

## How to Treat our Fellow Laborers Philemon 8-14

### Introduction:

1. Paul wrote this letter to a friend named Philemon in the church at Colosse. Paul was in prison in Rome at the time he wrote to Philemon.
2. In verse 1, Paul calls Philemon his “*dearly beloved and fellowlabourer.*”
  - The word “*fellowlabourer*” carries the idea of somebody who is involved in a work with you, side by side.
  - The Greek word for “*fellowlabourer*” is translated in other places as “*my helpers in Christ,*” “*my workfellow,*” “*my partner and fellowhelper,*” “*my fellowworkers,*” and “*my brother and companion in labour.*”
3. Paul had actually led Philemon to Christ (vs. 19) and they had served God together side by side. They knew each other very well as they served God together.
  - The apostle Paul had many people that were his fellow laborers. vs. 23-24
4. Likewise, if you are in Christ and part of a local assembly of believers, you are going to have fellow laborers. There are people with whom you will serve God, side by side.
  - This is God's plan, by the way. You were never meant to be on a spiritual island, just you and God. 1 Corinthians 3:9
5. This can be both a blessing and a challenge, because where there are **people**, there are **problems**. The same was true in Paul's day. Paul had a situation on his hands and had to deal with it.
  - Philemon had a runaway servant named Onesimus whom Paul had led to Christ in Rome. Onesimus had been changed by the power of the gospel and was now ministering to Paul while Paul was in prison. Yet, he belonged to Philemon, Paul's fellow laborer.
  - Once Paul discovered this, what was Paul to do? How would he handle this with his fellow laborer?
6. This little letter is a textbook on how one believer should treat his fellow laborer in Christ. We get to see firsthand how Paul deals with a very sensitive situation with his fellow laborer. What are the principles we learn from this little letter?

### First, express appreciation for their ministries. vs. 5, 7

1. We studied the first seven verses last week and we saw how Paul genuinely appreciated the ministry of Philemon.
2. Paul was not just buttering up Philemon to get what he wanted. Paul really was thankful for Philemon's ministry, and told him so.
3. Sometimes we can get tunnel vision, and we only see the value of **our** ministries. Do you realize that it takes all the members of the body ministering in their unique ways for the body to function efficiently? 1 Corinthians 12:17-21
4. When was the last time you said a kind word to others regarding **their** ministries?

5. Paul could have started this letter by tooting his own horn and talking about how important his apostolic ministry was. He could have had the attitude, “Because my ministry is so valuable and important, you must do what I need you to do.”
6. But this is not the approach Paul took at all with his fellow laborer. He took the approach, “I realize how valuable **your** ministry is and I appreciate it so much.”

### **Second, exhort them in a spirit of love. vs. 8-9**

1. Verse 8 may not be readily clear when you first read it, but as we define the words it becomes abundantly clear. “*Wherefore, though I might be much bold* (frank; blunt) *to enjoin thee* (command you) *that which is convenient* (proper).”
2. Paul is saying, “I could take the approach of intimidating you and ordering you to do what is right. I could be bold and brazen in what I am asking you to do. I could use my apostolic authority, push my weight around, and command you to do what I am asking.”
3. But then in verse 9 he says, “*Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee...*” This is the motivation of grace.
4. Law says, “You better do it, or I'm going to whack you.” Law intimidates, coerces, guilt-trips, pressures, and uses force. This isn't the way to treat our fellow laborers.
5. Grace says, “I will do it out of love. I will do it because I love you.” This was the basis of Paul's appeal to Philemon, “*for love's sake.*” 2 Corinthians 5:14
6. We must have a love relationship with our fellow laborers in Christ. Paul says, “I could command you to do this, Philemon, but I want you to put on display for that local church the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. I want you to do what is right, out of love.”
7. Remember, the Colossian believers were also receiving their own letter from Paul at this same time. Notice Colossians 3:13-14. Notice that Paul assumes that there **will** be quarrels in the local church. Paul wanted Philemon to be a living display of those verses.
8. When you are dealing with your fellow laborers, remember this: People may walk a mile for you out of **law**, but they will follow you to the ends of the earth out of **love**.

### **Third, always value their opinions and thoughts. vs. 10-16**

1. Paul makes it clear in verses 10-12 what he is asking Philemon to do. By law, Philemon had every right to execute judgment on Onesimus (jail him, fine him, punish him), but Paul said, “I want you to forgive him and receive him as a brother in Christ.”
2. Then, in verse 13, Paul said, “I would have loved to keep him right here with me. He has proven valuable to me here.” But verse 14 is a key in how to treat our co-laborers.
  - Paul said, “*Without thy mind would I do nothing...*”
  - The word “*mind*” means “opinion; counsel.”

- Notice that Paul does not presume upon Philemon. Paul doesn't have the attitude, "This is what is right and I'm doing it, so deal with it, Philemon."
3. Paul said, "I don't want your benefit (good works, good will) to be of necessity (by constraint), but willingly." vs. 14
  4. Whether Philemon was to forgive and take back Onesimus, or whether he was to send him back to Paul, Paul wanted it to be Philemon's decision. He valued Philemon's opinions and thoughts.
  5. This is very important as you work with others for the cause of Christ. Many times there are different ways of looking at a situation. This is where we must be good listeners and be ready to hear what others are thinking.
  6. We should never have the attitude, "This is the way it is, period." I love the way Paul say, "*For perhaps...*" Notice the tenderness, and notice how Paul acknowledges that Philemon may look at it differently.

#### **Fourth, trust and believe in your fellow laborers. vs. 20-22**

1. I love the way Paul believed the best about Philemon. He said, "Philemon, I not only have confidence that you will do what I have asked, I believe you will go above and beyond what I have asked."
  - Paul had every confidence that Philemon would do what was right in the situation.
2. Why is it that so many times we want to believe the worst about people?
3. We should always strive to believe the best about people, until they absolutely give us no choice but to believe otherwise.
4. Sometimes when we go to another believer about a problem, we can tend to go with a chip on our shoulders. It is as if we expect them to disagree with us or come against us.
  - This is no way to treat our fellow laborers. People can tell when we come to them with this kind of an attitude.
5. What incredible lessons we can learn here from Paul. The work of the ministry is a team effort, and it is crucial that you be able to relate to and get along with your fellow laborers in Christ.
6. How exciting to see Paul in a real-life situation, a real-life problem, and we get to see how Paul dealt with his fellow laborer. May we all take these wonderful principles and apply them in our relationships with each other.