

Reconciliation 2

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Date: 01 December 2019

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[0 : 00] We get to where the Bible is open at Philemon and this morning we looked at the first three verses in the background and tonight God willing we'll look at verses four to seven of the letter.

As we turn back there let's seek the Lord's help. Heavenly Father may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen. We've been considering Paul's letter to Philemon, Onesimus a slave had run away from his master Philemon and in Rome had met the apostle Paul and was saved.

And being a Christian now makes all the difference and Paul would have undoubtedly instructed Onesimus to go back to Philemon and to be reconciled to him. This void could not have existed for them being Christians.

We notice that it was an extremely difficult pastoral situation but Paul handles it with gentleness and tactfulness and his remedy for the problem is reconciliation.

[1 : 13] Due to the fact that Onesimus is reconciled to God and Philemon is as well there should be this desire for them to come together and be reconciled to.

And the letter is read out in public because Philemon's decision would have consequences for the entire church gathered together at Colossae.

And this is the wonderful theme of reconciliation, a loving God who is offended by human rebellion and sin yet has a marvellous rescue plan for all who believe in Jesus will have this estrangement with God and with each other dealt with.

Enemies become children, rebels become servants. There are no faults on his side yet he carries out and initiates reconciliation.

We looked at verses 1 to 3 this morning and saw that the first building block was partnership. Christians are not in the work of the kingdom alone.

[2 : 13] Christians we think, especially in a vacancy, will get a minister and everything will be sorted out. No, it won't. The minister has a particular set of gifts to be used but elders have gifts, different members of the congregation have gifts and it's only when we work together that the body is built up the way it should be.

We all have a part to play and when you think about it we don't all have the same gifts and that's a very good thing because then there will be fights over who's in the pool pit in the Sunday morning over who's doing certain things in the congregation.

We all have different gifts to work together to lean and depend on each other as a family in partnership for the work of the kingdom and that's what we thought a bit about this morning.

We all have Christ in the work of course but we also have each other, brothers and sisters in the Lord to support us. These are the people that will cheer us on when things get hard.

When we are weak they'll pray for us, when we are discouraged they'll share our joys, they'll help to bear our sorrows and being reconciled to God with all of the work that he did to make it possible allows forgiveness and reconciliation to happen, one with the other, with fellow believers.

[3 : 29] We also noticed it's hard, that's why God gives us grace which is more than sufficient and even if we come across what one minister called an EGR person, do you know what an EGR person is?

Extra grace required and dealing with them, we can be sure that nothing is impossible with the Lord. His grace is more than enough. Christ died for our sins and our rebellion against God so how can we hold anything against a brother or sister?

Echaros Spurgeon sums up the theme very well. Our love ought to follow the love of God in one point, namely in always seeking to produce reconciliation.

It was to this end that God sent his Son, has anybody offended you? Seek reconciliation. Oh, but I am the offended party you say?

Well so was God and he went straight and sought reconciliation. Brother do the same. You might say oh, but I've been insulted just so, so was God and all the wrong towards him and yet he sent his Son.

[4 : 36] Oh, but the person is so unworthy of my forgiveness. So are you, but God still sent his Son. And now we move on to the second building block of the sixth and verses four to seventh there is prayer, prayer and you can imagine why prayer is so central to this because we the Lord's help to make these things happen.

So prayer and verses four to seven Paul moves on to pray for Philemon and verse four he says I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayer.

That's how the NIV has it. The ESV is something very, very similar and this shows us the deep relationship between Paul and Philemon. Do you feel the brotherly love that Paul has for his brother in Christ and this would not have been lost on Philemon.

There is a real bond made possible because both are Christians and that relationship is really unlike anything else when you're a brother or sister in the Lord.

You know if you've ever gone to visit a congregation perhaps on the mainland and if it's a good welcoming congregation I'm afraid they not all are but hopefully if it is you just automatically feel a connection with people because they're brothers and sisters in Christ you haven't met them from Adam perhaps but you have that connection because you all know the Lord and that's how it should be and if it's not like that then something is very far wrong.

[6 : 07] It's not that those who don't follow Jesus can't have friendships or that Christians can't have deep friendships with unbelievers but it's to say that Christians have Christ in common.

They have fellowship with each other because of the fellowship we have with Jesus and with the Father. Our hearts have been changed to seek after the things that God seeks after for us and since God loves his people Christians are to love them as well.

And what a privilege we have as believers. We can remember each other in prayer. Philemon would have considered himself blessed. He had Paul the mighty Apostle Paul praying for him and Paul says what I think to say I always thank my God when I pray for you.

