

Total Gospel Focus: Myopic Horizons Transposed

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Date: 12 November 2006

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn up, if you would, Paul's letter to Philemon, page 1000 in the Visitor's Bibles. And in this, our third study on this little book, I want to focus particularly on the words of verse 15.

Paul says to Philemon about Onesimus, He was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever. As we've discovered already, this little letter is all about relationship transformation.

Relationship transformation of the most radical kind, and with the most profound implications. And that is so, of course, because it's primarily concerned with the great relationship transformation, the one that affects all other relationships.

And that is the transformation of relationship between the individual and God. The individual who once was an enemy of God, but is now not just a friend, not just at peace with God, but a child of God.

You can call God Father, as Paul does in verse 3, God our Father. And therefore, that person who calls God Father is therefore a brother and sister, with all of God's family, bound together to them with unbreakable bonds.

[1 : 29] They share that family's destiny, that family's love. They're bonds of the heart. We saw that last time, bonds of compassion, of deepest belonging. And that's what's happened to Onesimus, this runaway slave.

So that Paul can say of him in verse 15, in verse 12 rather, that to send him back to Philemon was like sending a part of himself, his heart. So closely was he bound to him.

And that is the great transformation of the gospel. It restores people to their true relationship with God, a relationship that previously had been destroyed, broken by sin.

It's a miracle of the mercy and grace of God. But the implications of this new situation are vast, because when a new relationship to God begins in Christ, all other relationships are changed. First, you remember we saw that this transforming gospel produces a restoration of broken human relationships. It brings to being tangible gospel fellowship between those who previously were against one another.

[2 : 46] Because in Christ is found a miracle that transforms the broken human relationships of this world and brings real fellowship in Jesus Christ. And Paul says that has got to be real between these two men, Philemon and Onesimus.

Second, last week, do you remember, we saw that this transforming gospel produces also a remodeling of all social relationships. It results in a true gospel family, the church.

And that's because in Christ is found a mercy that transcends the social divisions and hierarchies of our world and our society. It brings all together to be one in Christ Jesus.

And Paul says that is to be real and evident and visible in the church in Philemon's house in Colossae. Onesimus, the runaway slave, the new believer, verse 17 says, is to be received as an equal partner, just as though he were Paul himself.

But this morning I want to focus on a third aspect of this transformation that's produced by the gospel. And it's this. The gospel produces a reorientation of the horizons of all of our relationships, of all of our thinking.

[4 : 12] So that our thinking assumes a total gospel focus. And that's because in Christ there is found meaning that totally transposes the myopic vision of this world's horizons.

Our life, as it were, when we become a Christian is transposed into a completely different key. And as a result, the things that are just for a while begin to matter less and less and less.

And the things that are forever begin to be the things that fill our vision. So that all the relationships we have in this world and with this world become shaped not by the perspective of this world any

longer, this world's values, its ideas, its priorities.

No, everything becomes shaped by eternity. And of course, therefore, the relationships that matter in our lives in this world are the eternal ones.

Primarily, of course, our relationship with God himself. But flowing from that, our relationships with our brothers and sisters in our eternal family in the church. And what matters, says Paul in verse 15, is no longer what may go on for a while, but what matters is that we might have such a person forever, as a beloved brother.

[5 : 47] So having a total gospel focus is all about having a perspective in our Christian lives and in our church life that is not myopic. It's not concerned just with the things that are temporary, that are fleeting, that are passing, and therefore are only of secondary importance.

But it's with things that are of eternal importance. Those are the things that are really significant. Those are the things that must be primary and shaping and dictating all of our priorities in our lives together.

That's why when Paul begins his letter, as we've already seen in verses 4 to 7, his focus is on Philemon's relationship with God. Paul wants that to be ever more mature and growing so that he grows into a full knowledge of all the good things that are ours in Christ.

That's making a priority of eternal things. Of course, his focus is also on the other relationships that are eternal, that Philemon and Onesimus are to be brothers forever because that's what they are. And in fact, the whole church is not to focus on whatever may have happened for a while, but it's the focus on the things that are eternal. He's not taken up with the wrongs, whatever they were, that led to Onesimus leaving the household of Philemon.

[7 : 10] He's not taken up with the illegal parting itself. Even matters of restoration and reparation are put firmly in second place.

