

Philemon 1:17-21

In 1 Corinthians 1:2, the Apostle Paul defines the church as "the union of those who are one in faith in Jesus Christ through God's calling." I love that our church is named "Hanwoori," which beautifully captures this biblical definition of the church. Every time we use this name, we are reminded that this community is united in the love of Jesus Christ through faith in Him under God's sovereignty. However, in practice, displaying the true unity that is the church's identity is not easy. We often witness churches falling into division, unable to resist the evil attacks and temptations that disrupt unity. In this sense, the book of Philemon, which we will reflect on today, is an important message that teaches us what we must hold onto and carry out to maintain unity in the church. As we look together at Philemon today, I hope we will receive God's wisdom on how to strengthen the unity of this faith community gathered under the name "Hanwoori," and that we may experience repentance, determination, and change, enabling us to unite in Christ.

1. To unite as the Lord's church, we must accept one another like Jesus does.

Onesimus, Philemon's servant, betrayed his master and ran away. In verse 18, we see that Onesimus didn't just flee but also caused financial loss to Philemon. As we read Paul's letter, it becomes clear that Philemon was not at fault for Onesimus running away. In fact, Paul begins the letter by thanking God for Philemon's faith in Jesus and love for fellow believers. Onesimus's reason for running away was not because Philemon was a cruel master, but because Onesimus harbored evil intentions and sought to exploit Philemon's property. By worldly standards, it would seem foolish for Philemon to forgive Onesimus. In fact, it would make sense for him to use his wealth, influence, and resources to capture and punish Onesimus. However, in this situation, Paul writes to Philemon, asking him to accept Onesimus not as a servant but as a fellow brother in faith. Paul starts his letter with gratitude, recognizing Philemon's love and trust in Jesus, knowing that the only reason Philemon could accept Onesimus is because Philemon himself had been accepted and forgiven by Jesus, despite being undeserving. It is not difficult to say that we love and trust Jesus. However, if we find ourselves in a situation like Philemon's, where we feel we cannot accept or forgive someone who has harmed us, rejecting forgiveness would imply that we consider Jesus, who allowed for such forgiveness, to be foolish. By remembering the love and mercy of Jesus, who forgave us when we were undeserving, we too can experience unity when we accept one another as He did.

2. To unite as the Lord's church, we must not miss the opportunity for unity that God gives us.

In Philemon 1:15-16, Paul makes a statement that might have made Philemon feel hurt. He suggests that Onesimus's betrayal, his flight, his encounter with Paul and subsequent conversion, and his return to ask for forgiveness are all opportunities for unity that God has provided to Philemon. If we were in Philemon's shoes, how would we respond? If someone who has wronged us deeply returns seeking forgiveness after encountering Jesus, would we see that moment as an opportunity for unity from God? Many people might respond with increased anger and resentment rather than embracing the chance for reconciliation. In the story of David and Shimei, David believed that even in the midst of being cursed and pelted with stones, God had a good purpose. When David later encountered Shimei again, he had the power to kill him but chose forgiveness instead. Have you ever had someone like Onesimus reappear in your life? If so, I hope we will have the spiritual vision to recognize it as an opportunity for unity from God. When we, like Jesus, accept one another through these opportunities, our community will be united more firmly in God's grace.

3. To unite as the Lord's church, we must be willing to sacrifice for unity.

In verse 18, Paul asks Philemon to accept Onesimus and offers to repay any financial damage Onesimus caused. Paul had no reason to repay anything; in fact, both Philemon and Onesimus were spiritually indebted to Paul for bringing them the gospel, often risking his own life. Yet, out of love for them and a desire for the unity of the church, Paul is willing to sacrifice and remove any obstacles that might hinder their unity. If the church is the body of Christ, then we are its members. Someone must be the heart that tirelessly pumps blood and the lungs that constantly provide breath. While not everyone is called to make such sacrifices, if everyone in the church has the selfish attitude that someone else will do it, the church can never be united. However, if each of us is willing to make sacrifices to remove barriers to unity, then we will experience the unity that pleases God.

In verse 21, Paul concludes his letter by expressing his confidence that Philemon will follow his guidance. Though the situation would make it difficult for Philemon to forgive Onesimus by worldly standards, Paul is certain that Philemon will see it as an opportunity for unity given by God and that he will sacrifice and dedicate himself to this cause because of his love and trust in Jesus. Just as Paul wrote to Philemon, if Jesus were to write to us today, what would He ask of us? Just as God had Paul request that Philemon forgive Onesimus, Jesus asks us to forgive those we think we cannot forgive. I hope that Hanwoori Church will be a community that remembers the love of Jesus, accepts one another, does not miss the opportunities for unity that God provides, and matures into a community that sacrifices and labors for the unity of the body of Christ.

**Bible
Memorization**

A VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

“Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” (John 3:5)

**Bible
Reading**

9/23(Mon)	9/24(Tue)	9/25(Wed)	9/26(Thur)	9/27(Fri)	9/28(Sat)	9/29(Sun)
Daniel 3-4	Daniel 5-6	Daniel 7-8	Daniel 9-10	Daniel 11	Daniel 12, Hosea 1-4	Hosea 5-9

QT

Quiet Time Passage

9/23(Mon)	9/24(Tue)	9/25(Wed)	9/26(Thur)	9/27(Fri)	9/28(Sat)	9/29(Sun)
Nehemiah 11:10-21	Nehemiah 11:22-36	Nehemiah 12:1-21	Nehemiah 12:22-30	Nehemiah 12:31-47	Nehemiah 13:1-9	Nehemiah 13:10-22

**Sharing
Questions**

1. What new insights or blessings did you receive from today’s message?
2. Have you ever experienced a situation where it seemed impossible to accept someone within the church, like Philemon? Have you ever felt that you could never forgive or accept someone? As you remember how Jesus forgave and accepted us who were undeserving, what changes, repentance, or resolutions are you sensing from God?
3. Like David, who looked for God's good purpose even in his encounter with Shimei, have you ever failed to recognize an opportunity for unity and instead responded with anger or division? How do you believe your heart needs to change to recognize and embrace opportunities for unity that God gives you?
4. Paul offered to repay the debt that Onesimus owed Philemon, even though he had no obligation. Have you seen someone sacrifice for the unity of the church like Paul did? How did their sacrifice affect the community? What can you do to contribute to the unity of your church today?