



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## **Body Life, Part 2**

Most all of us have heard the expression, “He who aims at nothing hits it.” It is my experience that for some churches this is an appropriate description. Now that’s not so say that they don’t have their philosophy of ministries and specific goals which they are endeavoring to attain. But when it comes to a God ordained, Bible-scripted vision for Christ’s Kingdom and His Church, many don’t have a clue here; they are too busy copying “successful churches” or historical Christendom to bother themselves with God’s plan for His church.

Now lest we be one of these churches, it behooves us to understand God’s plan for the church. We need to understand how the church functions and the specific pattern for what body life looks like. We began to look at the book of Philemon and it addresses these concerns.

As you will recall, Paul was sitting in a Roman prison when he wrote this letter to both to a slave owner and a Christian, Philemon, concerning one of his runaway slaves, Onesimus. In Onesimus’ passion to escape from bondage, he stole from Philemon, and in the process he damaged his master’s property.

Now according to Roman law, Onesimus ought to have been executed for this rebellion. But then Onesimus’ life took an odd turn while in Rome, the runaway found the Apostle Paul who shared the gospel with him. God used this to bring Onesimus into His Kingdom such that he not only found salvation but also now became a brother of his former master, Philemon.

Disunity ought never to be endured in the body of Christ, so Paul chose to send Onesimus back to Philemon. Yet this Christian slave was not empty handed. He was to present this epistle to Philemon; an epistle which pled for Onesimus' life. Accordingly what we have in the opening words of this epistle is more than simply an introduction to the subject of this letter; rather they reflect the kind of family that ought to exist in the Kingdom of God today, the body life which flows from Christianity.

## **Christian Body Life**

Last time we considered what must become of your and my identity as Christians because we are

- Prisoners of Christ.
- Brothers and sisters in the Lord.
- Beloved of God,
- Co-workers with Christ and one another in the ministry of building up the body.
- Co-sufferers who are willing to take a bullet not only for Christ, but also one another.

Now, we will pick up where we left off last time with “The Nature of Our Service” when it comes to the Body of Christ.

## **Our Service**

Philemon 2, “And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house.”

This is a most significant addition when it comes to this epistle. Indeed Philemon and 3 John are the only two personal correspondences found in Scripture and by this we mean that they are the only private letters of an apostle to an individual.

If Paul or John were former presidents of our country, these two epistles would NOT be considered letters of state or official correspondences on behalf of the kingdom. Rather, they'd be gathered together as personal letters and later displayed when their presidential libraries were built.

So we have here in our hands a private letter written by Paul to Philemon. And yet what is most striking is the fact that in this correspondence Paul includes the church of Colossae as intended recipients. Look at the passage again:

Philemon 1-2 (NASB), “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier [one of the pastors!], and to the church in your house,”

This is rather significant. When Paul penned the other prison epistles, they were circular or open letters intended to be read by the receiving church and then passed on to the other churches of Asia Minor.

Colossians 4:16, “And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea [most likely Ephesians]<sup>1</sup>.”

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase in Ephesians 1:1, at Ephesus, was a latter edition indicating that the epistle was intended as a circular letter to the churches in Asia Minor.

Accordingly, these epistles had catholicity to them. The struggles and questions which prompted their writing, though personal, were undoubtedly shared by all. As such, though the brethren in Colossae were struggling with a pre-Gnostic heresy in which Christ was understood to be an angel, the rest of the churches needed to read the epistle since they too would undoubtedly face the trial. Though the brethren at Ephesus were struggling with unity in which Jew and Gentile remained apart, the rest of the churches needed to read the epistle for they too had to face the question of unity. So the epistles once received would have been sent to the other churches in Asia Minor (most likely after they were first copied).

Now this sending/sharing would have served a two-fold purpose. It would have encouraged the rest of the body of Christ unto love and obedience as these epistles have throughout church history. But they would also have paraded before the universal church the struggles and difficulties of the brethren in Ephesus and Colossae which no doubt would have increased their accountability and so their resolve to respond appropriately in the Lord! This no doubt was a wise tactic given to Paul by Divine inspiration.

