

Are You Qualified?

In the pursuit of employment, you must always pay attention to the qualifications listed as necessary for the job, and be able to demonstrate how your abilities, education and experience meet those requirements. One of the jobs required among believers is the experience & expression of forgiveness. There are certain qualifications necessary, however, to performing that task. You can determine if you qualify as we look at them in today's Templates of Truth.

The Apostle Paul had a lot to say in his writings about forgiveness. In both his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, he instructed believers to *forgive each other just as the Lord forgave you* (Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13). Reconciliation and restoration were also among the forgiving qualities Paul encouraged. His clear teaching to the Galatians was, *if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness* (Galatians 6:1). The ability to *restore* a fellow believer after having committed *any* sort of sin, and to do so in a spirit of grace & compassion rather than judgment & condemnation, requires a depth of *spiritual* maturity not all Christians possess (but certainly should).

Was there such a believer among Paul's circle of friends? There was indeed, and we learn his identity in a New Testament letter Paul addressed to the man personally – Philemon. Apparently a Christian businessman in Colossae, it was Philemon's house in which the church at Colossae had met. As was the case with many wealthy families of the day, Philemon owned a slave by the name of Onesimus, who stole from his master and ran away. While still a fugitive, Onesimus crossed the path of Paul's life who led him to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Onesimus became a beloved and loyal servant with Paul in the ministry of the Gospel, and we find him at Paul's side while the Apostle was under house arrest at Rome.

The contents of this letter reveal the profile & qualifications of a person who possesses true forgiveness and restoration. We see them not only in Philemon, but in Paul himself as he appealed to his friend for a reconciliation with the runaway slave. Paul pointed out these spiritual qualities in Philemon which included: *love, faith, fellowship, knowledge, goodness* and *obedience*. God's word teaches the principles of forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration. Philemon had a *knowledge* of those principles and his life demonstrated *faithful obedience* to the teachings of Scripture. He also held a high value for *fellowship* among believers in the church and the need for *loving* and supporting one another in the *goodness* of God. Paul initiated the occasion for Onesimus to stand before his master and account for his offense. It was Paul's goal for the sin to be forgiven and a new relationship restored between the two men. If there was restitution that needed to be made, Paul insisted that Philemon *charge (it) to his account* (Philemon 18). The desire and initiative Paul took in facilitating this reconciliation stands out as another admirable qualification of true forgiveness. It also serves as a dramatic picture of the kind of love and sacrifice Christ made for each of us on behalf of the sins we too were guilty of.

As Onesimus stood before Philemon bearing Paul's letter, he was not the same man that had fled

some time before. Christ had done a work of grace in his life that came about as a result of his repentance and faith. When Christ forgives, we should forgive also. As Christ restores, we must also restore. Philemon would have been a disgrace to his church family and a traitor to his testimony of faithfulness to God had he not extended grace, mercy and love to his rebellious servant. The work God accomplished in the lives of these men resulted in a new role for Onesimus – *no longer a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother* (Philemon 16). He became a greater asset to both Paul and Philemon, and ultimately to God and His kingdom.

We cannot read this account and not acknowledge the significance of its inclusion among the pages of inspired Scripture. It serves as a practical example for how we are obligated under faithfulness to Christ and His church to demonstrate the same kind of grace toward each other that He has demonstrated toward each of us personally. You might be in the place of Philemon today and be willing to confront someone in your life for whom you need to extend forgiveness & restoration. You might be in the place of Onesimus and need to present yourself in confession, repentance and a willingness to make restitution for past wrongs. You might be in the place of Paul and need to encourage & facilitate an act of forgiveness and reconciliation on behalf of a fellow believer, friend or family member. We have here the job description for forgiveness. The qualifications are clearly defined. The question is: are you spiritually mature enough to qualify?

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide in Christ. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in the Lord Jesus.

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