

Jesus our Centre (Colossians & Philemon)

Week 8: Jesus our Reconciler

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing and sharing together.

The Bible has been described as a big story of reconciliation between mankind and God, within which there are many stories of reconciliation between individuals (e.g. Joseph and his brothers or the parable of the prodigal son). Encourage people to share what their favourite Bible story is involving reconciliation, and why.

WORSHIP

What does being reconciled with God mean to you?

You could sing or listen to Man of Sorrows

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIOJ5o8W4Lw>

WORD

Sometimes the hardest thing about being a Christian is living out what we believe when finding ourselves in a particular day to day situation. Paul's letter to Philemon is a bit like that as he applies the principles he wrote in Colossians to a real, first-hand, situation involving slavery and reconciliation.

New Relationships and Behaviour - Principles

Read Colossians 3.22 – 4.1

1. Paul writes that whatever we do, we should do it 'as if working for the Lord, not for human masters' (v23). Why do you think he says this?

You may find it helpful to look back to earlier verses in Colossians such as 3:17, 1:22-23 and 2:6-7.

Growth Group Notes

Spring 2022



The gospel makes clear that there are many aspects of our society that happen because of our wicked and fallen nature. Slavery is one of them, and in New Testament times it was a universal practice. In 1 Timothy 1:10 Paul is more open in condemning slavery. The fact that he is less forthright here, therefore, suggests that he has a different focus in these verses.

2. Paul says that masters are to treat their slaves in ways that are right or just, and fair (v4:1a). What principles lie behind this command?

You may find it helpful to look at verses 4:1b and 3:11.

3. How should the principles identified in our responses to questions 1 and 2 affect the way that we treat others?

New Relationships and Behaviour - Practice

Read Philemon 1-21

Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his Christian master, Philemon. Whilst Onesimus had broken the law in escaping, the letter hints (v18) that he may have committed other offences as well. Writing to Philemon, Paul's desire is for such issues to be resolved and for Philemon and Onesimus to be reconciled to each other as Christian brothers.

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4. Paul clearly has high regard for Philemon, but why do you think he begins by saying this so openly (vv4-7)?

5. If you could summarise Paul's request to Philemon in a single word or phrase, what would it be?

6. What is Paul offering to do in vv17-19? Is this similar to any other situations in the Bible?

7. It must have been hard for Onesimus to return to Philemon. Why do you think that Paul sends him back (v6, v11)?

8. In his letter to Philemon, what principles from Colossians do we see Paul living out through his actions and words?

WHAT NEXT?

Thankfully, most of us are unlikely to be faced with slavery in our daily lives, yet that doesn't mean that Paul's words are not relevant. We all live in situations that contain the potential for oppression and the abuse of power to happen (for example, the management of staff in the work environment or within a close relationship). For some, it is more than potential, being something that they sadly experience in their daily lives.

In his relationships and his behaviour, Paul encourages Philemon to live differently. How might our society be different if we all lived in that way?

Personal reflection

As you reflect on what Paul says, could there be areas of your life where God might want you to act differently? As you listen to God and hear his gentle nudging, give thanks that you are reconciled to Him through Christ, and pray that He will come alongside you and help you to move forward with Him.