

# Philemon Commentary

Titus

Hebrews

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**APPEAL FOR FORGIVENESS**

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Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission

Another Overview Chart - [Philemon](#) - Charles Swindoll

[Detailed Chart by W Graham Scroggie](#)

**Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker,**

**Arthur Way** - PAUL From the prison in which he lies for Christ Jesus' sake, and Timothy my brother,

KJV Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,

BGT Philemon 1:1 Παλος δ σμιος Χριστο ησο κα Τιμ θεος δελφ ς Φιλ μονι τ γαπητ κα συνεργ μ ν

NET Philemon 1:1 From Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and colaborer,

CSB Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother: To Philemon our dear friend and coworker,

ESV Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker

NIV Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker,

NLT Philemon 1:1 This letter is from Paul, a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy. I am writing to Philemon, our beloved co-worker,

NRS Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker,

NJB Philemon 1:1 From Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and from our brother Timothy; to our dear fellow worker Philemon,

NAB Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our beloved and our co-worker,

YLT Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timotheus the brother, to Philemon our beloved and fellow-worker,

MIT Philemon 1:1 This letter comes from Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and brother Timothy to our loved colleague, Philemon,

- **a prisoner:** Philemon 1:9 Eph 3:1 4:1 6:20 2Ti 1:8
- **Timothy:** 2Co 1:1 Col 1:1 2Th 1:1
- **Philemon:** Philemon 1:24 1Co 3:9 Php 2:25 4:3 Col 4:11 1Th 3:2

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[BiblePlaces.com](http://BiblePlaces.com) is an excellent resource

## PAUL'S POSTCARD: CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

### A Simple Outline:

- Philemon 1:1-3 : Greetings
- Philemon 1:4-7 : Paul Praises Philemon
- Philemon 1:8-21 : Paul Intercedes for Onesimus
- Philemon 1:22-25 : End

Note: You will encounter a large number of quotes from Graham Scroggie's commentary on Philemon, entitled [A Note to A Friend](#) called one of the best ever produced on the Letter to Philemon. The comments under each verse below are essentially the entire book. And for Scroggie's summary see ["The Manifold Values of This Epistle."](#)

Paul's epistle to Philemon is one of the few books in the NT whose authenticity has hardly ever been doubted because Paul mentions his own name three times in this his shortest epistle (Philemon 1:1, 9, 19).

[Ray Stedman](#) observes that in "Philemon -- one of the shortest books in the Bible -- we have a beautiful emphasis upon the unity of the body....In this epistle, more than any other letter of the New Testament, you see that **the ground is level at the foot of the cross**. All distinctions between Christians are done away with in Christ. We are all brothers and sisters together. There is to be no difference in our attitudes toward one another because of any superficial distinctions of background, training, color, education, or whatever. As Jesus said, in Matthew 23, "One is your Master, and you are all brethren," (Matthew 23:8). This letter, then, sets before us the unity of the body of Christ. In his [overview of Philemon](#), Stedman adds "This little letter to Philemon is a marvelous example of the strongest force in the universe to affect control over someone -- grace. It takes up one of the most difficult problems we ever encounter, that of resolving quarrels between family members. We can ignore something a stranger does to hurt us, but it is very

hard to forgive a member of our own family or someone close to us. The key to this little letter is in Philemon 1:16.

**Henrietta Mears** wrote that "Paul entreats Philemon, the master of Onesimus, a runaway slave, to receive him back as a brother in Christ (see Philemon 16–17). This very personal letter reveals not only the concern of the apostle for a converted slave but also a practical demonstration of brotherhood in Christ, where "there is neither bond nor free" (Galatians 3:28). Christian love and forgiveness are given prominence in the book of Philemon. The power of the gospel in winning a runaway thief and slave and in changing a master's mind is clearly shown here. This is a book in applied Christianity, a textbook of social service.

**Martin Luther**, in his 1522 preface to the epistle, wrote "This Epistle gives us a masterly and tender illustration of Christian love; for here we see how St. Paul takes the part of poor Onesimus and advocates his cause with the master all that he can, and acts no differently than if he were himself Onesimus, who had done wrong. And yet he does this, not with force or compulsion, as was his right, but he lays aside his rights and thus compels Philemon, also, to waive his rights. What Christ has done for us with God the Father, that St. Paul does for Onesimus with Philemon.... For we are all his Onesimi, if we believe."

