

Brief remarks on the Epistle to Philemon

Part 1

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[00:00:01] I wonder if we, excuse me, I wonder if we would read, please, a few verses from the Epistle to Philemon. Verses, I think, briefly referred to in what we've already had before us. Beginning at verse 1, Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy, our brother, and to Philemon, our dearly beloved and fellow labourer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the assembly in thy house. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[00:01:04] I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints, that the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

Wherefore, though I might be bold much in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love's sake, [00:02:06] I beseech thee, being such and one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ, I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.

Let's stop there. Three people come before us very forcibly in this brief epistle. One, of course, is the Apostle Paul. The other is the runaway slave, now returning, called Onesimus. And the third is the man to whom the epistle is addressed, Philemon. And I often think of this short epistle as being a worked example, if you like, a working out of the things that we read in the epistle to the Philippians. Let this mind be in you, [00:03:10] which is also in Christ Jesus. Now, we could follow that in the case of each of these three individuals in this epistle. But what has brought me up here is the desire just to draw to your attention Philemon himself. Obviously, there was an assembly in the house of Philemon. It was doubtless part of the assembly in Colossae. You can check that out by looking at the letter to the Colossians and checking out the persons referred to in the final chapter. So, I would guess that Philemon was part of the assembly in Colossae, but with a company meeting within his house. [00:04:04] But he was a brother in whom the Apostle evidently could place great trust. And he thanked God for him.

Here it is again, you see, verse four, I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers. So there is the double emphasis, giving thanks for this brother and what he's doing on the one hand, and the other thing is bearing him up in prayer before God. Now, what was the reputation of this

brother? What did others think about him? They heard of his, or the Apostle had heard of this man's love and faith, which he had toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints. Note that right order. [00:05:02] If I love the Lord aright, then won't I love my brothers and sisters? It's that way round. If I love the Lord, then that'll cause me to love my brothers and my sisters. And it had evidently caused this man so to do. And the Apostle goes on to pray that the communication of his faith might become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. But it's verse seven I want you to concentrate on, because this is commendation indeed. We have great joy and consolation in thy love and he gives the reason. Because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee brother. I'm sure that everyone in this room would earnestly desire to have that said of us. [00:06:04] That we might be used by the Lord to refresh those among whom we move. In our local assembly, we've already considered how many of us come from small assemblies. Well what do they think of us? Do we refresh them week by week? Or do we bore them with our own ideas and not things in the scriptures? Well of this man it could be said that the bowels of the saints were refreshed by him, Philemon. And this is recorded in the word. We don't get much by way of what we call case history in certain professions. Case history, we don't get much of that in the New Testament. But here it is recorded in the pages of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit was pleased to cause the Apostle to write this so that we could read it and gain from it. [00:07:05] That which would be for our profit in this day in which we live. And I commend this to you, it's a word for each one of us. You say it's written to a brother, so it is. But I think sisters can perhaps put themselves in this epistle as well. The bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee brother. Well then that leads the Apostle to go on and to make of him a loving request. We're not told what the end result of that is but we can hardly doubt, can we? That Philemon did not do as the Apostle was asking.

As I say we could spend much time on this epistle but the hour is rapidly approaching half past eight. And can I then just leave you with the thought of this man commended upon the pages of scripture because for his love to the Lord Jesus, to all the saints and for the refreshment that he gave to the bowels of the saints. [00:08:12] We are of divine all praise excelling, joy of heaven to earth condemned.

First fruits of thy new creation, faithful, holy, may we be joyful in thy full salvation more and more conformed to thee. Till in heaven we take our place, then to worship and adore thee, lost in wonder, love and praise. 296 Of divine all praise excelling, joy of heaven to earth condemned.

[00:09:10] Bless us in thy pristine dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.

Savior be with us till we bless thee, strengthen in us to go forth.

Praise ye the Savior with unceasing glory in thy dying love.