



philemon 1-7

¹Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

*To Philemon our beloved fellow worker
²and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:*

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for Christ's service. ⁷For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

commentary

1-2 The book of Philemon is one of the shortest books in all of the Bible, containing 1 chapter and 25 verses. While the letter is addressed from both Paul and Timothy, it appears that Paul is the primary author because he uses "I" throughout the letter. The letter is addressed primarily to Philemon, but the message of it is intended for the other leaders (Apphia, Archippus) as well as the entire church that meets in Philemon's house. Some believe that Apphia may have been Philemon's wife and Archippus his son. Archippus must have had a substantial ministry in Colossae because Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians 4:17, "...say to Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.'"

The book was probably written around 62 AD about the same time Paul wrote Colossians and Ephesians during his imprisonment in Rome. All three letters were delivered to these churches by Tychicus and Onesimus (the former slave and prisoner mentioned in this letter).

The primary theme of this book is that the Gospel has the power to change lives and refresh relationships. The context behind this letter is that Philemon was a wealthy slave owning Christian¹ who was leading a house church in the city of Colossae. Earlier, he had heard the gospel message through the Apostle Paul and came to faith in Christ, after which he opened his home where Christians in that area could meet on a regular basis.² Onesimus had been one of Philemon's slaves, likely stole from Philemon and ran away to Rome as a

¹ Slavery then was not similar to the brutal slavery we think of in American history. A slave was a part of his owners household and was even sometimes paid, but was more thought of as "part of the family."

² On an aside, this is how the message of the Gospel spread and the church grew in the first couple centuries of Christian history. There were no church buildings, per se, but rather people opening up their homes to Christians and neighbors, sharing life together, and seeing mission develop through neighborhoods. There was a much more communal aspect to the Christian faith in contrast to how individualistic and "organized" it has become here in America today.

fugitive, where in one of the largest cities in the world, he hoped to remain undetected. In God's sovereignty, however, Onesimus came in contact with Paul, and he became a Christian. He developed a friendship with Paul and began assisting him in Paul's missionary work while he was confined to prison. It is supposed that Paul would have liked to have kept Onesimus in Rome with him, but he knew the importance of seeing reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus, so he wrote this letter, and sent it with Onesimus back to Philemon in hopes of spurring a healed relationship between the two.

In doing this, Paul was hoping to establish Onesimus no longer as Philemon's slave, but rather as his Christian brother and friend sharing in the same mission. This letter is a masterpiece of persuasive writing, and it is believed by scholars and historians that this letter helped lay a foundation for the abolition of slavery worldwide.

3 Offering the grace and peace of God to the letter's recipient was typical of Paul. He wanted to establish that grace and peace were his primary objectives in his communication.

4 In verses 4-7, we see the impact the gospel has on a person's life. In other words, we can get a glimpse of what happens to a person, what they are to do, and the impact they have on others when they are infused with the love of Jesus. Paul thankfully encourages Philemon in the love and ministry he is showing toward other Christians and those around him before he makes his plea for Onesimus.

5 It is Philemon's love for and faith in Jesus that drives him to show love toward others and to build up the church and open his home to them. Love for Jesus because of what he has done for us moves us to love others. The apostle John agreed with this when he wrote in 1 John 4:19-21, "We love because [Jesus] first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen how can he love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." Real faith is marked by a love for others.

6 Having experienced the love of Jesus and been given faith in Him, Philemon was moved to "share" his faith. "Sharing" here is much broader than just telling somebody about Jesus. It is the Greek word "koinonea" which includes the idea of generosity, partnership, togetherness, good will, and action together on God's mission. This is why Paul can pray that Philemon's faith will "become effective." Koinonea is intentional and tangible generosity toward others for the advancement of the good news about Jesus. Koinonea is the vehicle through which the gospel takes root and can transform relationships or even an entire culture.