And this is the case when it came to our epistle as well! Though Paul could have kept this epistle as a private matter between Philemon and himself (to preserve Philemon's dignity had he chosen NOT to forgive Onesimus), nevertheless the apostle addressed this letter "to the church in your house" which now made this private affair very public.

Now, most of us have heard the Latin expression, *coram deo*, meaning before the face of God. This was an expression coined during the Reformation expressing the truth that all of life; private, public, when we are with people or all alone, is lived before an all-seeing God! Now this epistle adds the Latin expression, *coram homine*, meaning before man to our vocabulary because our lives are an open book specifically to the church!

See if there is anything to be gleaned from Paul's inclusion of the brethren of Colossae in this PRIVATE letter to Philemon, it is that as individual Christians what we do impacts the entire community. And our lives, to an extent, become the church's business.

Now this does not mean that we ought to have public confession times in which each of us shares our deepest and darkest sins to the body. When it comes to the handling of our sins it ought to be done privately and secretly so that slander and gossip might be prevented. And this is Christ's teaching in Matthew 18:15.

What this does mean is that our understanding of Body Life must be expanded to include the concept that we are NOT individuals who according to the freedom of choice have deigned to affiliate ourselves with a church as if it were a lodge or club. Rather through Christ we have become part of a body such that what we do not only impacts the body, but also is the church's concern. Drawing from an analogy of the body, Paul wrote these words:

1 Corinthians 12:12, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ."

1 Corinthians 12:26, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it."

This is so important when we begin to work our theology of the church and its body life. As in our human bodies, what occurs to our shoulders may not be seen by the feet, but it certainly will impact the feet. So also as the body of Christ we are vitally connected. Thus what you do will affect how we do!

- If you suffer, we suffer.
- If you are honored, we are honored.
- If you grieve, we are grieved.
- If you are hurting, we are hurting.
- And if you sin, the entire body will become defiled- not that we become sinful, but our fellowship, intimacy, and unity will be compromised!

In fact as we live *coram homine* we recognize that what we do in private might eventually become a very public matter. Christ said this:

Matthew 18:15-17, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

Now there might be some here who say, “That is why I am quick to repent after indulging in a sin. Yes I sin- and often times willingly. But I always repent soon after that the body might not know.”

If this is your consolation, you’re not going to like to hear this:

Matthew 12:36, “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Neither will you enjoy this:

Matthew 10:26, “Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.”

Nor:

1 Timothy 5:24, “Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after.”

INDEED you must see that there is very little privacy when it comes to the body of Christ. On the Day of Judgment ALL will be open and made known.

Now again there are things in this life which ought to remain private and unknown to the body, that’s obvious! Yet one must realize that in the end even these will be uncovered!

- Every word.
- Every thought.
- Every outburst.
- Every motive.

Such is the nature of our service as members of the body of Christ- it is *coram homine*.

Thus Paul addressed the private issues of Philemon, because this slave-owner’s decision had an impact on

the entire body.<sup>2</sup> The apostle dealt with the issue before the church in Colossae even identifying one of its pastors by name!<sup>3</sup>

- Is that your “theology” when it comes to the church?
- Are you living before God and one another with a clear conscience?
- Do you understand that what YOU do in private will effect what WE do in public?

Brothers and sisters, put yourself in the shoes of Philemon. You know that what you do with regard to Onesimus will be known to the church. So

- What are you going to do?
- How are you going to treat him?
- What will be the tenor of your voice?

These questions are quite germane for us today. For again what you do this week... in private... when no one is looking... WILL IMPACT THIS CHURCH AND IS OUR CONCERN! Such is the nature of our service as members of the body of Christ. This is why we are called to

- Bear one another’s burdens, Galatians 6:2.
- Encourage each other as the day draws near, Hebrews 3:13.
- Live for each other, and if need be die for one another, Philippians 2:17.

