

Gospel Fellowship

Philemon

Week 1 – The Gospel Creates Fellowship

Purpose: The Gospel saves and changes God's people. Christians will grow, living in Gospel Fellowship through growing, to know that God creates fellowship through the Gospel.

Series Graphic (SLIDE 1)

Opening Idea

Saul and Anaias – The Gospel turns Enemies into Brothers

Jesus appears to Saul, who is persecuting the Church, and Saul receives faith. Jesus blinds Saul and sends him to find a disciple named Ananias. Jesus also appears to Ananias to tell him that Saul is expecting him to come and heal Saul. Ananias checks God in saying to God that Saul's reputation is dangerous to those who believe in Christ. God assures Ananias that He is doing a work in Saul and now Saul belongs to God. Rather than causing harm to God's people, Saul will suffer for Jesus' name. The Gospel that saved Ananias has also saved Saul and is now at work to change them from enemies into brothers. In Acts 9:13-14, Ananias shares his concerns with God about Saul's work to harm the church. God speaks to Ananias that Saul now belongs to Him and God is calling Saul to serve God. Ananias obeys, goes, and lays hands upon Saul. Then, in verse 17, Ananias says something that shows the change the Gospel has brought in both men. Ananias sees Saul, lays hands on him, and calls Saul his brother. Jesus appeared to both of them and is uniting them. The Gospel has created fellowship between men who were enemies but are now brothers in Christ!

This is something of which that God is reminding us. There is sweet and powerful fellowship on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's look at a letter written by Paul to a friend named Philemon and see how the Gospel is working to create fellowship, change God's people, equip them for good works, and to glorify God. Gospel Fellowship is a sweet and powerful thing for God's people. Let's see Gospel Fellowship at work!

Read

Philemon 1-7 ESV

(SLIDE 2) **1** Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker **2** and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(SLIDE 3) **4** I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, **5** because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, **6** and I pray

that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. **7** For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Series Graphic (SLIDE 4)

Notes on Philemon 1-7

Letter from Prison (v. 1)

Paul writes a letter to a dear brother in Christ named Philemon. This letter was written while Paul is in prison in Rome. Paul writes this highly personal letter at the same time he writes a letter to the church in Colossae. Paul has connected with a man named Onesimus who professes faith in Christ. As a Christian, Onesimus is disciplined by Paul. Paul learns that Onesimus was a slave to his friend, Philemon. Paul will commission Onesimus (along with Tychicus) to take the letter to the Colossian church (Colossians 4:9) and Onesimus will take Philemon's letter to Philemon. Paul writes to Philemon that Paul is a prisoner. This is true in that Paul is in prison in Rome, but it is also true that Paul is a prisoner of and for Christ. Paul includes Timothy in this greeting to Philemon. There is a dynamic connection that happens through Onesimus.

Paul is imprisoned in Rome when he writes this letter. He makes it clear that his imprisonment is due to his connection to Jesus Christ. Paul writes that he is a prisoner for Christ Jesus. This would indicate that it is on account of Paul's preaching about Jesus being the Christ and proclaiming the Gospel. Some theologians believe that this letter was written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome due to appealing to Caesar (Acts 25). Paul is likely including this in the opening salutation to let Philemon know that obedience to God is rewarding but can cause hardship from a world that rejects and rebels against God. The reward of pleasing the Father through obedience is greater than any worldly hardship.

The Gospel has saved, evoked a proclamation about Christ, led to Paul being imprisoned, and caused a letter to be written between two men who are brothers that will influence them, the people closest to them, and the Church. The Gospel is at work in prison!

Letter to be Shared (v. 1-2)

Paul writes that Timothy is with him. Paul is making Philemon aware that Timothy knows to whom Paul is writing a letter and that Timothy is a witness to the contents of the letter and the situation with Onesimus. Paul includes Apphia and Archippus in his greeting. Paul doesn't clarify to us who these two people are. Some theologians speculate that Apphia is Philemon's wife and that Archippus is their son. Paul also includes the church that is meeting in Philemon's home. This letter is meant for more people than just Philemon. It is a personal correspondence that is to be shared. Paul is encouraging Philemon to do the obedient and Christlike thing and to do it publicly. God is using this to shape the hearts and minds of believers

to love God's people and to treat them with equal value like Christ does. This is a letter to be shared with God's people and used by the Holy Spirit to grow the Church for generations to come. The Gospel brought people into relationship with Jesus Christ and with each other. In the context of those relationships, a letter is written and shared for the benefit of the one who wrote it and to all who read it.

Encouraging Words (v. 3)

In verse three, Paul writes a greeting. Paul expresses the desire he has for grace and peace to be upon Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church in Colossae. These are normal greetings found in all thirteen of Paul's epistles. This encouragement isn't just from Paul. Paul writes that grace and peace are kind gifts given from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a desire of Paul for God to bless Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church. This reveals that this is a word from God through Paul. It also is an indication that what will be directed or encouraged in the letter will require God's grace to accomplish. The word from God will also cause disruption to their normal pattern of life and they will need the peace that only comes from Jesus Christ. Every person who reads this and is challenged spiritually to be obedient and grow to become more Christlike will desperately need God's grace and the peace of Christ.

Regardless of being imprisoned or not, both men are bound to and belong to Jesus Christ. The Gospel has brought them into Christ and generates a letter that will nurture and grow these two men. God is using these men to encourage, challenge, and grow each other. The Gospel is working in a way to grow people through encouraging words.

Brotherly Affection (v. 4-6)

4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, **5** because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, **6** and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.^[a] **7** For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Paul then writes deep and sincere words expressing affection and gratitude. These are thoughts that are stirred by the Holy Spirit and brought back to Paul's memory as he prays. Philemon is a catalyst for Paul to worship God with thanksgiving. That is a wonderful relationship. Word of Philemon's love and faith for the "Lord Jesus" and for the saints is making its way back to Paul and Paul is deeply moved to worship God. Paul expresses that he continues praying for Philemon to grow into full maturity. This maturity is into the likeness of Jesus Christ and is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Philemon is sharing his faith with others, especially those in the church. This is an effective work to grow God's kingdom, as well as, grow Philemon into the knowledge of the good works God has prepared for him to do (Eph. 2:10) and that is in God's people to the glory of Christ. Paul expresses publicly that there is brotherly love that binds he and Philemon. This love, the testimony of God's work through Philemon, and the growing of

the church is used by God to sustain and strengthen Paul while he is in prison. This testimony of God's work in and through Philemon has refreshed Paul and God uses it to refresh others who belong to Him.

The Gospel has joined two men through change and godly brotherly affection. The context of this letter reveals the deep connection that is between these two men and the evidence of the Gospel working in people to unite them in Christ and to each other.

The Gospel Creates Fellowship (SLIDE 5)

God Draws Us to Himself (SLIDE 6)

By His Love for Us

His Sacrifice

Our Salvation

We Love Him in Return

God Brings Us Together (SLIDE 7)

Love Each Other

Affection

Sharing

Cause Worship

Prayer

Petition

Remembrance

Gratitude

God's Work in Brothers and Sisters

God's Work Through Brothers and Sisters

*This first passage of Philemon hints at the Gospel at work, but more to come with that in the next few weeks.

We Will Live Abundantly in the Fellowship of the Gospel (SLIDE 8)

Read

1 John 1:3 ESV (SLIDE 9)

3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Series Graphic (SLIDE 10)