



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 7 Issue 9

March 9, 2008

Body Life, Part 1

I love the words of Solomon.

Proverbs 18:10, “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

At first glance this verse seems rather odd. God’s people are said to run for safety in “the name” of the Lord. How can a person take refuge in a name?

Really, this doesn’t make sense. Is a Christian really supposed to respond to “bad” things by saying: “Yahweh!,” “Adonai,” or “Elohim” or any other name used of God, and that is supposed to make everything better?

Now, I don’t know about you, but that’s not going to cut it in my life.

Ah, but then we come to understand that in the Bible the “name” of someone or something is NOT primarily the means of calling to them BUT a statement of their character of who or what they are that is an entirely different matter. Thus to take refuge in the name of the Lord is to take refuge in His character.

We say that God

- Is loving— so depend upon that love.
- Is in charge of all things— so trust Him.
- Has your best in mind— so wait upon Him.

This is what is behind the Third Commandment. When on Mount Sinai God through Moses said, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). That means far more than simply saying we are not to use God’s name when we curse. It means that we are NOT to take His character lightly RATHER, we are to live in light of who He is.

This is the connotation of “Name” in the Bible! And thus indeed when one reads that “the name/the character of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10) we can shout Amen!

Christian

- What is your name?
- Now that you have come to Christ for salvation, how has this affected your character?
- What is a Christian?
- What have we become by grace?

We are going to answer this question as we turn our focus in this text to what I have called, “Body Life.” Paul, as you know, is sitting in a Roman prison writing this letter both to a slave owner and a Christian concerning one of his runaway slaves, Onesimus. In Onesimus’ passion to escape from bondage, he stole from his master, Philemon, and damaged his property and according to Roman Law, Onesimus ought to be executed for his rebellion.

Yet something strange happened on the way to work one day. While in Rome, Onesimus bumped into the Apostle Paul who shared the gospel with him. God used this to bring this runaway slave into His Kingdom such that Onesimus, not only found salvation, but he also became a brother of his former master, Philemon. And because disunity ought never to be endured in the body of Christ, Paul chose to send Onesimus back to Philemon.

Yet, Onesimus did not go empty handed. He was to present this epistle, Philemon, to Philemon and in this epistle Paul pled for Onesimus’ life.

Now the opening words of this personal letter do more than simply introduce the subject of the epistle; they also reflect the kind of family that exists in the Kingdom of God, the body life which flows from Christianity. We are going to begin looking at this “Body Life” simply by considering the five names Paul uses to describe the child of God. These names give us far more than a means of identifying say Timothy, Philemon, Apphia, or Archippus. Rather they tell us what they were and what we have become in Christ, they give us our identity.

Our Identity

Philemon 1-3, “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul begins this epistle in his regular fashion by introducing himself, his companions, and the intended recipients of this letter. Last time we looked at the key players here: Paul, Timothy, and Philemon. However I did not mention Apphia.

Apphia is a Phrygian name and hence tells us that she was born a Gentile. She most likely was Philemon’s wife (so say the scholars). Unfortunately she is only referenced here in the Bible. So other than what is recorded in this book, we are at a loss when it comes to knowing more about her.

Archippus was most likely Philemon and Apphia's son. Yet as in the case of Apphia, it is impossible to be conclusive at this point. Yet this we do know, Archippus was one of the pastors of the church in Colossae. Some even believe that his oversight would have included the Laodicean church as well. Paul closed Colossians with this exhortation:

Colossians 4:17, "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."

Truly, Archippus obviously was one of the pastors of the church which met in Philemon's home.

Now you will notice that with each name referenced here, Paul uses one or more adjectives to describe them—adjectives which, because of their general nature, are apt descriptions NOT of the Green Beret Christian, BUT of every servant of Christ. Toward that end, let's consider what we, what ALL servants in Christ, have become by grace, a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

Paul begins this book "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ." Truly this marks our first identity. We like Paul are prisoners of Christ.

And what a significant title this is in this context. First off, note that Paul never starts any of his epistles in this way; this is the only time and place.