This obviously will require vulnerability on our part, the vulnerability seen in Philemon’s relationship with the body of Christ in Colossae. Yet such is required if we are to fulfill Our Service to Christ and one another.

## Our Confession

What then is our confession as the household of God?

- Philemon 3, “Grace<sup>4</sup> to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Sadly this phrase, grace to you, has become an impertinence by virtue of its repetition throughout Scripture. It can be found 14 times at the beginning of Paul’s epistles and the book of Revelation.<sup>5</sup> In fact as a preacher I already have addressed this expression from the pulpit no less than four times, and this makes the fifth.

The result is that we easily can pass by the statement. We take it simply as the cultural form which letters and correspondences took in the first century AD. Yet that would be a big mistake, for the expression is packed with meaning!

First realize that this ISN’T the form which standard greetings took in Paul’s day when one wrote a letter. The standard salutation was, “Greetings!” From this it should be obvious that Paul took the form and

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<sup>2</sup> Just a Peter’s sin in Galatians 2:11

<sup>3</sup> Compare Philemon 2

<sup>4</sup> χαρις charis

<sup>5</sup> Compare Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3, and Revelation 1:4

deliberately changed it! Accordingly, if Paul changed the standard greeting to what we read here, then we can be sure that what is written in this verse is important and therefore NOT something to be quickly read over!

So what is Paul seeking to convey here?

To answer this we must begin by defining the two key terms: grace and peace; that which one commentator called, “Christ shaped gifts.”<sup>6</sup> *Grace* is a word used 131 times in the Bible and references the bestowal of favor, affection, and/or aid to ones who do not deserve it. Accordingly it speaks to a very definitive context.

Let me set the stage,

An individual stands unworthy before, say, a king. They have NOT lived so as to please or merit any blessing. In fact, they are guilty of foul revolt against the monarch. But rather than receiving condemnation, they are forgiven (which is what is involved in mercy), and then they are granted

- Favor.
- Land.
- Money.
- Positions of authority.
- Affection.
- Trust.
- Love.
- A future and a hope.

## **Mephibosheth**

This “granting” is what is involved in grace! In fact a VIVID PICTURE of this is found in 2 Samuel 9.

Many remember the story of Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth lived during the time of King David. Now, Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan and the grandson of King Saul. During the Israelite wars against the Philistines, after his father and grandfather were killed, Mephibosheth was hastily carried away into safety. And yet something horrible happened.

2 Samuel 4:4, “And Jonathan, Saul’s son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.”

Years later David sought to honor any remaining relative of Jonathan. And so when it was determined that Mephibosheth was the last remaining heir of his good friend, David called for him.

2 Samuel 9:5-7, “Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar. Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy

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<sup>6</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), Send the Light (June 1988), ISBN-10: 0802803091, Page 173

servant! And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually."

Now you have to understand the context of this story. Mephibosheth was the only man who had a claim to the throne of Saul and so he knew his life was in danger. In fact, in the Ancient Near East when a king ascended to power, he usually killed everyone who might have a claim to his throne. And this was the obvious fear of Mephibosheth.

Accordingly David sought to assure him saying, "Do not fear" (2 Samuel 9:7a). Now the amazing thing about this account is NOT that David would show kindness to Jonathan's son- this is understandable in view of the relationship David had with Jonathan. RATHER, it is that Jonathan's son was a cripple when he received David's kindness.

2 Samuel 9:8, "And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?"

This was not a statement of false-humility on the part of Mephibosheth, he meant it. Now why would he say this? Because he was crippled; he had two lame feet!

Now, in our day, this is no big deal. But in the context of the Ancient Near East, this was huge. It was believed that to be crippled was to bear in your body the marks of divine disapproval on account of your sin. Recall that in Christ's day the thought even among the disciples was that physical ailment was the consequence of sin; it was the divine punishment for an evil life.<sup>7</sup> And so Mephibosheth believed that he was nothing better than a "dead dog."