Paul mentions them. He doesn't ignore the practical things. In verse 18, he says, he offers to pay for these things. But the way he deals with them shows that these are clearly secondary matters. What's really vital, according to Paul, is to make these people understand that they are family, that they are God's family forever. And what really matters, therefore, is that there will be tangible gospel fellowship among the members of God's family, that there will be true gospel family. and also a true gospel focus. Now, this gospel focus, this perspective that's fixed firmly on eternity, on the things above, the earthly, the human, our normal horizons, this perspective explains the paradox of this little letter, in fact, of much of the New Testament itself.

Why doesn't this letter that's all to do with a runaway slave and the issue of slavery? Why does it not explicitly condemn the practice of slavery? In fact, nowhere in the New Testament do we find an explicit condemnation of slavery.

[8 : 35] In fact, the explicit statements about slavery appear to have almost the opposite understanding. Slaves are always told to obey their earthly masters, to work well for them.

Now, to some in the church that is and has been a great embarrassment. And they've sought ways of trying to show that, in fact, the Bible does clearly condemn slavery. Others, of course, have found it a source of great glee and scorn, fuel for them dismissing the Bible.

The Bible's ethics are barbaric and imperialistic, condones slavery and so on. How could we listen to what the Bible says today? But, you see, to say that kind of thing is to miss the point completely. It's to misunderstand what the Bible's all about. To misunderstand what the Gospel's all about. It's to totally mistake the Gospel's whole focus and fail to see that the Gospel's perspective is not primarily taken up with the relatively trivial matters of things that are just for a while.

It's taken up with the things that are forever, the eternal things. The Gospel is not primarily concerned with changing conditions in this passing world.

[9 : 51] It's primarily concerned with rescuing people from this passing world for the eternal world, the world which is to come. Now, to say that is something that is anathema to many in the church today.

But, friends, that is the plain teaching of the New Testament. And that's the explanation for the emphasis that we find in this letter of Philemon and in other New Testament letters that deal about issues like slavery and war and social justice and so on.

As far as the New Testament is concerned, we must be absolutely clear what the priority is and what the primary focus is for the church of Jesus Christ.

And it is to have a total Gospel focus. And that means that the church's task as the church is not primarily to be taken up commenting on the conditions of this world or dealing with the problems of this world or even changing the problems and the conditions of this world.

That's not the church's primary task. The church's primary task is to proclaim the message of the world to come to the people of this world, to rescue them from this passing world and at the same time to demonstrate the values and the ways of the world to come of the kingdom of Christ in this passing world.

[11 : 25] And that is the church's task and that's our primary focus. That is a total Gospel focus. And we must never be confused about that. So important, so important in our day when there's so much direct action going on.

It seems to be taken as read, even among many evangelical believers, that the church, as the church, must be engaged enormously on the social and the political level.

But that is not the emphasis of the New Testament. It's certainly not the emphasis here in Philemon, is it? Paul doesn't write to Philemon asking him to start a campaign against slavery.

No, he writes encouraging him to apply the gospel to the life of the church in Colossae. And to live in line with the liberating truth that builds eternal bonds right across the social divides of his world's day, whatever they might be.

And that is always the church's primary task. The church, as the church, is not here to foment social rebellion. It's not even here to focus on reforming the social problems of our world.

[12 : 43] It's here to redeem the sinful people of this world. The church's task is not social campaigning. It's spiritual conversion.

The church's task is not chasing politics. It's changing people. And that is Paul's emphasis in Philemon, isn't it?

It's very plain. It's focused on the transforming changes in people, in relationships that are brought about by the transforming gospel. Now, don't misunderstand me.

Don't mishear me. That is not to say that as Christians we are to ignore our life and our society or to despise it or to hide from it or to seek to escape from the world.

Of course not. We're not removed by becoming Christians from the structures, from the responsibilities that we have as citizens of this world.

[13 : 43] Of course we're not. If you look at the beginning of Paul's letter to Colossians, which, remember, was carried with this letter to the same church, Paul begins his letter by saying he's writing to those who are in Christ at Colossae.

They still have responsibilities, don't they, as citizens of Colossae, just as you and I still have responsibilities, even though we're citizens of the New World, as citizens of Glasgow, of Scotland. So it's not to say that we opt out of this world, but it is to say that our perspective on this world has radically changed. And all of the things which beforehand may have been our primary concern are now clearly just passing matters, things that are just for a while.

And therefore nowhere near as important as the things which are going to be forever in Christ. Our whole perspective on life has been transposed by the meaning that comes in grasping the eternal purposes of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's why Paul goes on when he's writing to the Colossians. To say in chapter 3 verse 1, since then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is.