What is the significance of being a prisoner of Christ?

As you know Paul longed in life to bring the gospel to Rome, to preach the glorious message of Christ to the capital of the then world! And yet when the time finally came that God in His providence brought Paul to the city, Paul did not arrive as an evangelist or the preacher to the Gentiles, or the missionary of his age. No, Paul came to Rome as a prisoner. Read into this his great humiliation!

And do you remember what happened when Paul first arrived?

He wasn't accepted by all in the church in Rome, specifically those in leadership. In fact, the reference in Philippians 1:15 to envy and strife amongst those in Rome toward Paul indicates that Paul's presence threatened these church leaders. In fact far from receiving the Apostle with dignity and honor, they instead "proclaim[ed] Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause [Paul] distress in [his] imprisonment" (Philippians 1:17).

Truly the environment in which Paul wrote Philemon was one of hostility, not simply from the world, but from the church itself. Here is what the church was saying:

- Look at the great missionary now!
- He's nothing special!
- He's nothing more than a prisoner of Rome!

Yet it is interesting at this point AND in Philippians that Paul at this time understood what really was going on. Yes he was bound in chains. Yes he was a prisoner. BUT the gospel wasn't bound!

Philippians 1:12-13, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places."

Indeed Paul was a prisoner, BUT he was not a prisoner to Rome — though that was true— rather he understood that in and through all things he was a prisoner to Christ! He was bound to Christ by the chains of grace. That was Paul’s identity!

And this is the case for each and every one of us who are Christians.

What chains bind you in your service in the kingdom? Are they in the form of

- A bad marriage?
- An ailing health?
- Lack of finances?
- A bad record?
- Hostile rumors?
- An uncertain tomorrow?

Christian, learn from Paul. These ought never to define you or bind you! In and through all things you must never be a prisoner of anything in this life. Rather, you are a prisoner of Christ! You are bound to Him, and He to you!

Thus

- What you do.
- What you will become.
- Where you go.
- What is going to happen.

is intimately and ultimately wrapped up in Him; for it is to Him that you are chained!

Philemon needed to know this because in the Roman culture for Philemon to forgive Onesimus was economic and social suicide. Yet he must forgive. For he too was bound NOT to public opinion or temporal well being, BUT to Christ!

These were great words of comfort to Philemon!

- Is He well-pleasing to the Father... then so are you!
- Is His power in anyway hindered by this world... then neither will it be on account of your circumstances!
- In and through all things is He reigning... then so are you!

Indeed! Being a “Prisoner of Christ” translates into one undying conviction regardless of our circumstances:

Romans 8:37, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

May God grant us the grace so to live.

Brothers and Sisters

And yet we not only are “Prisoners of Christ” we are more. Notice the second adjective used to describe the servant of Christ: “Timothy our brother . . . and Apphia our sister.” Brother and sister are interesting words

which, though common place today and therefore hardly noticeable in the church, were a shocking and significant appellation in the first century. In fact so much so that one of the first accusations against the early Christian by outsiders was that the church endured incestuous relationships.

Think about this accusation. If Janet and I are “brother and sister”... Then indeed I married... my sister!

How’s that for a gross thought? This was repulsive to first century Jews and Romans such that they used it to attack the church.

Yet what does the title, brother and sister, imply?

It doesn’t nor did it mean that we have a common earthly parent. Rather, it means that

- God is our Father — daddy!¹
- We have become His children by virtue of Christ’s work on the cross!²
- As we rely upon Christ’s cross work as the payment for our sin we become members of God’s household³ and thus brothers and sisters in the Lord!

And so, you may feel alone... bereft... out of place... uncared for... and the like. But if you are in Christ Jesus then you are members of the forever family of God! You belong here! This is your first family! And yet the title involves more than this! For if you are in Christ Jesus then not only are you members of the family of God but you are now called to be a family to the body of Christ.

