



Tweets from Heaven

#5 Philemon: Partnership

I. Introduction

We live in a world of separateness and isolation, and Paul's world wasn't much different. Into such a society punctuated by the "ONE," he uses a very important word in verse 17 to convey his underlying thought for the entire letter. Paul in essence asks Philemon if he considers him to be his "Partner".

vs. 17 "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him (Onesimus) as myself..."

Partner: "Koinonos" from the root meaning to hold in common, to share in, to be joint participators, to be fellow travelers, to be companions.

A. The term "koinonia" is used three different ways in the New Testament:

1. The sharing in something

Phil. 2: 1- the sharing or "fellowship of the spirit"

1 Cor. 10:16 – the sharing or "communion of the blood"

Eph. 3:9 – the sharing in or "fellowship of the mystery" (of Christ)

2. A benefaction, a collection or contribution

2 Cor. 9:13 – "A liberal distribution"

Rom. 15:26 – "To make a certain contribution for the poor saints"

Heb. 13:16 – "To do good and communicate forget not"

3. Fellowship, intercourse, intimacy

Gal. 2:9 – "The right hand of fellowship"

Phil. 1:5 – "Fellowship in the gospel..."

1 John 1:3, 7 – "Our fellowship is with the Father..." "We have fellowship one with another"

B. A positive example – James and John are partners with Simon Peter in the fishing business (see Luke 5:10)

C. A negative example – Paul urges us not to be partners with Demas (see 1 Cor. 10:20). We are not to share in other people's sins (1 Tim. 5:22)

II. "Koinonos" is a "beautiful relationship of faith." It is the idea of being bonded together for a united purpose.

- A. It is rooted in our relationship with God.
 - 1. "The fellowship of his son": 1 Cor. 1:9
 - 2. "The communion of the Holy Spirit": 2 Cor. 13:14
 - 3. "Partaker of the divine nature": 2 Pet. 1:4
- B. Its purpose: "fellowship in the gospel": Phil. 1:5
- C. It is "joint participation in an entire system of faith": Acts 2:42
- D. The activities involved in the "fellowship of the gospel" include communion (1 Cor. 10:16), financial contributions (2 Cor. 8:4, 9:13, Heb. 13:16) and other spiritual endeavors like prayer, fasting, discipleship (Rom. 15:26-27)
- E. It's not simple "togetherness" or a social gathering or a meal shared. It's more than a long chat with a friend or an exchange of gifts or services. It's definitely more than the casual gathering together of the church family once or twice a week.
- F. Thus, a working definition might be: A sense of community, a joint participation. Its root is found in the Greek work for "common." It's an intimate relationship which involves a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and in each other.

God wants us to have this kind of intimate, purposeful relationship for a very specific purpose: John 17:11, 21 – That the world might believe that Jesus is the Christ. The word translated "one" is illustrated in Rom. 12:4 and 1 Cor. 12:12, 20 where there are many members but one body (no division into parts). There's an agreement in purpose and action. We can't duplicate the oneness that God the Father and Christ have, but we can imitate it.

Our society talks a lot about "friendship" but very little about "partnering." It's so much more than a casual connection made through your kid's soccer club or a shallow graciousness shared over the back fence.

Paul expected something out of this partnership (vs. 17), and he had a right to do so.

III. Paul benefitted from his partnership with Philemon

His friendship was much more meaningful than a kind word exchanged.

"Let me have joy of thee..." (vs. 20) Literally, this means let me profit from you. It is another play on Onesimus' name. Let me "Onesimus" from you! Let me derive pleasure or have an advantage from our relationship. Let it matter! Let it count!

IV. Paul expected to benefit from his relationship in two specific ways:

- A. Vs. 20 "Refresh my heart in the Lord"

Refresh: This Greek word means to provide rest, or a repose. It is an inner tranquility that is contrasted with the din of the outer noise and pressure of everyday life.

Look at Matt. 11:28 – 29 Here God promises "anapausis," (inner tranquility) to the weary, while they are engaged in the necessary labor of life.

Paul wants to partner with Philemon and ensure that his own heart has a resting-place from the incredible stressing stains of ministry. His friend is a refuge, a refuge for his heart.

B. Vs. 22 "Prepare me also a lodging."

Here's an opportunity to be a practical blessing, to exercise biblical hospitality.

Hospitality: It's required of a Pastor (Titus 1:8), expected of a woman (1 Tim. 5:10) and should be done without grumbling (1 Pet. 4:9).

V. So what? Consider these principles when developing life-long partners.

A. Seek common ground or mutual interests with their friends. Strong friendships share mutual important goals and values...especially spiritual ones.

"A true friend is one who knows you as you are, understands where you've been, accepts who you've become and still gently invites you to grow."

B. Cultivate authentic transparency

Prov. 27:10 "Do not forsake your friend or a friend of your family, and do not go to your relative's house when disaster strikes you – better a neighbor nearby than a relative far away.

Things we might say to a true "partner":

1. "I need help" (Gal. 6:2)

"A friend is one who walks in when others walk out." (Walter Winchell)

2. "I need to tell you"

Prov. 27:6 "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses."

"A true friend always stabs you in the front." (Oscar Wilde)

a) We need to be told when we've offended someone.

b) We need to be told when we're about to make bad decisions.

c) Real friends take the risk to confront.

Eph. 4:15 "Speak the truth in love."

3. "I was wrong, please forgive me."

"You can tell a real friend by the fact that when you've made a fool of yourself, she/he doesn't feel you've done a permanent job."

"O, the comfort – the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts, nor measure words – but pouring them right out – just as

they are – chaff and grain together – Certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them – Keep what is worth keeping – And with the breach of kindness blow the rest away.” (Dina Craik)

Proverbs 17:9 “Whoever would foster love covers an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.”

4. “You greatly matter to me”

Proverbs 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

C. Communicate your care and concern

Remember: Love is not an emotion – it is something we do.

Proverbs 18:24 “One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

Expressing our friendships with:

A look – Ruth 1:14-18

A word – Song of Solomon 1:5, 2:1

A touch – Matt 9:29

An act of kindness – Phil. 4:10, 14-19

A gift – something personal that says I know you and your unique personality and preferences.

Discussion Questions

1. What’s the difference between friendships and biblical partnerships?
2. Do you have any of those? Why or why not?
3. Is it easy or hard for you to cultivate transparency?