In fact the passage is going to great lengths to show this.

2 Samuel 9:13, "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet."

And yet herein we behold the grace of God as it relates to God's children; the grace of God referenced in our text! David doesn't refute the fact that according to societal standards Mephibosheth was wretched. Instead, in spite of Mephibosheth's wretchedness and clear threat to his throne, David exalted him to his royal table and there enjoyed fellowship with this man throughout both their days!

2 Samuel 9:9-10, "Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants."

That is what grace is all about in the Bible! It is getting what you don't deserve. It is being in a place of wrath, and not only being forgiven, but also being granted provision, aid, help, concern, etc.

Thus when Paul wrote, "Grace to you..." he not only was declaring what Philemon and the church already had received from God on account of the cross of Christ, BUT he also praying for Philemon to know more

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<sup>7</sup> Compare John 9:1-2

of this grace in his life!

For do you know what happens when the child of God knows the grace of God? When they are mindful of it and so live in light of it?

While we might provide many answers, Paul gives us his when he wrote “peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philemon 3).

Now don’t mistake what Paul is saying here. Paul is NOT saying, “Peace WITH God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” While it is true that on account of the fall, mankind became enemies of God and so is at war with Him. God in His grace sent His Son NOT ONLY to die the death that we deserved BUT also to give His own righteous record to the sinner thereby making him no longer an enemy but a friend.

This is the peace spoken about by Paul in

Romans 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And so while indeed Christ did come to reconcile God unto man providing peace where formerly there was war that is NOT the peace spoken about in our text! Notice Paul here is talking about a peace not with God but from God! In light of this, this is what is mind here as what Paul referenced in Philippians. There he says tells us what happens if we rely upon God.

Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

That’s the “peace” spoken about here. It is calm in the midst of the storm. It is contentment in the midst of want. It is satisfaction in the midst of turmoil. It is submission in the midst of pain. It is hope in the midst of tragedy. It is calmness in the midst of troubled waters. It is sleeping in a boat during a life-threatening gale. It is washing the feet of ones who soon would betray you knowing that God is in complete control! Edward Bickersteth described the peace reference by Paul in this text when he wrote the following “catechism:”

Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin? The blood of Jesus whispers peace within. P  
Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed? To do the will of Jesus, this is rest.  
Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round? On Jesus' bosom naught but calm is found.  
Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away? In Jesus' keeping we are safe and they.  
Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown? Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.  
Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours? Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.<sup>89</sup>

So what do we “confess” when it comes not only to being children of God, but living as children of God? What do we uphold when it comes to The Body Life of the Church?

It is very simple. Each and every moment of our lives we live in light of the grace of God! We know we don’t deserve anything on account of our sin. But seated as we are at the table of the King we no longer fret or worry about yesterday’s sin. Rather, we rejoice over the fact that God loves us and has deigned to

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<sup>8</sup> Edward H. Bickersteth, Jr. 1878. Bickersteth chose these words from Isaiah 26:3.

<sup>9</sup> Red Trinity Hymnal #702.



grant us everything pertaining to life and godliness.

And where does this position (seated at the table of the King) and our conviction (that the King has deigned NOT to condemn us BUT bless us) lead to in our lives?

Peace, perfect peace!

From this I want you to see a very important element of our confession as a body of Christ, grace has a definite and predictable impact on the child of God. In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 we see that it impelled Paul to work hard for the Lord. In Titus 2:12 we see that it makes God's people deny ungodliness and worldly desires. And we also see that it impels the child of God to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

In Titus 2:13 we see that it gives the child of God a heaven-ward perspective by which we long for Christ's second coming. In our text this morning, we see that it grants us peace in a world of turmoil, misery, and pain.

You say,

- “Whoa! That doesn't describe my life!”
- “I don't work very hard when it comes to the kingdom of God.”
- “I rarely deny ungodliness and worldly desires.”
- “Living sensibly, righteously, and godly is a dream.”
- “The hope of Christ's return rarely crosses my mind.”
- “And my life is characterized by anything but peace!”