**Graham Scroggie** on the letter of Philemon - Its Personal value consists in the light which it throws upon the character of Paul. Its Ethical value consists in its balanced sensitiveness to what is right. Its Providential value consists in its underlying suggestion that God is behind and above all events. Its Practical value consists in its application of the highest principles to the commonest affairs. Its Evangelical value consists in the encouragement it supplies to seek and to save the lowest. Its Social value consists in its presentation of the relation of Christianity to slavery and all unchristian institutions. And its Spiritual value consists in the analogy between it and the Gospel Story. ([A Note to A Friend](#) [A Note to A Friend](#))

**William Barclay** points out that "The letter to Philemon is remarkable, for in it we see the extraordinary sight of Paul asking a favour. No one ever asked fewer favours than he did; but in this letter he is asking a favour, not so much for himself as for Onesimus, who had taken the wrong turning and whom Paul was helping to find the way back.

**James Orr** says this letter is "A tender illustration of how the Gospel operates in hearts and results in good deeds."

**Scroggie** adds "That must have been a great intellect," says Dr. Maclaren, "and closely conversant with the fountain of all light and beauty, which could shape the profound and far-reaching teachings of the Epistle to the Colossians, and pass from them to the graceful simplicity and sweet kindness of this exquisite letter; as if Michael Angelo had gone straight from smiting his magnificent Moses from the marble mass, to incise some delicate and tiny figure of love or friendship on a cameo."

**Spurgeon** - Paul watched him (ONESIMUS), admired the character of his convert, and was glad to be served by him, and when he thought it right that he should return to his master, Philemon, he took a deal of trouble to compose a letter of apology for him, a letter which shows long thinking, since every word is well selected: albeit that the Holy Spirit dictated it, inspiration does not prevent a man's exercising thought and care on what he writes. Every word is chosen for a purpose. (For full sermon [The Story of a Runaway Slave](#))

**R Kent Hughes** - Paul included a brief letter to Philemon on his behalf, which a no less hostile critic than Ernest Renan called "a true little masterpiece of letter writing." The letter to Philemon was the most brilliantly nuanced, compelling letter of reconciliation in ancient history. It is a model of grace and charm. As such, it can be a great help to us all if we care to enhance our human relationships—especially those in the Body of Christ, where we have special stake in each other's lives. (Preaching the Word – Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon: The Fellowship of the Gospel and the Supremacy of Christ)

**J Sidlow Baxter** (Explore the Bible) - Even in the best art galleries there is always a space for choice miniatures. This personal note from Paul to Philemon is such a graceful little masterpiece of "fine courtesy, exquisite tact, and even playfulness of wit," and withal it has such distinct spiritual values, that one can only wonder sadly at those who have begrudged it the little niche which it adorns.

**D Edmond Hiebert** - In its artless revelation of Paul's devoted love to individual souls we may discover one of the secrets of his success as a missionary. It was because of his affectional personal interest in men wherever he went that the Apostle was able to exercise such a powerful grip upon the hearts of his friends. This little letter gives us a striking illustration of this characteristic of the Apostle.

**Paul, a prisoner ([desmios](#)) of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother ([adelphos](#) - "from same womb")** - The writer of the letter is **Paul**. Picture him writing with his manacled hand. He is a **prisoner ([desmios](#)) of Christ Jesus**, not of Nero or Rome, but **Christ Jesus**. Yes, Paul is in a Roman Prison which many think was the Mamertine Prison in Rome (see [Wikipedia article](#) and [picture](#) - picture above is also Mamertine), but Paul was a man with an eternal perspective and saw himself more imprisoned to Christ Jesus. Paul may have been imprisoned by men, but because of he was in union with Christ Jesus, man's prison because a pulpit for promoting Christ Jesus in 4 so-called "[prison epistles](#)." He frequently mentions others who are with him when he writes, but they (in this case Timothy) are not the writers. Timothy of course is a **brother ([adelphos](#))**, "from same womb" in the sense he like Paul is

born again by the Spirit and now in God's family (Jn 1:12-13+) The expression I, Paul, in the body of the letter (Philemon 1:9, 19) shows that Timothy is not a coauthor

Paul is a "prisoner of Jesus Christ," not a prisoner of the Roman government or of Nero. This is in keeping with his conviction that GOD had placed him in Rome for a special ministry (Philippians 1:12).

