



Philemon
For Lovesrael.org

It is a joy to have an influence on someone spiritually, and it is encouraging to hear that person recount how precious their faith in Messiah Yeshua is. Even better than that, though, is to see them putting their faith into action. In this epistle, the Apostle Paul encouraged Philemon to do exactly that – to put his faith into action.

Philemon, a fellow servant in the Kingdom, was serious about his faith, and even had a congregation in his home. As a leader, it was very important for him to demonstrate (model) his faith. When we live in the flesh, there are many things we would not naturally want to do.

However, obedience to the Word of G-d will often cause us to act in a way contrary to what our flesh naturally desires – we live with a desire to be well pleasing to G-d.

Verse 1: *“Paul, a prisoner of Messiah Yeshua, and Timothy the brother. To beloved Philemon, our fellow servant.”*

A prisoner: False charges had been brought against Paul and he was, literally, thrown into prison for sharing Biblical truth in the land of Israel and beyond. Most commentators think he wrote this epistle from the prison in Caesarea (Acts chapter 23-26).

Timothy: Timothy co-authored this letter with Paul.

The brother: The usage of the definite article (“the”) is of great significance here. It reveals to us that Paul did not see Timothy as just one of the brothers that he had in the faith. Timothy is held up as an example of what a true brother looks like. Paul had a close relationship with Timothy and saw him as a spiritual son. Timothy was trustworthy, relied upon, and was extremely useful to Paul in their joint service of sharing the gospel truth.

Beloved: Philemon is spoken of in terms of great endearment.

Our fellow servant: Philemon is a believer, and he is a fellow servant in the faith.

Verse 2: *“To beloved Apphia, Archippus, our fellow soldier, and the ones in your house congregation.”*

Beloved Apphia: This letter is also addressed to a woman who is located where Philemon is.

Archippus: Colossians 4v17

The ones in your house congregation: This is an important piece of information. It tells us that Philemon was a serious believer, a leader who led a congregation in his home. Paul is addressing this congregation, and their leader Philemon, in regard to a very significant and personal matter.

Note: Paul writes to Philemon in a very personal way. The value of this epistle is not just the instruction or the theological truth that we receive, but also the intimate glimpse into how Paul interacted with others.

Verse 3: *“Grace to you and peace from G-d our Father and the L-rd Messiah Yeshua.”*

Grace...and peace: This is common language for Paul. He frequently speaks about grace that produces peace (what we experience when G-d’s will is fulfilled).

From G-d: G-d is the provider. He has provided this grace, that produces peace, through Messiah Yeshua.

L-rd Messiah Yeshua: He is the Redeemer. His redemption brings about a change. In this epistle Paul admonishes and encourages Philemon to demonstrate this change in his life. Faith should cause us to make decisions differently to how most people would. Faith causes us to not think only about our own interests, but also to take into consideration the interests of others.

Verse 4: *“I give thanks to my G-d, **always** making mention of you in my prayers.”*

Making mention of you in my prayers: Paul has called Philemon “beloved” and a “fellow servant.” Now he reveals to us that he also always prays for Philemon. This shows us the close relationship that Paul had with Philemon.

Verse 5: *“Hearing of your love and faith which you have for the L-rd Yeshua and for all the saints.”*

Hearing: The report that Paul had heard about Philemon was that he demonstrated, or acted in, love. This is important. Love is the primary characteristic of the Torah, and is foundational in the commandments of G-d (Matthew 22v36-40)

The L-rd Yeshua: Philemon had a good reputation with outsiders. He demonstrated his faith by acting in love - toward Yeshua as well as toward fellow believers. A Biblical principle that can assist us in making right decisions (and show others that Yeshua is our L-rd) is to make them out of our faith and love for Messiah Yeshua, and not to make them based on the feelings of our flesh. Paul is reminding Philemon to continue to make his decisions based on that love and faith.

Verse 6: *“So that the sharing of your faith should be effective in the recognition of every good thing which is in you and for Messiah Yeshua.”*

Note: Our faith is always *effective* if we maintain the principles of Scripture for exercising it. We may not see it in this world (as it may manifest itself apart from us, meaning: our faith may be an influence in someone else’s life, but we do not see the fruit of it in our lifetime), but the Scripture says the Word of G-d does not return void (Isaiah 55v11). Likewise, our faith in Messiah is based upon the Word of G-d. It, too, does not return void.

In the recognition of every good thing: The faith **in us** should rightly recognize every good thing (It should know what the right thing to do is).

