

In the Wake of the Gospel's Power (vv. 1-3)

"Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother to Philemon or beloved brother and fellow worker and Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 1-3).

The memories of April 3-4, 1974, will be forever vivid in my memory. Those were two days that witnessed a series of destructive tornadoes sweeping across the section of north Alabama where my wife and I lived at the time. The night was spent listening to weather alerts and the morning of the 4th dawned with no electricity and news of great destruction. The typical headlines of the newspapers, once they were able to resume printing, would say, "Spring storms leave destruction in their wake!" A swath two miles wide marked the path of the storms.

Tornadoes are not the only things that leave a clear path behind. Jet aircraft leave the ribbons of their presence. Sea vessels leave the churning green water. Whenever something of immense power passes, its "wake" leaves telltale signs. Such is true with the gospel. So powerful is God's Word that its wake is filled with telltale signs revealing its impact. This impact is discussed in Philemon 1-3.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE GOSPEL'S WAKE

As the gospel passes through the lives of men and women, it leaves specific evidence of its impact. This evidence is clearly seen in the open-

ing verses of the book of Philemon.

It leaves an impact upon relationships. The book of Philemon provides a marvelous insight to the relationships shared in Christianity. In Philemon we see how Christianity enables a smooth harmony between unbelievable personality and ethnic types.

First, there was Paul the apostle. He was a Jewish scholar, trained from early youth with an arrogance toward Gentiles and women. It is reported that in his prayers the Jewish man would thank God for not making him a Gentile, a slave, or a woman! In early adulthood, Paul was enmeshed in bitter opposition toward Christians.

The second person was Timothy, Paul's son in the faith.

The third person was Philemon, a well-to-do Gentile businessman. He had been trained by social prejudices to hold contempt for any Jew and to relegate others outside his social strata as "inferior." As an owner of slaves, he was tempted to scoff at the idea of humane treatment of his fellowman.

The fourth person mentioned was Apphia. It is thought that she was Philemon's wife. If so, she was a woman of status and wealth. Her high standing would make her smug and arrogant.

The fifth person was Onesimus, a slave who had deserted Philemon and in departing had taken valuables from his master.

These five people would be considered "impossible" mixes. Given the normal society structure and prejudices of the first century, there was no conceivable way these five could ever be "one."

But these impossible types, in spite of their ethnic conflicts, were all united with one another—they shared something in common. This is indeed amazing!

If you think it is amazing that these five could be “one,” consider an even more amazing observation—notice the titles used to describe each one. Paul is a “prisoner” (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:8). What an amazing change from the proud arrogance that his genealogy called for (Philippians 3:8). Philemon is a “fellow-worker” (Romans 16:3, 9, 21; Colossians 4:11; etc.). He was united with Paul in a common service. Apphia, Onesimus, and Timothy are “brothers” and “sister.” Being reborn into God’s family meant they were bound with new life in Christ. This new life was rooted in a new family and members of that family shared loyalty, friendliness, a common life, obligations, and origin!

In the wake of the gospel, a slave had become a brother, and a Jew gave thanks for a Gentile (Psalms 133:1). Is it not amazing how the gospel’s power changes relationships?

It leaves an impact upon vocation. As the gospel passed through Colossae, it left behind “fellow workers.” It united various people in a goal of common labor (Colossians 4:2-6). Frequently, the Scriptures speak of people becoming “fellow workers” as they join together to spread the gospel. (Cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Romans 16:3, 9, 21; Philippians 2:25; 4:3.) This phrase speaks of a desire to achieve a mutual goal—to become fellow workers with God. No longer do we aim for the singular selfish goals and ambitions, but in unselfish service we unite together to strive to accomplish God’s divine goals (2 Corinthians 6:1).

It leaves an impact upon our temperament. As the gospel’s power passes through, it leaves “fellow soldiers” and those who are “beloved.” These two terms describe the temperament that characterizes God’s servants. The term “soldier” describes the temperament toward the world. As a “soldier” we must endure the conflicts with the world (2 Timothy 2:3; Philippians 2:25). There must be an aggressiveness in our attitudes because no soldier was ever victorious through timidity. (Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:7.) If we are to become a “soldier” toward the world, we are to become “beloved” toward the church. The term “beloved” describes the temperament we are to demonstrate toward brethren.

The true mark of discipleship is the accepting and tolerating attitude of the “beloved.” (Cf. John 14:34; 15:12, 17.)

