



Let's Get Personal.

Raise your hand if you have ever been in church and felt like the pastor was speaking directly to you. Have you ever felt like you are sitting in the “hot seat”? Ever felt like the pastor keeps making eye contact with you, and only you, as he was speaking? It's happened to me, both as a recipient and after giving a message. I have had people come to me and say, “I think that message was written for me.” For whatever reason, the message that day for that person was very personal.

The apostle Paul wrote several letters to the church in his time, many of course that we have preserved in our Bibles today. The letter that we have to Philemon stands apart from the others because it is a much more personal letter, it is very short and, on the surface, does not seem to contain any big theological teachings.

This letter has a lot to do with relationships, close personal relationships, and the incredible bond of love (inspired by Christ) that binds them together. Consider for a moment the words that Paul uses to describe Onesimus, He is his child (v.10), his heart (v.12) and his beloved brother (v.16). When he speaks of Philemon, he uses similar words plus regards him as a co-worker (v.1), a partner (v.17) and one who owes him his very life (v.19).

Much of Paul's letter to Philemon is written on the foundations and command found in 1 John chapter 4. “We love because he first loved us... Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister”. (v.19,21b)

It seems that Philemon was in the “hot seat” as the intended recipient of the letter, but, the introductory verses also read,

“the church that meets in your home”. The church as a whole body is included in this plea that Paul writes. While this letter is personal there is a bigger message for us all.

I like to think that we can all put ourselves in the shoes of the original characters of this letter. Maybe you or I take on the role of Paul as the writer and mentor, maybe as Philemon, the recipient and leader, or as Onesimus as the one seeking to be forgiven and accepted. Maybe you or I are observing from the “sidelines” as someone who is a part of the church.

No matter who we might be in the letter there is a message here for each of us. A message that bridges the span of time from its first delivery to the minute you and I read these words in your bible today.

As followers of Christ, we are not alone. In Christ, we become brothers and sisters, we are adopted as sons and daughters into the family of God. Paul outlines some very practical ways for us to act as a family through this letter, putting us all in the “hot seat” as we think about how we personally and corporately live out each of his prescribed actions in our lives.

How are we loving one another? (vs. 5, 7, 9,16); How are we praying for one another? (vs. 4, 22); How are we partnering or sharing with one another? (vs. 6); How are we being good or showing favor to one another (vs. 6,14); How have we been refreshing (inspiring) each other's hearts to act and serve in a way that honors God? (vs. 7,12,20)

What question or action will you choose to act on today? Was this message written for you personally here and now? Pray and ask God to lead and guide you out of the “hot seat” and into action.