For Messiah Yeshua: We do the right thing **for** Messiah Yeshua. The things we do need to be done in obedience to the truth of G-d. This demonstrates His L-rdship in our lives. Our lives, lived in this way, become living sacrifices - we live for His desires and not for ours. (Romans 12v1-2)

Verse 7: *“For we have much joy and consolation in your love, the hearts of the saints are renewed through you, brother.”*

Consolation: This means comfort or encouragement. Paul was encouraged and comforted when he thought of Philemon. Philemon had always acted correctly in the past, and Paul was anticipating that he was going to keep on acting correctly, and in a G-dly manner, into the future. Paul has not even brought up his request yet, but he is laying a foundation and reminding Philemon of the testimony he had already “achieved” – in anticipation that Philemon would make the right decision going forward.

Hearts: This is not the normal Greek word for “hearts”. It is a word that speaks of an intense, (strong) emotional feeling that is felt in the pit of one’s stomach.

Renewed: Refreshed

Brother: Paul had confidence that, in every situation, Philemon was going to continue to behave like a brother.

Verse 8: *“Therefore having boldness, much in Messiah, I could command you that you would do the appropriate thing.”*

Therefore: In light of what Paul had written in verse 1-7. Paul’s choice of words put a lot of pressure on Philemon to do the right thing.

Boldness: Can also be understood as confidence.

Much in Messiah: Paul and Timothy were convinced, in Messiah, that what they were going to ask Philemon to do was the appropriate (right and correct) thing for Philemon to do.

I could command you: Paul could have commanded Philemon to do the right thing, but he appealed to something far higher than a command: love (see v9) To act out of love is far better than to act out of command.

Verse 9: *“On account of love I rather appeal to you - being such the one that I am, Paul the elder, but now also a prisoner of Messiah Yeshua.”*

Rather: This is word of preference. Paul could command Philemon in the L-rd, but he is saying that he would prefer to rather encourage him to act out of love.

Paul the elder: Paul did not use titles very much, but here we see him reminding Philemon that he is speaking from a place of authority. He is a senior, an older man, and has had a lot of experience by this time. Paul had been an obedient believer for a long time. He had done many journeys for the faith. He had interacted with others, and G-d had upheld his sharing of the gospel. The Holy Spirit had worked mightily in his life, and there was evidence that there was much fruit in his life.

A prisoner: Even though Paul had an elevated position, he wanted Philemon to know that it did not exempt him from being in a place of suffering. Philemon was a leader of a congregation. He was looked up to and had a good reputation for his faith. However, Paul is reminding him that even leaders are called to suffer, and to live their lives doing the right thing for G-d - no matter what the consequences are.

Verse 10: *“I encourage you concerning my child, whom I begat in my bonds, Onesimus.”*

Encourage: Exhort, beseech.

Child: A term of endearment. It speaks about a close family relationship.

I begat in my bonds: It appears that Onesimus had contact with Paul while Paul was in prison. Paul led him to faith and now he was a believer, part of the family of G-d. He was no longer simply seen as a slave but rather, now, as a brother. Faith brings about a significant change in our relationships with others - this is what Paul teaches Philemon, as well as us.

Verse 11: *“Who once to you was unprofitable; but now to you, and also to me, a necessity.”*

Unprofitable: Onesimus was probably someone who had negatively impacted Philemon.
But now: There has been a change. Paul is asking Philemon to see Onesimus in a different light.
A necessity: That which produces, manifests, or brings about good. In the past Onesimus had been a liability for Philemon, but now (for both Paul and for Philemon) he had become an asset, profitable.

Verse 12: *“Whom I have sent to you, him take close. This is my heart.”*

I have sent: Some commentators say that Onesimus was the one carrying this letter from Paul to Philemon as Onesimus returned to Philemon.

Take close: Receive him. The word here implies that Philemon must bring Onesimus close to himself as Onesimus would now be useful to him.

This is my heart: Paul felt very strong emotion toward Onesimus.

Note: Paul is encouraging Philemon, because of the change that has happened in the life of Onesimus, to bring Onesimus into his inner circle. Paul wants Philemon to invest in Onesimus, as to do so would enrich Philemon’s own life. Onesimus had the potential to be an asset to Philemon. Any feelings of compassion, love, or mercy that we have are there for the purpose of loving others.

Verse 13: *“Whom I wanted for myself to keep, in order that on behalf of you he would serve me in my bonds for the gospel.”*

Whom: Onesimus

Wanted: This is a word for desiring something.

To keep: This same word is found in 2 Thessalonians 2v6 -7 in regard to the “restrainer”. Paul’s desire was to restrain Onesimus and not allow him to depart from him. Paul considered that Onesimus would be a great asset, and he wanted to keep him for himself.

Verse 14: *“But without your consent not wanting anything to do, in order that not as according to compulsion but this good thing you would do voluntarily.”*

Without your consent not wanting anything to do: Paul did not want to keep Onesimus without Philemon’s consent or knowledge.

