

Dearly Beloved Fellow-Labourer

by

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Philemon is one of the shortest and least-utilized books in the New Testament. There is just one chapter of 25 verses. Yet there is a lot of meaning there.

Among many things we can learn, there are three aspects of Christian fellowship in this short book of Philemon. These three aspects of fellowship are to be fellow-labourers, fellow-soldiers and fellow-prisoners of Jesus Christ.

The first is revealed in the very first verse. *“Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer”*.

Imagine how good it would feel to receive a letter from the apostle Paul that addressed you as *“dearly beloved”* and *“fellow labourer”*. Although Paul was putting Philemon into a stressful situation in attempting to reconcile him to Onesimus, a greeting like that would certainly feel wonderful.

But it was more than just a greeting. Paul was acknowledging the good work that Philemon had done as a Christian. Read verses 4-7, *“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.”*

When we work together, our names are written in Heaven, as we read in Phil. 4:3, *“And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.”*

When we help our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are doing good for Jesus. Matt. 25: 40, *“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”*

We are fellow-labourers not only with each other, but with God as well. 1 Cor. 3:9, *“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.”*

Others were recognized as fellow-laborers as well, in Philemon verse 24, *“Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.”*

The second aspect of fellowship is found in the second verse of Philemon, *“And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house”.*

The life of a Christian is often a difficult fight. The world throws so much at us, and at our children. 2 Tim. 2:3-4, *“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”*

But we don’t have to fight this battle alone. We have each other as fellow-soldiers. 1 Pet. 5:8-9, *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”* And we have God on our side, and he ensures our ultimate victory, 1 Cor. 15:57, *“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

God gives us armor to defend us and a weapon to wield. Eph. 6:14-18, *“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”* Note that there is no sheath for the sword. Use the word of God constantly, every day. And note that watching and praying are also important elements of our armor.

We read the third aspect of fellowship revealed in the book of Philemon in verse 23, *“There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul had become a prisoner for preaching the name of Jesus, as we see in Acts 28:16-17, *“And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.”*

Others in that day were imprisoned for their faith as well. In addition to Epaphras in the book of Philemon, we read in Rom. 16:7, *“Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.”* And in Col. 4:10 we see another example, *“Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)”*.

Though he was bound as a prisoner, he continued his work of preaching Jesus Christ to any and all who would listen. And his commitment to his duty inspired others, Phil. 1:12-14, *“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”*

May we, like Paul and others of that day, continue to stand up and preach Jesus unashamed in the face of this evil world. 2 Tim. 1:8, *“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God”*.

There is much more that we can learn from the book of Philemon. But we wanted to focus in this article on these three aspects of fellowship. Fellowship is all the good times we have when together; but it is also working together, fighting against Satan together, and often suffering together. We need to be there for each other in good times and bad, as we read in Rom. 12:15, *“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”*

Don't ignore the little books of the Bible. Let us study it all, and apply it to our lives, so that we can be recognized by God on the day of Judgment as dearly beloved fellow-labourers.

In Christian love,
Bro. Terry Warford

