

Have You Seen The “Bible Man”? (vv. 4-7)

The following poem is an excellent way of describing the devout believer who is steadfastly following God’s Word.

The Bible Man

He stands behind the sacred desk,
A book held in his hand;
And as he speaks his brethren know
He is a Bible man.
Upon the Scriptures, right and truth
He ever takes his stand
To make the gospel clear and plain—
He is the Bible man.
He loves the grand old Book divine,
He loves to preach the plan;
He loves the lost its message saves—
He is the Bible man.
Let skeptics doubt and heathen rage,
And build their hopes on sand,
He loves, and lives, and teaches God’s Book—
He is the Bible man.
When worlds shall end and stars shall fall,
and at the throne we stand;
How sweet to hear the King’s command,
Come home you Bible man.

Carl H. Bates

To be known as a “Bible man or woman” has to be the greatest compliment one can ever receive. I think this poem is a lovely way of commenting upon the character God loves because it reflects divine glory. Such a character was exemplified by Paul (Galatians 2:20; 6:14) and commanded by inspiration (Philippians 1:27).

The person of Philemon illustrates a real “Bible man.” He was a wealthy resident of Colossae who had been converted by Paul’s preaching (v. 19). He is known as a “fellow worker” (v. 1). When you read what Paul writes about

Philemon, you can imagine a man totally dedicated to God. There was not a single bone in Philemon’s body that lacked devotion to Christ! As a “Bible man” his life accurately reflected divine truth.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE “BIBLE MAN” (vv. 4-7)

The Bible man has a good reputation (v. 4). Philemon’s character was well known. News had spread all the way to Rome where Paul had heard about Philemon’s goodness even in prison! Whenever Philemon’s name was mentioned you can be sure that it was greeted with fond and high respect. Paul said to him, “I hear of your love” (v. 5). A record was being kept about Philemon, and the “Bible man” was totally unaware of its writing! His constant performance of seemingly insignificant kindnesses was the cause of Paul’s delight in Rome. The good that Philemon had done in Colossae was powerfully felt throughout the empire. When Philemon “refreshed” others, he did not imagine that it would also “refresh” Paul who was so far removed.

A good reputation is an essential trait of the character of the “Bible man.” The smallest deeds, good or bad, have an expanding influence on all around. Our action can either mar or beautify, gladden or sadden.

Because of his reputation, Philemon was a source for constant thanksgiving in Paul’s heart. Such is a grand thought—how wonderful to possess such a remarkable reputation that whenever thought about, a prayer of thanksgiving

would be made! (1 Thessalonians 1:7, 8). The reputation of Philemon centered on three specific points: for having a reputation of faith and love for Christ (v. 5); for demonstrating faith and love for brethren (vv. 5, 7); and for living a life of dynamic faith (v. 6).

Paul had his special sources through which information about brethren would come to him. Through these sources he heard wonderful things about Philemon. Such is true today—there are special channels through which our reputations become known to others. Realizing this, let all Christians zealously guard their reputations and keep them as spotless as Philemon's!

The Bible man cherishes a deep faith and love for the Lord (v. 5). "Faith" is a word that indicates a practice of trusting and being confident in Christ's deity. "Love" refers to a practice of devoted affection which arises when one understands what all Christ has done for him (Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 8:3). These two elements were found in Philemon. Philemon saw Christ as "the Lord" and admitted the absolute reign of Christ in his life. As the "Bible man," Philemon practiced personal devotion to God. This devotion existed because of gratitude, love, and loyalty. There was no question about the devoted faith of Philemon (cf. Galatians 2:20b).

The Bible man revels in fellowship with brethren (v. 5b). Paul informs Philemon that he had once again heard two things about this beloved brother's attitude toward brethren. First, Paul had heard about Philemon's "faith" toward his brethren. This indicates that he felt confidence and security in fellow saints. The second thing Paul had heard was the "love" that Philemon demonstrated toward brethren. Philemon was a man who understood the wonderful affection that partners share in Christ. This "love" was not the usual love of the world but the unusual devotion shared between kindred hearts.

Philemon had demonstrated a practical Christianity as he became known for these two qualities. His love was not a pretense but was demonstrated with specific actions (1 Thessalonians 1:3). It is important to note that Philemon accepted "all," regardless of who they were (cf. Romans 10:12). His love was not mere sentiment, empty words, or weak emotions (cf. James 2:1, 14-17). Such is the depth of fellowship that the "Bible man" relishes with his brethren!