It leaves an impact upon self. In the wake of the gospel’s power, there is a dramatic change in our inner self. The gospel provides the greatest good we can ever desire—“grace” and “peace.” These two blessings provide an inner comfort and contentment that is available nowhere else. The gospel gives us God’s “grace”—that is the favor that provides us with the blessed state of reconciliation and fellowship with our Father. The gospel also provides “peace”—a healthy condition, an inner harmony even in the midst of great conflict, the tranquility of mind (Romans 5:1).

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In the wake of the gospel’s power, “grace” is obtained, and “peace” is applied (Philippians 4:4-7). From no other source can these two blessings arise.

It leaves an impact upon our associations. For those who understand and obey the gospel, “the church” becomes the sphere of associations. It is the family of God assembled together, worshiping and working together. The association is large enough in scope to include all who are “in Christ” but is best understood on the local level. This association was the eternal design of the gospel and is accomplished only by obedience to God’s commands (Ephesians 1:3-10).

THE EXAMINATION FROM THE EVIDENCE

As the evidence is surveyed, it quickly becomes apparent that the gospel’s impact will be found if we have properly responded to it. Examine the impact of the gospel’s power in your life by answering these questions.

First, is there the appropriate change evident? Have you responded to the gospel as you should? If the gospel’s power has influenced your life, the relationships you share will be

different than before. Paul became a “prisoner.” That indicated the cost of being a Christian and the commitment essential to following God (Romans 6:16-19). Too often this is not evident in our lives and relationships. Has the gospel affected your relationship as a “fellow worker” and a “fellow soldier”? Are you actively laboring for Christ’s cause? Are you aggressively fighting to endure and conquer sin? (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:20, 27.) Has the gospel brought the appropriate changes your life so that you now share a common life, origin, and obligation with those who are Christians? (Romans 1:7; Hebrews 2:11, 12). These questions accurately evaluate a critical aspect of obedience. It asks, “Have you responded to the gospel’s power?” (2 Corinthians 4:3, 6; Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5, 6; 2 Thessalonians 2:10). If an appropriate response has been made, there should be a visible impact upon your life and mine.

Second, is there an appropriate impact of my life upon those in the world? If I have felt the wake of the gospel’s power, I should have an impact on others (1 Peter 2:12). If there has been no impact in my life from the gospel, my life will have no spiritual impact upon others around me (Titus 1:16).

Third, is there an appropriate understanding of the gospel’s power to change my life? (Romans 1:16, 17; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 4:2). Those who fail to recognize the gospel’s potent power will never be influenced by its tremendous power.

CONCLUSION

Just as a series of powerful spring storms left their mark on northern Alabama in 1974, the gospel’s power left a series of amazing changes in its wake in the first century. Everywhere people felt its impact (Acts 17:6; Colossians 1:5, 6).

In a world deceived by Satan and deluded by darkness, the force of the gospel was introduced. Its impact left a result eternal in scope (2 Timothy 1:10). The invasion of the gospel spread the good news of Christ throughout the world. The lost were saved, the forlorn cheered, and the proud were humbled. Enemies became brothers, and love was the sovereign decree which bound all people together in one indissoluble union in the church.

This gospel, which shattered the darkness of sins’ reign in the first century, is still filled with

power some two thousand years later. Its impact is still earthshaking. As it continues its trek into the vast darkness of sin, it leaves behind an unmistakable wake—hearts are cheered and encouraged and souls are saved as obedience is demonstrated. Such a result is God’s desire (Revelation 14:6, 7).

—John Kachelman

“Fellow-Ship” (*Philemon 2, 23*)

This compound English word says much about Christian association. A “fellow” is a companion, comrade, mate, or associate. And the suffix “ship” indicates quality. Thus the wonderful fellowship of the church refers to the valuable quality of the friendship found in Christ. In Philemon we discover that true fellowship in Christ is evident in three phases:

1. *Fellow* prisoners (v. 23)
2. *Fellow* soldiers (v. 2)
3. *Fellow* workers (vv. 1, 23)

As these three phases are studied, a wonderful insight will be gained into “genuine friendship” with each other!

The Church at Your Home (*Philemon 2*)

John Calvin remarks that the references to “house church” is a charge laid upon all families to keep the homes godly and regulated by God’s will (*Commentary on Colossians*). Such an observation leads us to state that your home should prepare the family for future service to God because:

1. There your children get the first impressions about God and the foundation laid thus is influential.
 2. There the parents hold forth God’s Word in practical exposition—the family practices the gospel.
 3. There prayers are raised.
 4. There the family is bound with spiritual fellowship.
 5. There young hearts are trained to take their place as members of the larger church.
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