Amazing is that. I wonder if anyone could say that about me. Alan I always thank God when I pray for you. I don't know but Paul could say it for Philemon.

Here's a question. Do we thank God for each other? When was the last time you thanked the Lord for a brother or sister?

[7 : 16] Just thanked Him for a brother or sister in Christ. Lord I can't stand that person. I need more grace. I just can't go on with them. Lord I need this. Lord I need that.

When was the last time you just said Lord thank you. Thank you for how that person has shown Christ to me. Thank you for how that person is so generous in spirit.

Thank you for the grace you've shown them. Thank you for their love. Thank you for their service. I think if we were more thankful in prayer we would find reconciliation and forgiveness an awful lot more easier than what we do.

If we thank God for each other and you know something if you look at Paul he does it all the time. We often petition and pray for each other and that's a privilege and we should do that.

But how often do we thank God for each other? Paul does it often. Philippians chapter 1 verse 3. I thank my God every time.

[8 : 11] I remember that every time every prayer he makes he gives thanks for them. Colossians chapter 1 verse 3 we always thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you.

That wasn't enough. 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 2 we always thank God for all of you mentioning you in our prayers. And if you go to 2 Thessalonians 2 Timothy Romans and 1 Corinthians you'll find exactly the same thing.

Things are repeated for emphasis. Any good teacher knows if you want people to learn something you repeat it. Paul says that nearly in every single letter he writes. We're to be thankful for each other.

And if we're not thankful we need to confess that to the Lord because that is sinful. The Bible asks us to be thankful for each other. And it's a wonder if you're feeling really annoyed at someone try praying for them.

Your anger and frustration can't last too long if you've been sincere in prayer and thanking God for that person. Paul's example is clear. We're to thank God for each other.
[9 : 19] And how can Paul give thanks for Philemon? Well Epaphorus who's mentioned in verse 23 was with Paul and he had brought Paul news of the church at Colossae.

And you read about that in the letter to the Colossians the longer twin letter. Colossians 4:12 Epaphorus who is one of you and a fellow servant of Christ Jesus sends you greetings. And what's Epaphorus doing? Paul says in Colossians 4 he is always wrestling and prayer for you that you may stand firm in the will of God mature and fully assured.

What's he doing? He's praying for them. And what a privilege it is to pray and to give thanks for someone. You see Paul's tact again.

He reminds Philemon of the benefits they have as Christian brothers. And the whole background backdrop to this is the Onesimus too. You have to give thanks for him.

[10 : 17] He's the runaway slave. He's the one that has done you wrong. But he's now a brother. And as I am showing that example to you, you're to show that example to him and to others. He has been saved.

It's grace indeed when Onesimus can save Philemon and Philemon can save Onesimus. I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers.

But that's what the gospel is capable of because it's God's gospel and nothing is impossible for him. Because I wonder just thanking, you know, we often hear in our prayer meetings, we often hear many petitions and that's fantastic.

We need to be petitioning God, but how amazing would it be if we just heard thank you prayers every now and again? Or every single time you meet. Once in a church, as a mission trip with Joanna and the Philippines early in the year, the prayer meeting lasted for three hours.

The first hour all you were allowed to do was to thank God. And they did thank God. Thank God for every blessing they had. It was so comprehensive, then they took a little break and came back together to pray petitions.

[11 : 29] Not suggesting we meet for three hours, but I am suggesting we need to be thanking God more for each other. And some of them walked six hours to get to the prayer meeting.

And some of us can't even go a mile or two to get to the prayer meeting because perhaps because we don't see it as important, but the biblical teaching is so important on it. It's very clear we are to be people of prayer and perhaps we don't see the Lord's blessing because we're not asking for it. I always give thanks whenever I remember you in my prayers. And why does Paul give thanks? He goes on in verse five, because I hear he's heard testimony about Philemon of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.

And do you see what Paul is saying there again? Do you have it again, the vertical reconciliation we thought this morning, faith in the Lord Jesus and this leads to the horizontal reconciliation, love for all the saints.

Always find them together. If someone says, I love the Lord Jesus, but hates their brother or sister, John actually tells us that the love of God is not in them.

[12 : 41] How can you love the Lord your God with all your heart, so mind and strength and not love your neighbour as yourself, the two come together? Yes, we don't do it perfectly, but if we don't love other Christians, there is something wrong.

We have to ask ourselves the question, do I even love the Lord if I don't love fellow believers? It's not to say we'll go on with every single believer we come across, but we're to love them and we're to give thanks for them and the Lord as Paul's example.