In the Epistle of Philemon, this was a crucial concept. As Paul spoke of Timothy and Apphia as our brother and sister, thoughts immediately would have gone back to the rich fellowship enjoyed when Paul, Timothy, Philemon, and Apphia were together in Ephesus. It would have also been a reminder of the commitments which were and continued to be expressed to one another. Philemon would have recalled the love and the mutual concern.

With this in mind, what was Philemon to think when Onesimus HIS BROTHER stood before him? Would he throw him in prison... maybe execute him? Or would he forgive his debt and welcome him as a brother in the Lord as Paul and Timothy did when Philemon and Apphia first became believers?

Such is the obligation that rests on each and every one of our lives this day when it comes to our family members in this church.

- Unconditional love.
- Unconditional acceptance.
- Forgiveness.
- Care.
- Concern.
- Commitment.

Nothing less is implied by these beautiful adjectives; brother and sister. And so in Christ today we are prisoners of the Lord and brothers and sisters with Christ and with one another!

¹ Compare Matthew 6:9 and Galatians 4:6

² Compare John 19:27

³ Compare 1 Timothy 3:15

The Beloved

Philemon 1, “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto **Philemon our dearly beloved**, and fellowlabourer.”

Now, the New American Standard (NAS) version translates this, “Philemon the beloved brother.” Yet the word “brother” does not exist in the original. Now certainly the idea can be taken from what Paul just said about Timothy (that he is “our brother”). However to translate this text as did the NAS makes Paul out to be a liar.

We’ve already seen that one of Paul’s closest companions was Timothy. Thus if ever Paul had a “beloved brother” it was him. That is why when Paul here called Timothy our “brother” and Philemon our “beloved brother,” we are left with the conclusion that Paul really doesn’t mean what he is saying here. He simply is “pouring it on” that Philemon’s heart might be softened.

I hope you see that this is untenable. According, let’s just take this verse as Paul wrote it: Philemon first and foremost was “the beloved.”

Now the rightful question here is, “To whom was Philemon beloved?”

The answer is found as we consider how Paul used this nomenclature elsewhere. When “beloved” is by itself as a description of the child of God, what is involved?

Romans 16:12, “Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.”

First note from this verse that “beloved” as a description can stand all by itself. Notice Persis here simply is “the beloved.” He is not a “beloved”

- Brother.
- Friend.
- Servant.

He simply is, “beloved.” In fact if we translated the verse as the NASB translators did Philemon, the text would not make sense: “Greet Persis the beloved worker of the Lord (taken from the previous statement about Tryphaena and Tryphosa), who has worked hard in the Lord.”

No! Indeed! “Beloved” can and ought to stand all by itself here.

So what is denoted by the title? Or better, who is the subject of the love referenced by “beloved”? Is it Paul?

The answer is found in 3 John 1.

3 John 1, “The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.”

Clearly the title “beloved” doesn’t refer to John here since right after describing Gaius in this way John wrote, “...whom I love in truth.”

So to whom is Gaius beloved?

The only possible answer is God! Truly when we read that someone simply is “beloved” in the Bible, nine out of ten times the giver of the love is God. As Paul clearly stated:

Romans 1:7, **“To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:** Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

So what did this imply about Philemon? What does it imply about us?

Brothers and sisters, when used by itself “beloved” is a term of endearment typically used in the context of a marriage. To be someone’s beloved is to be loved NOT for what we do, BUT for who we are! In other words, “beloved” denotes an unconditional love lavished upon an individual. And it denotes a love that does not seek to get, but simply to give.

And thus do you realize that if you are in Christ, today you remain:

- The beloved of the Lord!
- An object of His affection!
- That for which God sacrificed His own Son in order to redeem!

To appreciate this we must understand the context. When God created this world He intended to have a love relationship with man not because we are special, but because it pleased Him. And yet what did we do?

We spurned God’s love, authority, and overture of eternal fellowship. We deigned rather to listen to Satan. We chose to follow our own reason from our finite and fallible minds and turned our backs on God and said, “Get out of my life; I neither need you nor do I want you!”

Now God could have and should have executed us on the spot- such

- Arrogance!
- Impudence!
- Autonomy!