**William MacDonald** - Paul introduces himself as a **prisoner** rather than as an apostle. He could have used his authority, but he prefers to appeal from what might seem a low place of disadvantage. Yet the apostle gilds this low place with the glory of heaven. He is a **prisoner of Christ Jesus**. Not for a minute will he grovel as a prisoner of Rome! He sees beyond the emperor to the King of kings. (**BORROW** [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** on **Timothy our brother** - Paul's ministry was a "team" operation, and he often included the names of his associates when he wrote his letters. He liked to use the term "fellow worker" (see Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor. 3:9; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11). ([Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament](#))

**A T Robertson** on **Timothy** - With Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:22) and probably known to Philemon. Associated with Paul also in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, Colossians 1:1 ([Philemon Commentary](#)) Note that the last two are "prison epistles," indicating Timothy stayed close to Paul in his hour of need.

**Guzik** makes an interesting observation - Paul's friendship with Philemon is shown by something significantly missing in his greeting. Of the 13 letters Paul wrote to churches or individuals, in 9 of them he called himself an apostle in the opening verse. In this letter (along with Philippians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians), Paul appealed to his reader more as a friend and less an apostle.

**Lightfoot** on **prisoner of Christ Jesus** - "They were not shackles which self had riveted, but a chain with which Christ had invested him; thus they were a badge of office."

**Wiersbe** - "Paul the prisoner" (Acts 23:18) was the name the Roman soldiers used for the apostle, a designation he himself often used (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8; Phile. 1, 9). Paul was under "military custody," which meant he was bound to a Roman soldier who was responsible for him.

*Asking will often succeed where commanding will altogether fail.*

- Scroggie

**Scroggie** "He almost always speaks of himself as an Apostle, but he has the wisdom to fit the designation to his object. In writing to the churches the thing which he makes prominent is his AUTHORITY. But that would not do here. He does not think it seemly to command Philemon what to do with Onesimus, he prefers .to entreat (8-9), and he can better entreat as a " prisoner " than as an Apostle. He is making appeal to Philemon's compassion rather than to his conscience, and so with " unartificial spontaneousness " and " unconscious pathos " he opens with these words " Paul a prisoner." This note he strikes three times again in this brief letter (9, 10, 13,), and so makes it practically impossible for Philemon to refuse him his request. Asking will often succeed where commanding will altogether fail.

**Scroggie** - It is a CAPTIVE who is pleading for a SLAVE. If Paul's speaking of himself as a "prisoner " reveals his TACT, his relating his captivity to Christ Jesus reveals his FAITH. He shuts his eyes to all secondary causes and sees in his imprisonment, as Joseph, long before, had seen in his, an all-wise Providence. "Christ Himself had riveted his manacles on his wrists, therefore He bore them as lightly and proudly as a bride might wear the bracelet that her husband had clasped on her own."...They must take the responsibility who persecuted Bunyan and Rutherford, but how vast had been our loss had they not thus suffered. When Paul says that he is "a prisoner of Christ Jesus," he means that he is there according to the will of God, and in consequence of loyalty to Christ. He is Christ Jesus' prisoner, not Jesus Christ's. The latter name refers to Him on earth, the former to Him as risen and enthroned. Paul is the prisoner of Him whom he saw that day when he was smitten down on the Damascus road. **It would be well if we always saw the divine aspect of our afflictions;** if our ruling consciousness was rather of the " hands " than of the " wheels." Such a view would temper our troubles, and we would be troubled less with our tempers.

Later in this letter Paul alludes to his imprisonment again writing "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my **imprisonment**." (see [Philemon 1:10](#), and also Phile 1:13, 23)

**Webster** says that a **prisoner** is "a person deprived of liberty and kept under involuntary restraint, confinement, or custody." Yes, Paul was a prisoner to Rome but much more significantly he was a prisoner of Christ voluntarily and at liberty, which is the antithesis of the worldly definition of a prisoner! May God grant each of us the desire by His Spirit to make the wise choice to be prisoners of Christ! Amen

**To Philemon** ("affectionate" "friendly") **our beloved** ([agapetos](#)) **brother and fellow worker** ([sunergos](#)) - Paul names the recipient of his personal letter with warm greeting **beloved** ([agapetos](#)) and also acknowledges Philemon who lived in Colossae as a co-laborer

for the cause of Christ.

**Scroggie** - The test which the Lord set of discipleship was the mutual love of those who believe in Him (John 13:34 Jn 15:12 17). Paul here recognises this towards Philemon, and he will in a moment or two ask Philemon to recognise it towards Onesimus (16). The Apostle, writing as he does for the reinstatement of a slave who is not a Christian, puts love in the forefront, for no motive less strong than Christian love could move Philemon to take such a course. Paul begins, therefore, by telling Philemon that he is loved by all the brethren.