He'd heard from Epaphroditus and these two vertical and horizontal always come together. You could sum it up in the phrase, the reconciled reconcile. If you've been reconciled to God, you will seek to be a reconciler, a peacemaker.

And Philemon must have been a man of strong faith. For his faith, his testimony made it all the way back to the apostle Paul who was in prison elsewhere.

Epaphroditus had taken it back and his love for the saints, he loved the saints deeply. And we even noticed that back in verse two, the church meets in his house.

[13 : 47] It was a house church because in those days there weren't any church buildings we were to meet in. It was a house church. He opened up his home for them. That is what fellowship is. It's a deep intimacy.

It's a sharing flowing from a common faith. Now, not just in the free church and many churches will say, we'll have a fellowship after the service.

I know what we mean by that, but that is actually something crazy because what will we do during the service if we weren't having fellowship worshipping our God together?

The fellowship is actually the sharing of and in Christ. That's the fellowship. It's the meeting together as a family. People often say as well, the free church are very good at it.

We'll bake cakes and we'll have a fellowship time. We'll be home baking and loads of goodies. Now, the cakes and the goodies are not the fellowship.

[14 : 44] You can have them when you're having the fellowship, but the fellowship is the relationship we have one with the other. And if Christ is not being shared, it's not fellowship.

Fellowship is the sharing of and in Christ. That's what the fellowship is. I'm not speaking against tea, coffee and good cakes, but the fellowship isn't that.

You can have that when you're having fellowship, but the fellowship is something that goes far deeper than having tea, coffee and cakes. Because otherwise, if two non-Christians meet in a coffee shop and have a natter, they don't call it fellowship, but they're doing what we often do and we have tea, coffee and cakes.

The difference for Christians is that we have Christ. We're sharing Christ. And you know, I think we need to get far better at it. We need to be sharing Christ with each other in such a way that we say, brother, sister, what has the Lord been teaching you in His word this week?

What has the Lord been showing you in His grace this week? This is what He's been showing me and to talk about it. Because if we can't talk about Christ with each other, how on earth are we supposed to have a conversation with those who don't know the Lord?

[15 : 56] If we can't even share Christ with each other. When you get good news, you want to jump from the rooftops and say, I have this excellent news. I've got a new job.

I've got a promotion. I've had the best news ever from the doctor. You share it. When it comes to Christianity, we have the best news the possible ever to have.

Our sins are forgiven. We've got peace with God. Yet we don't share it. I don't know why. It's satanic. This is the best news ever. We're to share it. We're to declare it from the rooftops, not just the minister, but everybody.

We have a Savior and His name is Jesus. My sins are forgiven. I have been reconciled to God. Will you too be reconciled to Him?

So Paul commends Philemon for his faith in Jesus and the following love for God's people. And then in verse six, the apostle goes on to pray, I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith.

[16 : 56] That's very interesting. Very interesting indeed. Paul has just praised Philemon for his faith and now he's praying for his faith.

He's saying, you've got a strong faith. Then he goes on to pray and he will learn something very important. So often we pray for our weaknesses and we should.

We pray for the things we don't think we're any good at and we should pray for them. We pray for our burdens and we definitely should. But here Paul prays for one of Philemon's gifts, his strong faith.

Have you ever thought of that before? That we should pray not only for our weak areas, but our strong ones as well. Because if we don't, if the minister for example starts deciding why I can preach without praying, you know, becomes so self dependent and we forget that if we do have any gifts in any area, the Lord gave us those gifts in the first place.

What a thank Him for them. Paul would also encourage young Timothy to fan into flame the gift that the Lord has given you. Need to be praying for our strong gifts as well.

[18 : 04] That's why we should pray for our teachers, our ministers, our elders. We should pray for the people who welcome the door. We should pray for people who show hospitality. We should pray for people gifted in so many areas that we'll be using them all for the glory of God in every area.

Paul prays for Philemon and the sharing of his faith. Now you might think if you're sharing your faith, that's evangelism. And of course, sharing your faith does lead to evangelism.

Sharing Jesus with those who don't know him. And that is commanded. It's commanded in scripture, but that isn't what Paul has in mind here in Philemon.

The word translated sharing here is the same word that's translated partner in verse 17. You could also translate it as fellowship in other places. In other words, Paul is praying that Philemon would

be active in sharing his faith with other believers.

That's what he's praying for. But Philemon would share his faith with other believers, a better translation might be your participation in the faith.

[19 : 10] And what a joy, brothers and sisters, to be able to share our faith in Christ with each other. Do we do it enough? Do we share Christ with each other?

