



Insights – Philemon ‘Reconciliation into Partnership’

Date: Sunday 19th June

Speaker: Jeff Stamps (South Site), Adam Pipe (City Centre)

Key Verses: Philemon (whole book)

Talk Summary:

This letter is all about a runaway slave. 40 million people are estimated to be trapped in modern slavery worldwide. Human slavery is abhorrent and antithetical to the Kingdom of God. At the heart of the message of Jesus and the Kingdom is the fact that we are all created in the image of God, that Jesus came and died to set us free and that we are all one in Christ.

1. Paul’s Introduction (1-3)

a. Paul in Prison (1a)

The letter of Philemon was written by Paul from prison in either Rome or Ephesus and was sent at the same time as the letter of Colossians in approximately 60-62 AD. The letters were hand delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus. Onesimus whose name means useful was a slave who had belonged to Philemon but had wronged him and run away. Onesimus ended up encountering Paul and his preaching of the Good News about Jesus.

b. Philemon and Family (1b-2)

Paul describes Philemon as a dear friend and co-worker and his son as a fellow soldier. The terms ‘partner’ or ‘co-worker’ are repeated throughout this letter and partnership is the key to the whole letter. In Jesus we are bound together, with each other as partners sharing in the mission of the Kingdom of God.

c. Grace & Peace (3)

Paul wants his letters to be a means of grace and result in peace.

2. **Paul's Prayer (4-7)**

a. **Philemon's Reputation (4-5)**

Philemon's invisible faith in Jesus was made visible in his love for others and Paul will put that faith and love to the test. It is easy to say we have faith in Jesus but that faith is demonstrated in how we love others.

b. **Generosity in Action (6)**

Philemon's faith has led to generosity and Paul wants him to put that generosity into action.

c. **Entering into God's Rest (7)**

Word 'refreshed' is a military metaphor referring to the rest an army takes on a march to battle. Philemon, as a leader in the Colossian church, helps those who are weary from their daily battles find the refreshment and rest needed to regain strength for renewed warfare.

3. **Paul's Plea (8-20)**

a. **From Useless to Useful (8-12)**

Paul had great authority in the early church and could have ordered Philemon to take Onesimus back. Instead Paul appeals to Philemon on the basis of love as an ambassador and prisoner for Christ. In verse 11 Paul uses a play on words: the name Onesimus means useful. Useful had become useless but now he has become useful. In fact really useful. In Onesimus and Philemon we have a picture of us and God. We are the runaway slave who became useless to God, but Jesus came, paid our debts and presents us back to God as very useful.

b. **Back for Good (13-16)**

In verse 15 Paul looks for God's providential purpose in Onesimus running away '*so that you could have him back forever*'. Paul looks for God at work in the situation (Romans 8:28). Today whatever you are facing know that God is working in the midst of it, working for your good. In verse 16 Paul tells Philemon that Onesimus is no longer merely a slave but he is now a beloved brother. Paul takes it a step further 'especially to me' - Philemon must treat Onesimus as a beloved brother to Paul.

c. **Standing in the Gap (17-20)**

Here in the climax of the letter Paul is taking on himself the role of Christ in reconciling Philemon and Onesimus. He is 'standing in the gap' and protecting Onesimus by asking Philemon to treat him as if he was Paul.

In verse 21 Paul is confident that Philemon will do what he asks and even more. Here Paul hints at Onesimus being set free!

Worship

Worship is not just singing, it is thanking God for who he is and what he has done and is lived out through a life of trusting obedience. Discussing this together is an act of worship.

(Small group worship resources can be found at bvc.so/sgworship)

- What are you thankful for this week?
- Where has God been at work in your life?
- When have you taken risks in faith and obedience this week?

If you have a time of singing you can skip the above questions but please do ask this question each week:

- What has God been speaking to you about this week? *(Go around the group quickly don't spend a long time on it)*

Discussion Questions (choose some which are most relevant to your group)

- This is the final week of our 'Insights' series - share a highlight from the series or a book that stood out to you most.
- What stood out to you from the talk on Sunday?
- In what way does Philemon bring us into an atmosphere in which the institution of slavery could only wilt and die? (option: discuss as a group steps you could take to combat modern slavery. See www.antislavery.org)
- Partnership is key to the book of Philemon. What does it mean to be a partner in the Kingdom of God? How do we need to grow in our partnership?
- In what ways is the Philemon/Onesimus story a picture of us and God?
- Philemon lost Onesimus for a while but then got him back for good (v15). How does this story illustrate good working in our situations for our good (Romans 8:28)? Invite people to share examples from their lives.
- In verse 16 how does Paul radically transform the slave-master relationship?
- How do we 'stand in the gap' for others and continue Jesus' ministry of reconciliation?

Witness - *How would you share what you have learned with a non-church friend?*

We want to be investing in authentic relationships with those who don't know Jesus yet and inviting them to anything where they might meet other Christians and Jesus. Pick one of the below each week:

- How would you share what you have learned with a non-church friend?
- What church events coming up would your friends appreciate an invitation to?
 - Upcoming Events (go to bvc.so/whats-on for details)
 - Encounter Night – 25th June