

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/17/93 PM
Philemon 4-7 "A Breath of Fresh Air"

Outline of Philemon (from Bible Knowledge Commentary):

- I. The Salutation of the Letter (vv. 1-7)
 - A. The writer (v. 1a)
 - B. The readers (vv. 1b-2)
 - C. The salutation (v. 3)
 - D. The commendation (vv. 4-7)
 - 1. Thanksgiving (vv. 4-5)
 - 2. Prayer (v. 6)
 - 3. Testimony (v. 7)
- II. The Body of the Letter (vv. 8-21)
 - A. The plea (vv. 8-12, 17)
 - 1. A plea, not a command (v. 8)
 - 2. A plea for love's sake (v. 9)
 - 3. A plea for a spiritual son (vv. 10-11)
 - 4. A plea from the heart (v. 12)
 - 5. A plea from a partner (v. 17)
 - B. The relationship (vv. 13-16)
 - 1. The present brotherhood between Paul and Onesimus (v. 13)
 - 2. The past brotherhood between Paul and Philemon (v. 14)
 - 3. The future brotherhood between Onesimus and Philemon (vv. 15-16)
 - C. The pledge (vv. 18-21)
 - 1. Philemon to charge Onesimus' debt to Paul (vv. 18-19a)
 - 2. Philemon to consider his own debt to Paul (v. 19b)
 - 3. Philemon to refresh Paul (v. 20)
 - 4. Philemon to go beyond Paul's request (v. 21)
- III. The Conclusion of the Letter (vv. 22-25)
 - A. The comfort (v. 22)
 - B. The fraternal greetings (vv. 23-24)
 - C. The benediction (v. 25)

Intro:

Illust: "It was the right hook that got him. Pastor Waite might have stood in front of the Communion table trading punches with head deacon Ray Bryson all morning had not Ray's first caught him on the chin two minutes and fifteen seconds into the fight. Waite went down for the count at the altar where most members of Emmanuel Baptist had first declared their commitment to Christ."

Does that sound incredible? It actually happened, in in New England community of Newton, Mass., on the outskirts of Boston (Colson, The Body, 91). In fact, two of Pastor Newton's front teeth were knocked so loose that he had trouble eating corn on the cob for the next 3 summers, and Deacon Bryson's hand was broken in 2 places. But that's not all. Listen to the account...

"Within an instant a majority of the congregation converged on the Communion table, punching or shoving. Many came down the center aisle to help break up the combatants, but remained to fight after their side began to fall behind in the skirmish. The melee soon spilled over to an open space beside the organ."

"Two tenors and a baritone jumped over the wooden railing of the chior loft and began exchanging punches with members from both sides of the aisle. Mary Dahl, the director of the Dorcas Society, threw a hymnal at one of the tenors, but the missile sailed high and wide and splashed down in the baptistry behind the choir. Sharon Carlson had given up on the organ and moved to the piano, where she tried to restore order by playing, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds." (95)

There's more. The following Wednesday each of the deacons received a notice to appear at the Newton Courthouse for a hearing. Pastor Waite had also been summoned.

When the court officer entered, he was recognized as David Goldstein, one of the stars on Temple Beth Shalom's softball team. Members from Emmanuel had played against this man's team in the summer softball league.

For several minutes Goldstein looked over the police description. Then he looked at the tape on Waite's nose, and the cast on Branson's hand.

Finally he spoke, "I know some of you from the softball league... We may have had our differences on the ball diamond, but the cause of religion in our city is at stake here. There must be some way you can settle your dispute among yourselves."

"I'm dismissing the case. No charges will be pressed at this point, but I urge you to work this out within your own church. Your Jesus Christ may allow this sort of thing in His followers, but the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will not permit fistfights as a regular order of church service."

The leadership of Emmanuel Baptist Church filed quietly out to their cars and drove off in different directions. On the back of each car was a bumper sticker declaring, "God Is with US at Emmaneul Baptist Church." (Colson, 97)

Q: What kind of message is the Church giving to the onlooking world?

Thankfully, the episode I've just relayed is extreme (although Colson says that information is true, and based on interviews and research conducted by Mike Murray in Newton, Mass.). There are many churches that have poor reputations in their communities. There are many Christians that have poor reputations.