The Bible man yearns to communicate the gospel (v. 6). This verse is the hardest to interpret in the whole epistle. Its meaning depends on how the word *koinonia* is translated. It seems that Philemon was anxious to share the gospel message with others and was able to do this through his generous good deeds. Once again the emphasis falls upon reputation and character. Paul prays that Philemon's life of practical faith will "tell" the lost around him about Christ. As others saw Philemon they gained a truer insight to the gospel's message and power (Galatians 5:6; 1 Peter 2:12). The "Bible man" yearns to teach the gospel. He realizes that some will not read the Bible's pages, so he presents them a Bible in "living life" to study. In this effective manner communicates the gospel.

The Bible man brings happiness (v. 7). What a lovely epitaph! How marvelous to be forever remembered in this way! Philemon "refreshed" the brethren who came to visit his home. This term literally means to bring to rest, to relieve of distress, pressing cares, or sorrows. The home of Philemon provided an atmosphere of rejuvenation for the soul. Whenever a tired Christian, harrassed by the world, came to visit Philemon, he would leave refreshed, rested, and ready to combat Satan once again!

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These are the marvelous characteristics of the "Bible man." Each Christian would do well to examine his life to see if he possesses everyone of these points for each is vital!

THE CHALLENGES OF BECOMING A "BIBLE MAN"

We are challenged to respond to the gospel exactly as brother Philemon! Let the gospel's power control our lives so we will be transformed (Colossians 3:10; Romans 12:2). Such a goal is not unrealistic (1 Corinthians 15:58).

We are challenged to emulate the marvelous reputation of brother Philemon! How is your

reputation? How do others look at you? (Philippians 2:15; Proverbs 22:1). A good reputation should never be assaulted (Deuteronomy 22:13-19). There is an account of a certain tribe of savages who thought that when they killed a man they were immediately endowed with all his good qualities. Murderers were quite common in the tribe and it was a very dangerous thing for a man of good merit to be found unguarded among people of such principles! Similar attacks upon believers' characters persist today—people imagine they will somehow profit by making another look bad. Brother Philemon did not behave in such a savage manner. Philemon would quickly tell anyone that the reputation must be guarded. We must live carefully so we will not lose the rewards of a good reputation (Psalms 57:7; 1 Peter 2:11, 12). A Turk is said to have taken a piece of white cloth to a dyer to have it dyed black. He was so pleased with the result that after a time he went back with a piece of black cloth to have dyed white. The dyer answered, "A piece of white cloth is like a man's reputation; it can be dyed black, but you cannot make it white again."

The basis for true happiness is an absolute trust upon God's care.

We are challenged to develop the intensity of faith and love that brother Philemon possessed! How strong is your faith and love toward Christ! An old saint was speaking about the pillars of our faith. He was a retired sailor and was speaking to a group on board a ship. There were several large posts on the nearby dock to which ships were secured by throwing a cable over them. The cables would hold the ship secure in even the worst storm. The sailor looked and observed that Christ provides even a greater security for the faithful! How strong is your faith and love toward brethren? A father once asked his daughter why everyone loved her. "I don't know," she said, "unless it is because I love everybody." Those who develop an intense faith and love for brethren will receive the same faith and love from brethren! (Hebrews 13:1; Psalms 55:14).

We are challenged to communicate the gospel! Do you actively share your faith in an unpretentious manner? Do those who observe your life act impressed with the gospel's power? (1 Peter 2:12).

We are challenged to bring happiness to everyone. The basis for true happiness is an absolute trust upon God's care. Our faith, put into practical action, will make our disposition accepting and our tolerance long suffering (Psalms 149:2, 5; Romans 5:2, 11; 3 John 4).

CONCLUSION

When worlds shall end and stars shall fall,
And at the throne we stand;
How sweet to hear the King's command,
Come home you Bible man.

The marvelous rewards of being "Bible men or women" will be found during earthly existence. But the rewards received on earth will pale in comparison with the wonders of heavenly blessings (cf. Matthew 25:34; Revelation 7:14b-17).

Look in a mirror—do you see a "Bible man or woman" looking back? Do others look at your life and see one who is dedicated and devoted to God? Do they see a "Philemon"? (Philippians 1:27).

—John Kachelman

Powerful Praying Focuses On Three Points (Philemon 4, 5)

Other than Christ, no one in the New Testament prayed as fervently as Paul. Here we find his prayer for Philemon and observe that it was constructed around three basic points. We need to use this same construction as we pray.

1. *Thanksgiving*—"I thank my God always." Our prayers ought to begin with statements expressing our gratitude and dependence upon God.
2. *Intercession*—"Making mention of you." Our prayers ought to reflect an unselfish spirit of brotherly affection.
3. *Personal needs* (v. 22)—Paul was prayerful of his situation and did not fail to mention his needs as well.