There is a personal benefit to koinonea, too. Paul tells Philemon that it will "become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." This means that in sharing for the sake of the gospel, Philemon would start to see the good things God was building into he and the people he was loving. His spiritual growth would be made apparent to him because of the koinonea (sharing for the sake of the gospel) he was living out. Koinonea leads to a personal experience of seeing the blessings Jesus has for him.

7 Paul immediately shares some of these blessings with Philemon. Personally, Paul had experienced joy and comfort because Philemon had shown love to the other Christians there. Since Paul couldn't be there himself, he was very glad to have a leader like Philemon present to love the people. This gave Paul immense joy and comforted him knowing the church was continuing on in love, and sharing the gospel, even in his absence. The result of Philemon's love and koinonea is that the people around him were refreshed.

Renewal and continual rededication to one another and the task of sharing life with one another in the way described in these verses is the purpose of Christians. We have been renewed by Jesus, bringing refreshing to our souls, the result is that we take that same refreshing and bring them into our relationships, neighborhoods, church, and culture to see it refreshed.³

for reflection

Sunday - Read all of Philemon. What kind of changes can you identify occur in a person's life when they have faith in Jesus? In other words, what kind of tangible changes does the Gospel make in someone's life? Have you experienced any of these changes through faith in Jesus?

Monday - Reflect on Philemon 1-3. Reflect on your friendships, particularly those with Christians. Could you say that you are partnering with them toward some purpose? If so what is it? What are the outcomes of these relationships/partnerships?

Tuesday - Reflect on Philemon 2. Are you working with any fellow Christians toward the end of seeing the gospel take root in your neighborhoods? If not, take time today to contact a neighborhood group leader about getting involved in this way (see bulletin or infusionchurch.tv).

Wednesday - Reflect on Philemon 4-5. Are you driven by your love of God to love other people? How is this practically unfolding in your life? What are some practical ways you can love your neighbors this week because of your love for Jesus?

Thursday - Reflect on Philemon 6. List some practical ways you can share your faith koinonia-style. (See commentary on page 2 about verse 6.)

Friday - Reflect on Philemon 6. What are some of the outcomes you would like to see in your relationships and neighborhood if you lived a "koinonia" lifestyle?

Saturday - Reflect on Philemon 7. Who can you show hospitality to in order to give them refreshing? Today, think of 1 or 2 ways to practically do this, plan them, and act on it.

³ See Peter spoke of this refreshing in his speech recorded in Acts 3:17-21.

for discussion

Ice Breaker: Which one of these is your favorite way to refresh on a daily basis & why?

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a good meal | <input type="checkbox"/> exercising | <input type="checkbox"/> alone time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cold drink | <input type="checkbox"/> conversation | <input type="checkbox"/> hot tubbin', baby! |

Read the entire letter to Philemon

1. Review the occasion and purpose behind this letter.
2. From verses 1-2, what appears to be the affect of the Gospel on Philemon's life?
3. Why would Paul write this to "the church in your house?" What role does a house church play in Paul's plea with Philemon? What role will your house church play in the refreshing of others?
4. The Bible makes it clear that it is not our good works save us, but the opposite that the fact we are saved moves us to good works. Why do you think Paul emphasizes in verses 4-5 that Philemon's love for others is the result of his love for Jesus?
5. What do these passages have to say about how to measure authentic faith?
 - 1 John 4:19-21
 - James 2:14-17
 - Philippians 2:1-18
 - Matthew 22:34-40
6. Verse 6 talks about sharing faith that is effective. The English word "sharing" is used for the original Greek word "koinonia" which involves the idea of generosity, partnership, togetherness, good will, and action together on God's mission. What changes in your own life would have to occur to live a koinonia lifestyle?
7. What are some practical ways you, together, intend to live out koinonia in your neighborhood? Take some time right now to plan something along these lines. Get it organized and on the calendar!!
8. Koinonia is effective for a lot of things. What are some of these outcomes in verses 6 and 7?
9. As a group, list 5-10 outcomes you would like to see in your neighborhood as the result of your living a koinonia lifestyle for the sake of Christ.

for memory

Philemon 6

"...I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for Christ's service."



infusionchurch.tv