It strikes me, and I do it myself, I do it myself. It strikes me as soon as the benediction is finished.

The sands are forgotten. The sermon is often forgotten.

They walk out the front of the door, oh, it's a cold morning this morning, or this afternoon. What are we having for lunch today? Better get ready to get this done and that done.

We don't mention Christ. We don't mention Him. It strikes me as Christians that we don't share our faith. And that's exactly what Paul prays for Philemon, to share his faith with other believers.

You know, be wonderful at the end of the sermon after the benediction is present given. Instead of all rushing out that you sat beside your brothers and sisters and said, let me just pray for you in the pew, let me just share Christ with you, let me just have that conversation with you.

[20 : 12] We can all do that at least by sharing our testimony, one with the other. Tell, let's share each other with Jesus. Let me tell you of Him. He's so good to me even though I don't deserve it.

Every hour I need Him, He's there for me. He showed me His love this week. His grace is more amazing to me today than it was yesterday. He is more precious to me than ever before. He is with me in temptation.

He's with me in trials. He's with me in joys. He's the fairest of 10,000. Share Christ with each other.

You can almost hear Philemon's thoughts too. When Paul prays all of this, I'll have to take Onesimus back.

I need to share Jesus with Him as well. I need to share that joy with Him. We'll have to be reconciled. I've got a new brother in Christ to share this joy with.

And that's the reason Paul gives for praying for Philemon's faith because his faith is just about to be tested when Onesimus comes back. The rubber's about to hit the road as his faith has to be put into action and he has to forgive this man, Onesimus.

[21 : 18] Paul says, so you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

This is knowledge that leads to action. When we learn more about the goodness of Jesus, we should be moved to serve Him more fully.

And we with Paul, Philemon and Onesimus can truly say that we have received good things in Christ. There are no bad things in Christ, not one. Paul even says to the Ephesians, praise me to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The word good here is again used in verse 14, where it's translated as favor and as grace. And this is the grace and favor that Philemon will show to Onesimus.

In fact, the Bible even talks about outdoing each other in good deeds. It's not about a competition, but we should seek to outdo each other in the good deeds we do, one for the other.

Paul is indicating strongly that because of the good things that Philemon has in Christ, he should desire that Onesimus has the same and all the sin and all the backwardness and all the humiliation he had caused, even when he didn't deserve it.

[22 : 27] Paul is eager that he too should have the same blessings. Because due to the goodness shown us, we are to apply the great truths of the faith to our lives because this is what Jesus is in the business of doing.

And it's knowing the astonishing good that God is doing among us through our being reconciled through Christ, that Philemon's fellowship would deepen with God and with his people.

And that will be a witness to all the people at Colossae of the grace of God. If two warring brothers can be reconciled through Christ, what an example to an unbelieving world, the grace of the gospel.

Paul then moves in verse seven to talk more about the love that Philemon has for the saints. Your love, brother, has given me great joy and encouragement. We see once more the deep love that Paul and Philemon have for each other.

Philemon's moving on with the Lord is a source of joy and encouragement. And here is something else to give thanks for. God's will for us, what is God's will for each and every human being?

[23 : 34] But we're told in the Bible that we would become more like the Lord Jesus Christ. That is God's will for us. And when we see brothers and sisters becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ,

it should bring us immense joy.

You know, and I go down to churches as well as a minister, you often hear, well, we'll not smile in church because our joy is deep down inside. But you know something, the Bible says a joyful heart brings a smile to the face.

And if we can't smile about the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ, I don't know what else we're going to crack a smile over because this is good news, indeed joy. When you see a brother or sister being more Christ-like, we should be giving thanks to our Father who has made that work possible. We're in this together, we share the faith together. And the author to the Hebrews picks up this theme, doesn't he? The Hall of Faith in Hebrews chapter 11.

He's talked about all those who follow Christ and then he sums up and says, therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance.

[24 : 47] The race marked out for us, the image is of Christians all running on the race of faith with their eyes fixed on Jesus every step of the way.

And see the thing about that is the other believers are not cheering from the sidelines. They are running the same race with us. And that race of faith, we're all sparring each other on to keep running for Christ, to keep persevering, to keep on throwing off the sin and to run that race of faith, we're to do it with each other.

To say, come on now, brother, come on now, sister. I know it's hard, but keep going. Do you remember Noah? He trusted God and built an ark when it seemed foolishness to everyone else to do so and God saved him.