We're not going to bemoan that problem tonight. Granted there are problem people in probably every church (Marshal Shelley calls them "Well Intentioned Dragons" in his book by that title). But there are also people who are a "breath of fresh air." What makes the difference?

Such was true of a man named Philemon. He was a breath of fresh air to Paul. We can learn about him and from him by turning to the little epistle Paul wrote to Philemon (right after Titus).

V 4 "I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers..."

Proposition: There were 3 things that thrilled Paul about Philemon, which the apostle mentions in verses 4-7.

- I. Philemon had great Relationships (4-5).
 - A. With the Lord
 - B. With People
- II. Philemon had great Resources (6).
- III. Philemon had a great Reputation (7).

I. Philemon had great Relationships (4-5).

V 4 "I thank my God..."

Paul prayed a lot. His prayers were personal. His prayers were specific.

Did you realize that every letter Paul wrote, with the exception of Galatians, began with an expression of THANKS. Paul was constantly thanking God for people, and telling them so!

Why is that significant in this letter to Philemon? In just a few verses, Paul was going to have to deal with a "heavy" subject with Philemon. He wrote this letter to handle a very delicate issue. Philemon had a runaway slave named Onesimus. By the providential working of God, Paul met Onesimus while in prison in Rome, and led him to faith in Christ. Now Paul was sending him back to his master, with this letter. Paul was going to say some pretty strong things to Philemon in this letter. He was going to lay it on the line.

But before he does, he begins on a positive note. He affirms Philemon. He expresses his appreciation for his brother in Christ.

Application: We'd do well to follow suit.

Q: How often do you thank God for specific people?

Q: How often do you tell people that you thank God for them?

Illust:

Paul thanked God for Philemon. Why? He mentions the reasons in v 5...

V 5 "Hearing of thy love and faith..."

Philemon was a breath of fresh air to Paul because he had great relationships. Notice Paul said he had "heard" a report about Philemon. From whom? Quite possibly from Epaphras (a minister in Colossae who relayed to Paul what was happening in the churches in that area; Col 1:4, 7). And I wouldn't be surprised if Onesimus himself shared some things with Paul about his master.

Paul commended Philemon for 2 relationships.

A. Philemon had a great relationship--With the Lord.

V 5 "which thou hast toward the Lord"

The qualities "love" and "faith" are the hallmarks of the Christian life. The structure of v 5 is a Chiasm. In the sentence, "love" goes with "all the saints," and "faith" goes with "the Lord." That is, Philemon exhibited faith in the Lord, and love toward all the saints. His vertical relationship with God was in order. So were his horizontal relationships with people.

Think about that. Philemon had a great relationship with the Lord. Word got around about his "faith toward the Lord." I don't think Paul has in mind Philemon's saving faith here, but his daily, practical faith. God expects His people to walk by faith, not by sight. Philemon did. The Lord Jesus was real in his life. He placed his confidence in the Lord. He trusted in the Lord.

Illust:

B. Philemon had a great relationship--With People.

V 5 "thy love...toward all the saints"

Q: Do you know what faith in Christ produces?

A: Love for the saints! In fact, a lack of love indicates a deficient faith.

James 2:1 "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord...with respect of persons."

Jm 2:17 "Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone."

There were no loopholes in Philemon's life. His faith in Christ was backed up by his love toward the saints. "All" of them. Paul will have more to say in a moment about Philemon's relationships with people.

By the way, can you see where Paul is going with this thought? Since Philemon "loved all the saints," he could surely include Onesimus, his runaway slave who had become a saint!

Illust:

Tran: You can see why Philemon was such a breath of fresh air to Paul. First because of his great Relationships. Second...

II. Philemon had great Resources (6).

V 6 is really a request. Remember Paul is telling Philemon what he prayed for him. V 6 begins with "that." Here's Paul's purpose as he intercedes for his friend.

V 6 "That the fellowship of thy..."

Let me say up front, it is very difficult to determine what Paul had in mind in this verse. In fact, it's very difficult even to translate the verse. There are 2 main clauses in the verse:

Clause #1: "That the fellowship of thy faith may become effectual"

Q: What is the fellowship of your faith?

A: The word "communication" (Schofield "fellowship") is "koinonia." It can mean "sharing." The word "effectual" means to be "at work; active." One commentator (BKC) suggests a literal translation would be "active in the sharing."