Well doctor! What is the diagnosis?

It is very clear. Either it is that you have not been saved by grace. Or it is that you aren't living by grace. In closing, let us address each one of these in turn.

If you don't know the effects of grace in your life (peace, holiness, diligence, living for Christ's return) it could very well be that you aren't saved. Let me ask you a very important question: On what basis do you stand before God?

If you were to die this day and go to heaven, what merit would you offer the Lord as the basis for allowing Him to let you in?

- Your good works?
- Your good intentions?
- Your relatively upright living?

God's word says that the standard for salvation is NOT a “relatively upright life” where you've tried your best and haven't hurt anyone too bad. RATHER it is a perfect life!

Matthew 5:48, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Truly, one sin is all that it will take to condemn you to an eternity separated from God in hell.

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Thus if your answer to my first question about why God should let you into heaven was anything other than, “Because Jesus died for me on the cross”, it may very well be that you aren’t saved. If that is the case then you have greater problems than lacking peace, diligence, and holiness in life. You have God’s wrath resting against you... waiting to be unleashed the moment you die.

Remain no longer under God’s wrath. Turn from your independence unto God. Ask Him to forgive you on account of the work of Christ on the cross. Beg for His mercy, and you shall be saved!

Yet if you are one this day who is trusting in Christ alone for your salvation and yet you lack peace, holiness, diligence, and a longing for Christ’s return, the obvious diagnosis is that while you may have been saved by grace, you no longer are living by it! In the book of Galatians Paul asked two very important questions:

Galatians 2:18, “For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”

Galatians 3:3, “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”

These questions indicate that it is possible as a child of God to begin

- By grace, and then live by law.
- By the Spirit and then seek to be perfected by the flesh.

In fact, do you know what happens to us and our relationships when this is the case?

They lack peace.

Galatians 5:15, “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”

So what are we to do this day if we are of the opinion that we are not living by grace?

I’ve got a couple of suggestions. First, ever and always work at de-programming and then re-programming your thinking.

What is your identity? What are you this day before God?

Last time we saw that first and foremost you are a prisoner of Christ! That is your identity.

- He is bound to you and you are bound to Him.
- His success is your success.
- His victory is your victory.
- Thus now and forever you are seated at the King’s table eating with Him.

If you and I truly believe this, if we can deprogram our thinking such that we can come to truly believe this.

- What impact will this have on what bothers or burdens you?
- What impact will this have on your hope and so your outlook in life?

- How will this affect how you spend your time?
- You're united to Christ in a forever love-relationship, how hard will you work for the Lord?

Truly to understand this, to preach this to your soul every day, is to walk by the Spirit and so enjoy the fruit of "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

But then secondly, if we are trusting in Christ but not living by His grace, let us go to our knees and beg God to keep us there! You must see that Paul's statement, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" is NOT simply a statement, BUT a wish... a longing... and so a prayer on the part of Paul on behalf of Philemon and the church in his house.

If we are lacking the peace referenced here (and the other benefits of grace), then a good place to start is to pray to God for Him

- To change your thinking regarding grace.
- To enable you to live in light of the glorious news of your forgiveness.
- To Cause you to value His assessment when it comes to your life above yours and everyone else's.
- To Humble you, break you, and crush your arrogance and pride.

To long for this daily, not only on our behalf but on behalf of the brethren, and then to preach the gospel to ourselves daily is NOT ONLY to come to know the peace of God "which surpasses all comprehension" but it also is to begin enjoying The Body Life of the Church!

- Who are we? Prisoners of Christ... beloved of God... brothers and sisters called to encourage each other as the day draws near.
- What is our Service? Caring for one another before God and the body of Christ.
- How are we to go about it? Relying upon the grace of Christ by which we will know peace both individually and as a congregation!

This is our calling today!

## **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

## **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 16, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church