[15 : 02] Set your minds on things that are above, not on earthly things. He's not telling them to remove themselves from the world, he's telling them their perspective on the world changes. Have an eternal perspective, a total gospel focus.

Even when you're thinking about the mundane things of living in this world, world. We must do that, you see, because the New Testament is clear. Although we are still citizens of this world, our primary citizenship is in heaven.

Philippians 3.20, our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now again, friends, I'm saying this to you because it's so important. In a day when mission in the church has come to mean, well, almost apparently anything.

So I keep getting letters, for example, from the moderator of our General Assembly asking me to join a protest walk to the Fasley nuclear base to protest against Trident. And that's called the church's mission.

It's interesting, by the way, that it seems to be taken as read that everybody in the church will be unanimous in their view against Trident, where it's not at all taken as read that we'll be unanimous in our view against things like gay marriage or gay adoption.

[16:17] It's quite ironic, isn't it? But something like that is called mission. It's important when in our day there's a huge skew of church funds to what are called priority areas for mission.

But usually what that means is it's funds for social work, for community work of all different kinds, often very laudable, often very necessary, but nothing, nothing about the gospel of Jesus Christ in it at all.

Now, of course, the Christian is not uninterested in such concerns about society, about social care, about poor relief, about health and so on. Of course not.

But, and this is a big but, all these things are not the mission of the church. They're the side effect of the mission that has a real gospel focus.

They're, in a sense, just incidental influences. They are the effect of true worship of God in the world. But that comes about when there is a real mission to the world, a proclaiming of the gospel of Jesus Christ to create true worship in the world.

[17:39] The real mission of the church as the church is, at least according to Jesus, to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey and to live as kingdom people, as lights in a fallen world.

It's not to make demonstrators or even diplomats, trying to change society by party politics or social campaigns or whatever it might be.

And that is still the church's task. Whatever the society we live in, to make disciples, whether it's a free society or an oppressed one, whether it's democracy or whether it's tyranny, as it was for the early church, as they witnessed in the Rome of Nero.

The early church didn't spend all their time campaigning against Rome. They spent their time seeking to convert Romans. And you see, the fact is, friends, we have to recognize this world cannot be reformed.

Not ever. The Bible is absolutely clear on that. This world has to be remade. We're living in the last days when that's begun. Began with Jesus' resurrection.

[18:47] It will be consummated when he comes again to reign forever and bring in a whole new creation. But until then, we still live in a fallen world, a world of sin and rebellion.

And we have to face that world as realists, not as fantasists. We don't ignore the world. We don't hide from it. We don't despise our dealings with it. We have responsibilities as citizens to our fellow citizens to our governments and so on.

The Bible is very clear on that. Read Romans 13. But it's just as clear that these things can never be our primary focus. The concerns of this world and society and so on can never be the church's primary concern.

Not ever. Because ours is a transposed horizon. We see things that are far more important even than the things which are for a while.

We're taken up with relationships which will be eternal. Now obviously that attitude is going to be very far-reaching, isn't it? It's going to dictate our priorities in our private life, in our Christian life and in our church life.

[20:00] And it will mean that our priorities are often totally at odds with the priorities the world has for itself and the priorities the world would like the church to have.

But we must not let the world dictate the agenda and the priorities of the church nor of our Christian lives. Otherwise it will be totally at odds with the Bible, won't it?

With the Bible's absolute priority of eternal issues over temporal ones with a true gospel focus that's demanded of the church. Let me give you an example.

The world's priorities, because it is taken up with the here and now, with this passing world, with what's for a while, the world's priorities are in things like satisfaction and fulfillment in our love relationships, especially erotic relationships.

And with economic relationships, our career, our progress, our rewards and so on. That pretty much sums up the concerns of the world, really, erotic relationships and economic relationships.

[21:07] Well, not so for the Christian. We don't disparage these things, of course. The Bible doesn't. It honors both of these things. But it's not the be-all and end-all.

If you read Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, you'll find that he's speaking about this overwhelming priority of finishing the race. Are you married? Are you not married? Well, it's not the biggest issue, says Paul. Because the present form of this world is passing away. It's something that's just for a while. Are you a slave, even? Well, don't be overly concerned with it. If you can get your freedom, well, so much the better. It doesn't matter if you can't. You're the Lord's free man, just as the free man is a slave to the Lord. Now, you see, that kind of thinking is scandalous to this world, isn't it?

