

The Need for “Philemons” in the Local Church Philemon 1-7

Introduction:

1. This is, without a doubt, the most intimate, personal book that the apostle Paul wrote. He wrote this letter to a friend in the church at Colosse named Philemon. 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."*
3. Paul had actually led Philemon to Christ (vs. 19). They were more than just passing acquaintances. They were buddies, friends; they had served God together side by side. They had a very personal and loving relationship, and this comes through in the letter.
4. Paul is going to get to the core issue of the letter beginning in verse 8.
 - Paul is writing to Philemon about a runaway servant of Philemon's named Onesimus. Paul had led Onesimus to Christ while in Rome and so Paul plays the role of a mediator between the two men.
5. But before Paul gets to this issue, he spends the first seven verses talking about Philemon and his Christian walk.
6. There is no evidence from this book (or the book of Colossians) that Philemon was the pastor of this local assembly. In fact, it doesn't appear that he was in full-time Christian service, but rather was a businessman of some sort. He must have also been a man of means who owned servants and a home big enough for the local assembly to meet there.
7. But what a blessing Philemon was to the cause of Christ! Oh, how we need more Philemons in the local church. Are you a Philemon? If you are in Christ, you can be. What is it that makes a believer a Philemon? Let's examine what Paul says about this saint and draw some principles for our own lives.

First, Philemon's service for the Lord was a family affair. vs. 1-2

1. Paul mentions Philemon's wife, Apphia, and most people believe that Archippus was Philemon's son. After mentioning all three, Paul says, *"...and to the church in thy house."*
2. Philemon had his entire family involved in the work of the ministry. His son is called a fellowsoldier and it appears that his son had a high level of leadership in the local church there at Colosse. Colossians 4:17
3. This is so refreshing to see. So many times, men will begin to grow in the Lord, but they leave their family in their spiritual dust so to speak. The man is growing in the Lord and experiencing the thrill of serving the Lord while his family sits at home.
4. A man's family should desire to serve the Lord with him for two reasons:
 - First, he **includes** them in his service for the Lord.
 - Second, he helps his family to grow so that they **want** to serve the Lord with him.

5. Of course, the greatest hindrance to this is when a man is one person at church and another person at home. This kind of hypocrisy will destroy his family's desire to serve the Lord with him.
6. Philemon was obviously a sincere believer who had made his service for the Lord a family affair. His family was growing with him in the Lord and serving the Lord.

Second, Philemon practiced gracious hospitality. vs. 2, 5

1. The local assembly met in Philemon's house. This was very common in the early church.
 - The opportunity that we have to buy, build, and rent buildings would not have been as easy for believers living in the Roman Empire.
2. Philemon just opened up his home and said, "We can meet at our house." This man was filled with the gracious, giving spirit of Christ.
3. Did you know that hospitality should not be an option for a believer (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9)? In fact, Paul listed it as one of the qualifications of a spiritual leader in the local assembly. 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8
4. What is the attitude of a Spirit-filled person? His attitude is this: "Whatever I possess, I want to use it for the work of God and for the edification and blessing of others."
5. Believers who are Philemons live for others, not themselves (vs. 5). This is what Philemon was known for. Paul said, "*Hearing of thy love...*" Word gets around! People were talking about Philemon all the way in Rome where Paul was.
6. Notice that Philemon's love and hospitality was first toward Jesus Christ, and then it naturally spilled over into his relationships with others. But notice that his love for others included **all** the saints. What a testimony! What a challenge.
7. When you are a Philemon, you don't pick and choose who you will love and be hospitable to. You love all the saints.

Third, Philemon was a source of refreshment to others. vs. 7

1. What does Paul mean when he talks about the saints being refreshed by Philemon?
 - Have you ever heard the expression, "He is always stirring the pot," or "She is constantly getting people all stirred up?" This is the exact opposite of this word "refreshed."
2. A cross-reference will help you gain an understanding of this word biblically. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus said, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" The word translated "refreshed" is the same word for "rest."
 - Also look at Mark 6:31. Are you getting the picture? A person who is a refreshment to others is like a wellspring of water in a dry, desert land.
3. When Paul talks about the "*bowels of the saints*," bowels speak of the innermost part of something, such as the "bowels of the earth."

4. Philemon had not just superficially refreshed people. He had helped to provide rest and peace to the saints in their innermost being and emotions, at the gut level.
5. Are you a Philemon? Do you provide rest, peace, comfort, and refreshment to others?
 - Or do you thrive on negative news? Do you love to pass on gossip? Do you find yourself always in inner turmoil and stirred up about something?
 - You cannot be a Philemon this way. By the grace of God, you must change.
6. Paul had been encouraged, comforted, and refreshed in prison by Philemon's testimony. Paul's imprisonment was actually made lighter, and he was emotionally strengthened by Philemon. Your life impacts others more than you know.

In Conclusion:

1. The key to Philemon's gracious, Christ-filled life is in verse 6. It is the key for every believer who desires to be a Philemon.
2. The word "communication" simply means "to share." Philemon had shared his faith in Christ graciously with others. His faith had flowed forth into his daily living.
3. When Paul had heard about Philemon's testimony, Paul thanked God and prayed for Philemon constantly (vs. 4). What was Paul's prayer? That the sharing of Philemon's faith would become even more abundant and energized.
 - The word "effectual" is the Greek word "energace." This is the word from which we get our English word "energy."
4. Paul said, "I am praying that the sharing of your faith becomes more active, operative, and energized than ever before."
5. How does this happen? Look at the end of verse 6. It would happen as Philemon recognized all that he had been graciously given in Christ. As he became more aware of who God had made him in Christ, he would be able to demonstrate that grace to others.
6. Christian, you have been made complete in Christ and been given all spiritual blessings in Christ.
7. You must get into God's Word and discover all that God has made you in Christ.

As your faith begins to rest in the truth of who you are in Christ, you begin to allow Him to live through you and put Christ on display in your dealings with others. You become a modern day Philemon!