Brother, sister, I know it's hard, but remember Moses. He was a man who didn't think he could speak and God used him to save an entire nation. I know the challenges, but remember Joseph, he was despised and rejected by his own brothers, sold into slavery, but through grace and faith, they as well were reconciled to each other.

Remember by faith, the walls of Jericho fell, the Red Sea was crossed. These saints as well are cheering us on to remember Jesus and to keep our eyes fixed upon him.

[26 : 05] And the joy and encouragement that Paul felt through Philemon's fellowship was something that had happened in the past, but continuing in present blessings. Paul, as we know, had heard of his faith through a pathos who was with Paul.

And Paul could give thanks for answered prayer in regard to Philemon. His prayers were answered for Philemon. And did this stop him praying? No, he says, I always pray.

I always pray. He was encouraged and spurred on to keep on praying for Philemon's faith, which was growing and growing and Paul was watering it by the prayers he was throwing onto it.

And what did the encouragement and joy lead to? Verse seven, because you brother have refreshed the hearts of the saints. What a thing to be said about someone.

The word heart is also used again in verse 12, where Paul calls anesimus, my very heart. And the word here in the Greek is not the common one for the blood pumping organ, but it's the one that stands for the center of the being.

[27 : 13] And it means deep love, deep affection, deep fellowship. He's my very heart. He's what keeps me going in the faith. You get the same idea in Philippians two.

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship in the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, and make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

The idea is here that the hearts of the saints are refreshed through fellowship with Jesus primarily, but also with other believers. So minister, if I was having a hard time, perhaps you preached on a Sunday and you felt terrible, go and visit people in the congregation.

Always be refreshed every time visiting old saints and sharing with them about Jesus. They would teach me far more than I ever taught them, I'm sure. It's refreshing. If you share Christ, one with the other.

And do you see the same thing coming out? This vertical reconciliation leads to the horizontal. Paul is saying Philemon, I am so encouraged and joyful about your faith in Christ and your love for God's people.

[28 : 23] Your example refreshes God's people no end. Now remember on this, and do the same for him as you've done for others. You see why now Paul is praying for Philemon?

And he's gifted in because he's about to be put to the test. And Philemon's failure in this regard would have terrible consequences for the whole church. This letter provides us with an example of how practical Christianity is.

It's not just a dead sense of religion, but it's practical, grace is real. It's not just simply grasping some truths in our mind, although it does involve that.

The evidence that we are truly saved however, and that we've truly grasped those truths is that they overflow into action in our lives. Jesus said, I have chosen you and appointed you to go forth and to bear fruit, fruit that will last.

And this will refresh and revitalize and restore the hearts, the internal workings of the saints. As somebody helpfully said, how we behave as Christians will either refresh or drain the saints.

[29 : 34] Is our Christian life an example to others? Are we sharing faith with other believers? Are we thanking God for them, spurring them on to love and to good deeds? This is fellowship.

This is what it means to be a Christian by being reconciled to God and heat at us. Is our fellowship refreshing to the saints? Or do all we do when we get together is complain?

Those elders making those decisions again, oh that's terrible. Look what they've done again, oh those deacons, what are they spending money on now? Oh goodness, what's going on now? We're so good at complaining. Far harder it is to give thanks.

And that's what Paul asks us to do. Instead of complaining, now when there's a genuine complaint, of course we do bring it, but instead of just having that complaint, let's try praying for each other and giving thanks.

That's Paul's example. That's the example he gives here to them. Let us heed Paul's example in Colossians. Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and beloved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against each other.

[30 : 42] Forgive as the Lord, forgive you. Forgive as the Lord, forgive you. And when you think about that, he's forgiven us everything. So we too should forgive each other.

Will our fellowship refresh or drain the saints? Let's pray the Lord would renew as his church to provide refreshment one to each other, brothers and sisters in the Lord.

As the hymn says, Lord of the church, we long for our uniting, true to one calling and by one vision stirred, one cross proclaiming and one creed reciting, one in the truth of Jesus and his word.

So lead us on till toil and trouble ended, one church triumphant, one new song shall sing to praise his glory risen and ascended, Christ over all, the everlasting King.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this example of prayer to give thanks for each other in Jesus. And Lord, I do give you thanks for the brothers and sisters here in Carlyway.

[31 : 47] I thank you for their faithfulness to you. I thank you for their joy in serving you and serving with each other. Give you thanks for the elders and the deacons and each individual member and adherent who's associated with this congregation.

Lord, would you bless them, help them to work together as a family to refresh each other and to share their faith with each other so that in turn, they may be able to share it with those who do not know Jesus.

In his name we pray. Amen.