Truly at this point in redemptive history all man stood condemned before God with no hope. Justice demanded our death.

Yet God commissioned His own Son- Jesus Christ- to

1. Become man.
2. Uphold the law which we rejected.
3. And then die in our place on a cross as a sacrifice for our sin.

WHY?

BECAUSE HE LOVED US! AND PHILEMON, OUGHT YOU NOT TO GIVE THE SAME LOVE TO ONESIMUS?!

Do you understand therefore what it means to be “The beloved of God”?

It means that while we were evil and wicked filled with hatred, deceit, murder, and rage the Lord set His love on you! It means that when we still were in the heights of our rebellion, Christ died for you! It means

therefore that nothing you ever could do now as a child of God could separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁴

So today we are assembled in this room as

- Prisoners of Christ.
- Brothers and sisters of Christ and one another.
- Dearly beloved of the Lord.

Fellow Workers

Yet there is more. In Christ we are fellow workers.

Philemon 1, “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto **Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer.**”

I referenced this last time. To be a “fellow worker” denotes NOT simply one who works by the sweat of the brow. For example Paul was a tent maker and Philemon was a farmer. Both worked hard. However, here fellow worker would imply more of a “fellow sufferer.”

Yet that is not what is behind this term. The concept behind a fellow worker is that of a shared commissioning and so a shared service. “Fellow workers” are ones who have been yoked together and so charged with the same work. And so we read this:

Romans 16:3-4, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.”

Read the Book of Acts and you discover that Priscilla and Aquila were co-laborers with Paul in the gospel ministry. Accordingly, by “fellow worker” Paul referenced ones charged with the same work as was he.

2 Corinthians 8:23, “Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ.”

This is the Titus of the Epistle of Titus written to a fellow pastor struggling in the work of God’s Kingdom. Accordingly “fellow worker” is seen to be NOT that of a fellow sufferer, BUT one who labored at the same grinding stone as did Paul.

Philippians 2:25, “Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.”

Philippians 2:29-30, “Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.”

Do you see it?

To be a “fellow worker” with Paul was to be one who co-labored with him in the gospel ministry. Thus when we read that Philemon was a “fellow worker with Paul” we understand that he too was charged with the

⁴ Compare Romans 8:38-39

gospel ministry of caring for, encouraging, loving, and building up the saints! In fact, if there were any doubt, consider this:

Philemon 1:5, "Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints."

You say, "This clearly is a title that does not reference me! I haven't been charged with the gospel ministry!"

Brothers and sisters don't undervalue or sell short the calling that rests upon you. Notice God's plan for church growth speaking of Christ:

Ephesians 4:16, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Regardless of your gifts, you have been charged with one and the same calling as Philemon the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Thus from Christ's perspective, you are a fellow worker given the calling to labor in Christ's vineyard, the church until He comes.

Thus BEFORE we tally

- The non-Christians with whom you've shared the gospel.
- The people you have led to the Lord.
- How many missionary journeys you've gone on.

We must BEGIN by asking ourselves, "How am I being used by God to build up the body of Christ in love?" That is our first calling.

Why after you were saved did God entrust to you a spiritual gift? Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 12:7, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."

Why did God give you the gifts He has?

He gave them so that the body might benefit.

It is interesting that today we talk about stewardship which typically involves a discussion of how we spend our money. Christian, don't miss it; your first stewardship is the gifts that God has given you for the sake of this body. Just as it would be shameful to discover that the monies God entrusted to you were spent on yourself, how much more so the gifts of the Spirit?

So as you think of yourself this day, what ought to come to mind? You are nothing less than

- A prisoner of Christ.
- A brother and sister of the Lord and so one another- a family.
- Dearly loved by God.
- One charged with the ministry of building up and so encouraging the body of Christ.

Fellow Soldier

And yet there is one more description which rounds out our identity as servants of Christ; fellow soldier.

Philemon 1:2, "And to our beloved Apphia, and **Archippus our fellowsoldier**, and to the church in thy house."