Where these relationships really are the be-all and the end-all. But not to the Christian, where eternal relationships are far, far more important. Now, that should be a great relief to us. [22 : 11] We don't have to find success in the relationships that the world always values. It's just part of this passing world. The Bible is full of realism about this passing world.

There's no fantasy talk in the Bible about creating a utopia by human progress or any such nonsense like that. There's no illusion in the New Testament about a world that will be free from war, or poverty, or exploitation, or lawlessness.

Jesus says very plainly, all of that will be true right to the very end. There's a simple reason for that. Unlike the secular politicians, unlike liberal churchmen, the Bible takes sin seriously, doesn't it? The Bible knows that the only answer to human sin is a new creation, from which sin has been removed and the causes of sin banished forever.

The Bible knows that this world's problems can't possibly be cured by fiddling with the budget. Our politicians may seem to think that, but the Bible says a rather larger solution is necessary, the recreation of the entire universe.

[23 : 31] Now, Mr. Blair, Mr. Brown, Mr. Bush, these kind of people might think that they can solve this planet's problems, but I'm afraid the Bible says, no, they can't. And we as Christians must be realists.

We must focus our horizons on the real task of the church, which is far greater, far more important than reforming the passing problems of this present world.

But in fact, it's when the church is absolutely clear about its primary task, that it's most effective in doing all these other things.

It's when the church is most effective at rescuing people from this evil age for the life to come, that it actually has most effect and works most lasting change in the relationships of this world too.

When it actually brings changes and reforms and benefits for the whole of society. That's proven in history. But we must be very clear about the difference between the church's primary task as the church, the direct influence that the church is called to in this world.

[24 : 48] We must be very clear about the difference between that and what is by necessity just the indirect influence of the church in changing human society.

This indirect influence is not unimportant. Of course it isn't. In fact, it's very powerful and effective. It's the purpose of the church's worship in the world.

The purpose of the church's worship in the world is to be a window from earth into heaven. It's to display the values of the kingdom of God in this world now.

But that will only be powerful. In fact, it will only exist at all as true worship if the church is focused on its absolute priority, which is to speak a word from heaven to earth. To change hearts.

To call men and women into an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. And to call them into being a church that will demonstrate the ways of heaven in this present world.

[25 : 51] I want to give a thought just for a few moments to the indirect influence of the church in changing society through its worship and by contrast to the direct and primary calling of the church that produces that worship.

The priority of gospel proclamation. But first of all, the purpose of the church's worship is that it should be a window from earth to heaven. A true gospel focus means the church is focused on being a living demonstration to the world of the relationships that are transformed by the gospel. There's no more powerful influences there in this world than the transformed lives and the transformed priorities of those who have been changed by the gospel. And in two distinct ways. First of all, the corporate life of the church, the life together, should shine like a light to the world demonstrating the transformed relationships of grace.

Demonstrating the tangible gospel fellowship, the true gospel family. Your lights to the world, said Jesus to his church. But secondly, on an individual level, our lives as individual Christians should

permeate society like leaven as we bring the values of the kingdom into the workplace, into the public square, into our home life.

To witness as a preservative, as a disinfectant in a decaying society. You're the salt of the earth, Jesus said. And that's what real worship is, of course.

[27 : 29] Worship has nothing to do really with singing hymns and songs to one another. Well, that's part of it, I suppose. But much more importantly, the worship of the church is singing the kingdom song to the world.

And that's a song with actions. We demonstrate. We give a window into heaven. Now, do you see that that's Paul's exact emphasis, isn't it, in this letter to Philemon?

He's seeking to have a church in pagan Colossae that is light and leaven in the society. Not campaigning about injustice and exploitation, but demonstrating love and righteousness to the world.

But his whole approach is to apply gospel priorities to all the relationships. To focus on the things that matter forever.

Not just endless specifics about things that are only for a while. Now, if you read the books about Philemon, you'll see that scholars are divided as to whether Paul was really actually hoping that Philemon would give Onesimus his full freedom.

[28 : 39] It's possible that he does want this, although I don't think we can be at all certain. But if he does, it's because it's driven by the needs of gospel mission. It's to free him, maybe officially, maybe not.

But it's the freedom, practically speaking, to serve Paul. Either back in Rome, where he's imprisoned, or later on, perhaps, in some sort of mission in the church, or both.

But it's certainly true that Paul's primary purpose is to focus not on changing the social customs of the society, but to focus on teaching the Christians in the church how to deal rightly with one another, whatever the social conditions are.