Notice the pronoun is singular ("thy"). Paul is talking directly to Philemon here. Paul wanted Philemon to be active in sharing something. What? "His faith." What does that mean? The next verse informs us that Philemon had a reputation for helping people in need. He shared his faith, not just in word, but in deed.

What was Paul's prayer request for Philemon? That he would be even more active in sharing his faith with others.

Q: Why? What happens when we share our faith? Clause #2...

Clause #2: "by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus"

There's a vital connection between these 2 clauses. When we share our faith, when we get involved in passing on to others what Christ has given us, what happens?

We "acknowledge" the good things we have in Christ. The word "acknowledge" means "to recognize, to know." Listen carefully. Paul's not talking about mere "head" knowledge, nor acquiring facts. This word stresses "knowing" something so that it impacts your life.

Think about what Paul is saying. He wanted Philemon to grasp "every good thing which he possessed in Christ." That is, Philemon had great Resources. And so do you, if you are in Christ. You are a spiritual billionaire. Every spiritual blessing in heavening places is available to you (Eph 1:3).

Q: But who is it that really taps into those resources?

Key: If you want to grasp what you have in Christ, share it with others.

Here's how other versions translate the verse...

NIV "I pray that you will be active in sharing your faith so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

NASB "And I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you."

Observation: Do you know when God's Word really comes alive to me? Do you know the times when I really am impacted by the riches I have in Christ? It's when I'm actively involved in sharing my faith in Christ with others.

Illust: When I sit across from a man and present the gospel

Illust: When I go out of my way to show the love of Christ

V 6 is a great key to successful Christian living. Do you want to prosper in your Christian life? Then here's where it starts.

1. Determine that you're going to dig into the Word.
2. Seek to grasp what you have in Christ.
3. Share it with others.
4. As you do, you'll discover even more resources that are yours!

The process never stops in this life. Philemon had great Resources. He exhibited great faith and love. Yet Paul prayed that he would become even more effectual.

Illust:

Tran: There was a third thing that thrilled Paul about Philemon. He had great Relationships, great Resources, and...

III. Philemon had a great Reputation (7).

V 7 "For we have great joy and consolation in thy love..."

Philemon had a great reputation. He was a source of great joy and consolation (encouragement) to Paul.

Q: Do you know what really thrilled Paul about Philemon?

A: V 7b "because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother"

Look at two significant words:

"hearts"--The Greek word is not the usual word for heart (kardia). Rather it's the word "splagchna," which refers to the inner parts of a person (the heart, liver, lungs, bowels). It's a graphic figure of speech. It's a deep emotional term. Philemon touched people right here (in their "innings"). He met the deep, inner emotional needs of the saints.

Q: What did Philemon do for people?

"refreshed" = "to give rest from labor"

Jesus used the same word in Mt 11:28, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you REST." What was Jesus offering to weary, oppressed people? "Come to me, and I will REFRESH you."

Watch this connection. How does Jesus refresh people today? One of the primary ways Jesus refreshes people is through His people.

Philemon was a refresher. He had a great reputation. He was a breath of fresh air to people. He encouraged people. He built people up. When Philemon walked into a room, people liked to be with him. He didn't tear people down. He wasn't a critic. He didn't badmouth. He didn't nag and scold and complain. He refreshed!

Churches need people like Philemon. Churches need Refreshers.

Q: Do you refresh people, or do you drain people?

Q: Are you a taker or a giver in your relationships with people?

Q: Do people hold their breaths when they see you coming?

Illust: I had a roommate in Israel like that: a critic, negative...

Challenge: Ask God to help you to be a Refresher!

Gal 6:10 "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men..."

Just think. Philemon went down in history with the reputation of being a refresher! What a eulogy! He was a man who helped ease the burdens of his brothers in Christ. He made people think of Christ when he was with them. He modeled the love of Christ. He was a Refresher.

Illust:

Conclusion:

Are there problem people in churches? Yes, sadly so. But thank God for the Philemon's!

Philemon thrilled Paul. He had great Relationships, both with the Lord and with people. He had great Resources. And he had a great Reputation. He truly was a breath of fresh air.

Q: What about you? Are you a breath of fresh air to people around you?