The term fellowsoldier designates much the same as "fellow worker." However there is a connotation involved in being a "fellow soldier" that is not housed in "fellow worker." Notice:

2 Timothy 2:3-7, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things."

Do you see the emphasis of this term, soldier? It is on the hardship associated with the calling both when it comes to our self-denial and the opposition that is expected

I love verse 7, "Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything."

What is Paul referencing here?

Clearly he is referencing that the ministry as a child of God is not going to be

- Easy.
- Carefree.
- Stress less.
- Without great concern.

That is the idea behind the fifth and final adjective that Paul uses to describe our work as Christians. As fellow soldiers we labor diligently at our calling. However as we work, we do not expect "to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease."⁵

Listen to how Paul described the higher life associated with ministry in the kingdom of God:

2 Corinthians 11:23-29, "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"

When Paul called Archippus a "fellow soldier" it was this kind of life that was in mind. And how it behooves us to understand that the calling that rests upon our lives is one and the same, and so will be fraught with such experiences.

⁵ Trinity Hymnal, #573

From my time in ministry, I have come to the conclusion that there is secretly, in everyone of us, the assumption and so the expectation that if I am doing God's work in God's way, I will know only blessing. We all assume that

- A struggling church is a church doing something wrong.
- A struggling ministry is a ministry gone amiss.
- A struggle when it comes to
 - My marriage.
 - Our parenting.
 - Our work.

Immediately means I had better stop messing up and get busy doing things right.

Now there are good reasons why we might think this way. Certainly doing things poorly or even wrongly often times will have a negative impact on success. But hear this well! If you do it right when it comes to the kingdom of God, you are going to have a hard time. Service in the Kingdom of God will not be flack-free.

2 Timothy 3:12, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

In this age it will only be by the "sweat of the brow" that imperfect fruit will arise from a cursed earth. This is essential to understand for it is possible to do everything right in ministry and still end up hanging on a cross.

As this is the case, as we consider ourselves as servants of Christ we must not allow trial and hardship to detour us in our calling to build up the body. Now don't miss the point, I was intentionally specific in what I said here. I have known well-intentioned Christians who have thought that God's will for them was to

- Criticize the leadership that the church might be kept on track.
- Stir up controversy in the class room that others might be prompted to think.
- To purposely shake a person's beliefs thinking this will strengthen their faith.

And then when the fruit wasn't forthcoming; and in fact when they found themselves opposed, they considered themselves a martyr. I am reminded of Peter's words:

1 Peter 2:20, "**For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?** but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."

Accordingly Peter exhorted the body this way:

1 Peter 4:15, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters."

Let's be very careful here as to what we identify as the ministry to which we have been called lest we be persecuted as a "troublesome meddler" (1 Peter 4:15). It is building up the body of Christ- not tearing it down. It is encouraging the brethren- not criticizing them. It is bearing one another's burdens- not praising God you don't have them. It is praying for one another- not gossiping.

Give yourself to this ministry, and Christian, you are going to get it, right in the mouth. I'll never forget the time while preaching in a pulpit in Florida, I addressed the Biblical calling for us to care for one another's children. I said, "We're a family and these children are yours."

Well the very next Sunday a dear sister with a sensitive heart by faith sought to help a family with an unruly child. And the parents just weren't very happy with her. She received a horrible rebuke telling her to mind her own business.

Brothers and sisters we are fellow soldiers of Christ. Show me a soldier in a battle zone who hasn't been fired at. It is going to happen, so let us not be surprised. Rather when it happens, let us consider it a privilege to have suffered with Christ.

However and again, if we should so suffer may it be because we are caring for the body of Christ. And so as a body working out our salvation with fear and trembling, we are

1. Prisoners of Christ.
2. Brothers and sisters of the Lord and so a family one with another.
3. Dearly loved by God.
4. Ones charged with the ministry of building up and so encouraging the body of Christ- and we remain faithful even when we are reviled and/or opposed.

This is who we are, and so that which shapes all that we ought to do as a church- including Our Body Life!

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 (10th 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.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found at [Philemon 1](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 9, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church