**Steven Cole** points out that "Being wealthy, Philemon owned slaves. The New Testament never directly attacks the institution of slavery. If it had done so, as one author points out, "Christianity would have sunk beyond hope of recovery along with such revolutionary attempts; it might have brought on a new slave rising and been crushed along with it" (W. Bousset, cited by R. P. Martin, BORROW [Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible \[Zondervan\], ed. by Merrill C. Tenney, Volume 4](#)). But, as F. F. Bruce pointed out, "What this epistle does is to bring us into an atmosphere in which the institution could only wilt and die" (*ibid.*). ([The Changes of the Gospel](#))

**Scroggie** - For Christians to be fellow-workers they need not be on the same ground, neither need they live in the same generation. We who are labouring for Christ to-day are fellow workers with all who have gone before us from the beginning. He who reaps is fellow-worker with him who ploughed and sowed." The first man who dug a shovelful of earth for the foundation of Cologne Cathedral and he who fixed the last stone on the topmost spire a thousand years after, are fellow-workers." Diversity of work, variety of temperament and gifts, widely separated fields, and different periods of time, do not impair unity of service. What better illustration can we have than the one before us Paul and Philemon. " The one lived a Christian life and helped some humble saints in an insignificant, remote corner; the other flamed though the whole then civilised western world, and sheds light to-day; but the obscure, twinkling taper and the blazing torch were kindled at the same source, shone with the same light, and were parts of one great whole." Let us therefore correct our standards of judgment, let us adjust our perspective that we may truly see the importance of all service rendered to Christ by the best known and the least known, that we may draw inspiration from the fact that, having all the same Master, we are all fellow-workers, and shall all share in the final reward.

In First Corinthians, Paul refers to **ALL** believers **God's fellow workers** (1Co 3:9+). Think of our familiar English word derived from sunergos - **Synergy** which describes combined action or operation. It is interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.

Paul, Timothy and Philemon + God (1Co 3:9+) = supernatural synergy!

**Horatio Hackett** nicely summarized the life of Philemon writing: "His character, as shadowed forth in this Epistle, is one of the noblest which the sacred record makes known to us. He was full of faith and good works, was confiding, obedient, sympathizing, benevolent, and a man who, on a question of simple justice, needed only a hint of his duty to prompt him to go even beyond it." Lord, may his tribe increase in our Your church in our day. In Christ's Name. Amen.

**Spurgeon** - This is one of Paul's private letters, though it has the stamp of inspiration upon it. It was not written concerning church business, nor to teach some great doctrinal truth, but there was a runaway slave who had come to Rome, and who had been converted under Paul's ministry, and Paul was sending him back to his master; and this was the letter which he was to take with him, to make some sort of apology for him, and to ask his master to receive him with kindness, and to forgive his fault. Every word of this Epistle is very wisely put. Paul begins by calling himself "a prisoner of Jesus Christ." Who would not grant him his desire when he was wearing a chain for Christ's sake? If a letter were to come to you from some beloved minister, whom you knew to be lying in a dungeon and likely soon to die, you would be greatly touched if you noticed the traces of the rust of his fetters on the letter. "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ," —THIS has been called "the polite epistle," for Paul used great courtesy and tact in writing it. Onesimus, a slave, had robbed his master Philemon, and had then run away from him. Hoping to conceal himself best in the metropolis, Onesimus had fled to Rome, where he heard Paul preach and became converted. The apostle sent him back to his Christian master with the following letter of apology. Although its first object was only to restore a runaway slave to his master, it is a weighty letter, and every syllable has substance in it.

**Spurgeon** - He joins Timothy with himself, to give double weight to the message. Probably Timothy was well known to Philemon, and much respected by him, so he puts Timothy's name that there might be two to plead with him. Then, notice the loving titles with which Paul addresses Philemon: "our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer." Probably the person whom Paul called "beloved Apphia" was Philemon's wife, so he writes to help also for perhaps the wife was the more tender-hearted of the two, so she might put in a good word for Onesimus, and her husband would all the more readily grant Paul's request. He also mentions Archippus, who was either the pastor of the church at Colosse, or an evangelist who stayed occasionally at the house of Philemon. So he mentions him with all the rest of the household who met there for worship, and so made up the church in the house.

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**Prisoner** (1198) **desmios** from **desméō** = bind from **desmos** = bind, chain) is a captive or one who is bound or who is in bonds. One under custody in prison.