Not as according to compulsion: If Onesimus was going to serve Paul, Paul wanted it to be from a voluntary position on Philemon’s part and not due to him feeling forced to give Onesimus up.

Voluntarily: According to a willingness. The word also relates to a donation that is voluntarily given.

Verse 15: *“For perhaps on account of this he was separated for an hour, in order that you should have him eternally.”*

Eternally: They (Philemon and Onesimus) were going to be brothers in the Kingdom forever – it was beneficial for them to restart their relationship properly while they were still on earth.

Verse 16: *“Not any longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me how much more so to you - in the flesh but also in the L-rd.”*

A slave: Biblically, especially in the Old Testament times, a slave was not taken against his will and enslaved. Someone who needed financial help would go to someone with financial means and ask if they could borrow the amount of money that they needed. They were then subjected to servitude, for a certain length of time, in order to pay back the debt that they owed.

It appears as if Onesimus had borrowed money from Philemon and had been unable to pay it back – he had been neither an asset nor profitable to Philemon (see verse 11)

A beloved brother: Paul is appealing to Philemon to accept and treat Onesimus as a beloved brother. Onesimus is a new creation in Messiah, and he can now be truly profitable to Philemon.

Especially to me how much more so to you: If Paul saw Onesimus as profitable and as a brother how much more so should Philemon.

In the flesh: In the things of this world. Onesimus would be able to help Philemon, like an earthly brother, with earthly things.

Also in the L-rd: Onesimus would be able to be like a spiritual brother to Philemon as well, and would be able to help him with spiritual things.

Verse 17: *“Therefore, if you have partnership with me, receive him as me.”*

Receive him as me: Paul is appealing to Philemon to treat Onesimus in the way Philemon would treat Paul if he went to his house – with fellowship, a relationship, and as partners in the faith.

Verse 18: *“If he has wronged you, or he owes you, this charge to my account.”*

Charge to my account: Paul was willing to pay, out of his own resources, for any outstanding debt that Onesimus may have owed to Philemon (see also verse 19).

Verse 19: *“I, Paul, have written in my own hand, I will pay - not that I should say to you that also you yourself are indebted to me.”*

My own hand: Paul wrote it in his own handwriting.

You are indebted to me: Paul was instrumental in leading Philemon to faith. This caused Philemon, through Paul’s proclamation of the gospel message to him, to be born again and to inherit eternal life. Paul reminds him of this fact.

Verse 20: *“For certainly, brother, I am a benefit to you in the L-rd, refresh my heart in the L-rd.”*

Refresh my heart (those strong emotions): It is implying here that Philemon is going to recognise his indebtedness, receive Onesimus (the right thing to do), and, in doing so, it will be a benefit to him in the L-rd.

Verse 21: *“Being convinced of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that also more surpassing what I say you will do.”*

Surpassing what I say you will do: Paul is encouraging Philemon to even go above and beyond the expectations Paul is placing on him. Why? Because Paul is convinced that Philemon is a true believer, and that is how true believers behave.

Verse 22: *“At this time also prepare for me a guest room, for I hope that on account of your prayers I should be gracious unto you.”*

Prepare for me a guest room: Paul is hoping to get out of prison and visit Philemon.

Be gracious unto you: Paul’s intent in visiting Philemon was not just for Paul to receive from Philemon. The implication of this verse is that Paul would visit in order to be a blessing, to be gracious unto Philemon – Paul’s visit would help Philemon to grow, as well as move the church forward into the will of G-d.

Verse 23: *“Epaphras greets you, my fellow prisoner in Messiah Yeshua.”*

My fellow prisoner: Paul was not alone in prison. Epaphras (see Colossians 4v12-13) was there with him.

Verse 24: *“Also Mark and Aristarchus, Demas, Luke my fellow servants.”*

Paul was also surrounded by these people. He had a supportive body of men around him - fellow servants and fellow believers (See Acts 24v23).

Aristarchus was a Macedonian from Thessalonica - he accompanied Paul on the voyage to Rome (Acts 27v2).

Verse 25: *“The grace we have received from our L-rd Messiah Yeshua (be) with your spirit. Amen.”*

L-rd: Whenever "L-rd" is mentioned it should remind us that we are servants of THIS incredible Master and Saviour. We are indebted to Him, and we need to behave in a way that demonstrates His L-rdship in our lives.

Amen: Amen is a word of truth, a word of faith, and a word of belief. What Paul and Timothy have written about needs to be taken to heart and heeded by all believers, as they have spoken truth.

Paul knows that what he has written to Philemon is going to become a reality. He has faith that Philemon is going to take Onesimus as a brother, and that they are going to be partners in the faith. Onesimus had at one time been unprofitable, but he was now going to be highly useful, highly profitable, for the things that related to the Kingdom’s work (see Colossians 4v7-9).

