

Having been asked to prepare a conversational Bible study I felt that Revelation 6 didn't lend itself to that format very well. I chose Paul's letter to Philemon as an alternative passage because it's a favourite of mine.

Let's hope it works!

Mark

### **Philemon Bible study**

*1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:*

Philemon is described as a fellow worker.

Fellow worker - he's a worker for the gospel

Archippus is described as a soldier.

So Philemon is a fellow worker and Archippus a fellow soldier.

#### **Question 1**

To what extent is our fellowship a nice club for each other rather than a group of people working for the gospel?

If the answer is we're too much of a club what needs to change?

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

#### **Question 2**

We need peace at this time. Unbelievers need peace and to come to know Jesus.

Does the current health scare provide us with more opportunities to talk to people about the Lord?

How should we go about sharing?

#### *Thanksgiving and Prayer*

*4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. 6 I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. 7 Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.*

Philemon is a dear friend v1

V5 Paul hears about his love for the saints

V7 his love encourages Paul

V7 He's refreshed the hearts of the saints

This is a picture of a believer who loves his fellow believers

He is a dear friend to them

He refreshes their hearts

Look at the impact of his life on others in the Christian community, including Paul (your love has given me great joy and encouragement).

### **Question 3**

Are we heart-refreshers?

If not, how do we become heart-refreshers?

#### *Paul's Plea for Onesimus*

*8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, 9 yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— 10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.*

*12 I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. 13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do will be spontaneous and not forced.*

Paul wanted a spontaneous response and not something forced.

Arguably the right thing for Philemon to do was to give Onesimus back to Paul so that Onesimus might help Paul, but what if Philemon didn't want to? (There's no evidence that he didn't, of course.)

### **Question 4**

How important is doing the right thing?

Is it still right to do the right thing even if our hearts are wrong?

*15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good— 16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.*

At some stage Philemon, being the kind of guy he was, had been very fond of Onesimus, but Onesimus had let him down badly. He'd run away, and possibly even stolen from Philemon (see verse 18). This must have led to hurt feelings along with anger perhaps and frustration.

### **Question 5**

Feelings of hurt and disappointment often don't go away easily, especially when we feel that the person is close to us.

How should we handle such feelings as believers?

*17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.*

In verse 20 again we see the idea of being refreshed by other believers. Paul was looking for 'some benefit from Philemon in the Lord'. This leads to us realising that it's more of an obligation for us to do that and not to just plod along, providing no benefit to other believers.

Paul was a great Christian leader but note how he needed this benefit.

### **Question 6**

Are we inclined to believe that leaders have simply 'got it sorted' and we are the ones who struggle?

Perhaps we should make a note to selves - to encourage each other more and don't forget to encourage the leaders!

*21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.*

*22 And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.*

Verse 22 shows us that there's a genuine affection between Paul and Philemon's family.

### **Comment**

Hopefully there is in our fellowship too.

I know there is, at least among you lot. When are you going to let me in? Lol

*23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. 24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.*

*25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*