27:2** (Aristarchus)
- **Colossians 4:10, 14** (Aristarchus and Demas)
- **2 Timothy 4:10** (Demas abandoning the faith)

## Exhortations

- **Seek Active Change:** Do not merely read the text; allow it to be **life-changing**. If you find it hard to forgive, it is a sign you are not "in him" with the mindset of Christ.
- **Fear the Cost of Sin:** Regard sin as the **"most costly action in life"** and

do whatever is necessary—even radical measures—to exclude it from your walk.

- **Forgive to be Forgiven:** Remember the high stakes: without **active forgiveness** in your life, there will be no active forgiveness from the Heavenly Father.
- **Be a Witness Through Mercy:** Follow Philemon's example by being a "refresher" of the saints, ensuring the character of Christ is **vividly seen** in your attitudes.
- **Reject Modern Dilutions:** Do not allow modern theology to dilute the clear scriptural warnings about the **consequences of disobedience**.

## FROM SLAVE TO BROTHER: RADICAL FORGIVENESS IN THE BOOK OF PHIL

Paul's letter to Philemon mediates reconciliation with his runaway slave, Onesimus, teaching that the gospel transforms social hierarchies and active forgiveness is non-negotiable for believers.

### THE NARRATIVE OF RECONCILIATION

**FROM 'USELESS' TO 'USEFUL'**  
Onesimus, a runaway slave, converted to Christianity under Paul's ministry while in prison.

**A NEW SPIRITUAL PECKING ORDER**  
Paul urges Philemon to receive Onesimus no longer as a slave, but as a brother.

**THE TRANSFER OF DEBT**  
Paul offers to personally repay any debt or wrong Onesimus committed against Philemon.

### THE MANDATE OF FORGIVENESS

**THE DANGER OF THE 'SHUT DOOR'**  
Unforgiveness is 'wickedness' that can result in the transfer of spiritual debt back to us.

**SEVENTY TIMES**  
Jesus commands unlimited forgiveness, removing all defined limits on mercy.

**MANDATORY MERCY**  
As taught in Matthew 6, God's forgiveness of us is conditional upon our forgiveness of others.

**GOD'S FORGIVENESS**

### FORGIVENESS CHECKLIST

<p><b>PREPARE THE HEART</b></p> <p>Scriptural Basis: Today is the day of atonement; do not procrastinate.</p>	<p><b>ACT WITHOUT COMPULSION</b></p> <p>Scriptural Basis: Forgiveness must be a spontaneous act of free will, not forced.</p>	<p><b>ACKNOWLEDGE</b></p> <p>Scripture: Recognize all 'slaves' massive</p>
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