We know that we can't ever magically change the conditions in our society, in our world. There's always going to be the boss and the worker, isn't there? There's always going to be the management and the workforce, the master and servant.

And some guys or others, always. And the point is that the Christian and the whole church must know how being a Christian and being in the church, whatever the mix of society, how being a Christian is to dictate how we relate to one another in a way that's totally different from the way the world outside relates to one another.

[30 : 03] We are to show, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, that we have an eternal bond of brotherhood and sisterhood that totally overshadows everything that's just for a while.

Every distinction. And there will always be distinctions that exist. But these things are totally secondary now that we're in Christ. And that demonstrates to this world, doesn't it, as light in a dark place, the overwhelming wonder of the eternal relationships that come in the Lord Jesus Christ? You might just like to look back to Colossians chapter 3, just for a word about this. Remember this letter accompanied Philemon's letter. It's page 984 in the church Bibles. It just shows us how these two things are held together.

Chapter 3, verse 11, Paul says to the Colossian church here, that is in the church in Christ, there is not Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

That's what's eternal. That's what matters. And yet look down to verse 22. Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

[31 : 25] Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. The wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done.

There's no partiality. Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven. Well, is that a contradiction?

Of course it isn't. It's simple realism. The gospel doesn't instantly reform the structures of this world. In fact, it never will completely for that matter.

The world's inequalities in some form or other will be with us right till the very end. But the point is that real Christian fellowship will and must transcend all of these things.

And the church, unlike the world, must be a place where there is no snobbery, no apartheid. And no inverted snobbery or chips on the shoulder either for that matter.

[32 : 27] That can never be in the world. It's impossible in a fallen world. But it is possible. In fact, it's inevitable in a truly gospel church. That's the message.

There will always be masters and servants in some guys in this world. But in the church of Jesus Christ, in our common life, in our life of worship, we must shine as a light, like a beacon on a hill. We must shine as a window into the eternal reality of heaven, the home of righteousness, the home of right relationships. We demonstrate. That's the purpose of the church's worship, to be a light to the world, to demonstrate a better way, a way of health, a way of life, a way of righteousness, of peace, of love, of harmony.

You are the light of the world. And, said Jesus, you're the salt of the earth and Christian people themselves, all of us are to permeate this world and take the values that we see and experience in a church changed by the gospel and take these values to our neighbours, to our countrymen, to seek their health, to seek their improvement, to seek their betterment.

That's how the world, that's how society is changed, really changed by the gospel. It's indirect, through the public and private lives of worship, demonstrating the word of the truth of the gospel.

[33 : 56] That's how the great social reforms came about in our society in the 18th century. Men like the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. That's how the great transatlantic slave movement was finally abolished through men like William Wilberforce.

Christians acting as leaven in the world, worshipping God in a very real and tangible sense. But, and this is really crucial, these men and many others like them did not arise.

Their achievements were not brought about by the church putting its primary focus into political and social campaigning. It was the exact opposite.

These things flowed from and flowed out of the great awakening, where there was a total gospel focus. Men like George Whitefield and John Wesley and so on, they went to the masses of this country.

Not primarily with poor relief, with campaigns for temperance, anti-drug things and anti-alcohol and so on. No, they went with the gospel of liberation from sin, the power of hell.

[35 : 06] And these things, all these things, including the abolition of slavery, freedom from alcoholism, from gambling, from poverty and drugs and all of these things, these things are not the gospel.

They're not the church's primary focus ever. They are the purpose of the church's worship. They flow from the worship of the church, but indirectly.

And all of that flows, first of all, from the direct focus of the church in the world, and that is the priority, always, of the church's work.

Whatever the situation in society, whatever it's like to speak a word from heaven to earth. The business of the church is always primarily to focus on the proclamation of the gospel, to win people into relationships that are eternal.

And that must always be our preoccupation as the church in this world. But you see, the tragedy is that in so many ways the church has forgotten this today.

[36 : 13] There's never been a time when the church has been more taken up with political activity and social activity and comment and direct action about this and that and the other thing.

But there's probably never been a time when there's really been less impact from the church on the human situation in our society. Why is that?

Well, listen to something I read this week from Martin Lloyd-Jones' book on Ephesians chapter 6, or one of his about six books on Ephesians chapter 6. Listen to this.

The tragedy is that today, while the church is talking about these problems and dealing directly with politics and economics and social conditions, no Christians are being produced.

And the conditions are worsening and the problems are mounting. It is as the church produces Christians that she changes the conditions, but always indirectly.

[37 : 15] That's exactly right, isn't it? To have Christian worship demonstrating Christian values in the world, you need Christians. It's pretty basic. Of course.

And that's what it means to have a total gospel focus. The church's task, I'm quoting Lloyd-Jones again, is primarily to evangelize. And to bring people to the knowledge of God.

And then, having done that, to teach them how to live their life under God as his people. Lives of worship. You see? To create eternally transformed relationships with God and with his people, and then demonstrate that to the world, that's a total gospel focus.

So, in closing, let me just draw to your attention, once again, some of the practical things that we've seen of that total gospel focus right here in Philemon.

What it looks like in practice. It's all about attitudes and actions. Our attitude as a church and as Christians, says verse 15, is to focus on the things that are eternal.

[38 : 27] To see that God's sovereign hand is at work in the world to achieve his primary purpose, which is to save lost sinners like Onesimus. Whatever the history of wickedness and of sin and of wrong action there was in the life of Onesimus, God used it all for his eternal good to bring Onesimus to Christ.

Just like Joseph, do you remember, in Genesis 50. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, for the saving of many lives. And you know, many people, many people get their lives into a terrible mess, don't they?

Broken relationships, disasters in their career, alcoholism, drug dependency, sexual promiscuity, whatever it is. But often, you know, God's wonderful grace uses even all these things to win brothers and sisters to the Lord Jesus Christ forever.

And that's wonderful. And so we must be careful, mustn't we, of our attitude. If we spend all our time declaiming such people, protesting against them and so on, we may never be able to reach them, to win them.

Remember, God is at work. And he wins people, not by the church moralizing to them, but by us evangelizing them, bringing the good news of Jesus.

[39 : 51] Isn't that right? And we've got to think about that also in our attitude to our society as a whole. God may let things happen that seem to be terrible, that are terrible, so that eternal relationships can be won forever.

Just think of China, the Cultural Revolution, and all the Western missionaries being kicked out. It seemed terrible, and yet God used all of that for the church to mushroom in growth.

And we need to remember that, I think, don't we, today? Saving our cherished heritage in the West can't be our primary concern, can it?

Maybe we have to lose some of these cherished things for a while in order to gain many brothers forever. Our Christian attitude to politics and so on must have a total gospel focus, mustn't it?

Our attitudes must put eternity first, not temporal things. Secondly, actions in the church and as Christians.

[40 : 58] We've seen Paul has focused on three clear things already, haven't we? First of all, reaching out and drawing in. That's a big feature of this letter, isn't it? Evangelism.

It's at the core. Doing everything that we can to welcome the enesimuses of this world with joy and generosity. That's a mark of a true gospel focus. Receive him as you would receive me, says Paul. A church reaching out and drawing in has a gospel focus. Second, refreshing the saints. We've seen that clearly, haven't we? Real fellowship.

Supporting work among the saints and helping others in their lives of ministry to build up their faith. A church that's growing by sharing and applying the gospel to all their relationships.

That's a church with a real gospel focus. And third, releasing. Releasing into ministry. That's another key in this letter, isn't it? Paul's focus is on frontline mission.

[41 : 58] He wants Onesimus released to have his place. He focuses on his fellow workers, on Timothy, on Archippus, Mark and Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. A church that takes mission and ministry seriously.

That's seeking to release into mission those that are called and have ability and to support them like Onesimus on Philemon's behalf. In partnership of whatever kind, like hospitality, preparing a room for me so that I can come to you.

That's a gospel focused church. Reaching out and drawing in. Refreshing and building up.

Releasing and sending out. An attitude that sees that eternal things and eternal relationships dwarf everything else.

An action's focused on reaching out and building up and sending out. That's a church with a total gospel focus. It proclaims a word from heaven to earth and calls people to Christ.

And it demonstrates the kingdom like a window from earth into heaven where people can see the light of the glory to come. That's a church whose worship will bring change to this world because, with primary importance, it's a church that will bring people out of this world into the world to come. [43 : 24] And I know that that's the kind of church that we've sought to be and we do seek to be. And the message of this letter is let's encourage one another and help one another to keep that as our focus.

Never to lose it. A church with a total gospel focus. Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, our world is so needy, but you have shined into our hearts the light of the knowledge of your new creation through Jesus Christ.

May we be a people who shine that light to our world through our words, and through the works which flow from them.

For the glory of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.