**TDNT**...Actual imprisonment underlies the usage, but the real bondage is to Christ for whose sake it is suffered and to whom self-will is offered in sacrifice. In answer to the idea that Paul borrows here from the concept in the mysteries that katoche precedes the final dedication, it should be noted that Paul nowhere calls imprisonment a penultimate stage prior to being with Christ ( Phil. 1:23). Imprisonment symbolizes his whole life and ministry. (BORROW [Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament : abridged in one volume](#))

**Desmios** - 16x in 16v - Matt. 27:15; Matt. 27:16; Mk. 15:6; Acts 16:25; Acts 16:27; Acts 23:18; Acts 25:14; Acts 25:27; Acts 28:17; Eph. 3:1; Eph. 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8; Philemon 1:1; Philemon 1:9; Heb. 10:34; Heb. 13:3

**Beloved** (27) **agapetos** from **agapao** = to love, **agape** = unconditional love borne by Spirit - Gal 5:22+) means beloved, dear, very much loved "prized", "valued." **Agapetos** describes the love of another, this love being called out of the "giver's" heart by preciousness of the recipient of the love (the "beloved"). **Agapetos** is used only of Christians as united (by covenant, the New Covenant) with God and/or with each other in love. (Matt. 3:17; Acts 15:25; Rom. 1:7; Phil. 2:12; Jas. 1:16; 1 Pet. 2:11).

**Agapetos** describes "one who is in a very special relationship with another" (BDAG) and in secular Greek is used mostly of a child, especially an only child to whom all the love of his parents is given (cf use by the Father describing His only Son and Abraham describing his "only son" in Ge 22:2). BDAG adds that **agapetos** " pertains to one who is dearly loved, dear, beloved, prized, valued (papyri, LXX; pseudepigraphia) indicating a close relationship, especially that between parent and child."

In the context of the New Testament **agape** love speaks of God's divine and infinite love, a love that seeks the ultimate spiritual welfare of the one loved. **Agapetos** could be translated "divinely loved ones."

**Paul's uses of agapetos** - Rom. 1:7; Rom. 11:28; Rom. 12:19; Rom. 16:5; Rom. 16:8; Rom. 16:9; Rom. 16:12; 1 Co. 4:14; 1 Co. 4:17; 1 Co. 10:14; 1 Co. 15:58; 2 Co. 7:1; 2 Co. 12:19; Eph. 5:1; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 2:12; Phil. 4:1; Col. 1:7; Col. 4:7; Col. 4:9; Col. 4:14; 1 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Philemon 1:1; Philemon 1:16

**Brother** (80) **adelphos** from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) literally means brother referring to a physical brother or figuratively can refer to a brother in the spiritual sense. "Adelphós generally denotes a fellowship of life based on identity of origin, e.g., members of the same family (Mt. 1:2; Lk 3:1, 19; 6:14); members of the same tribe, countrymen, and so forth (Acts 3:22; 7:23; Ro 9:3)." (Zodhiates) Figuratively, **adelphos** describes members of the Christian community, spiritual brother, fellow Christian, fellow believer (Ro 8:29). Jews used adelphos to describe fellow countrymen (Acts 3:22). One of the same nature, a fellow man was regarded as a brother (Mt. 5:22–24, 47). Adelphós also came to designate a fellowship of love equivalent to or bringing with it a community of life (Matt. 12:50; Mark 3:35; 10:29, 30; Acts 12:17). In this manner Jesus speaks of His brethren (Mt. 25:40; 28:10; John 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11, 17). The members of the same Christian community are called brothers (Jn 21:23; Acts 9:30; Rom. 16:14; 1 Cor. 7:12).

**Fellow worker** (4904) **sunergos** from **sun** = together with, speaks of an intimate relationship + **érgon** = work) means literally working together with and thus refers to a companion in work, a colleague, a co-laborer, a fellow laborer or fellow helper.

In the NT, **sunergos** is used only of a co-worker or helper in the Christian work. In each instance sunergos conveys the idea of an affectionate partnership and not merely that of an impersonal, official relationship. Paul twice specifically includes godly women among his fellow workers (Prisca or Priscilla Ro 16:3) and Euodia and Syntyche, two godly but quarreling members of the church at Philippi who had shared Paul's "struggle in the cause of the gospel" (see note Philippians 4:3).

Thayer writes that **sunergos** "with a genitive of the person (refers to) one who labors with another in furthering the cause of Christ."

This word refers to someone who is a team player, who does not seek to run or control things on his own, nor serve for selfish or personal agendas.

**Sunergos - 13v** - Rom. 16:3; Rom. 16:9; Rom. 16:21; 1 Co. 3:9; 2 Co. 1:24; 2 Co. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 3:2; Philemon 1:1; Phlm. 1:24; 3 Jn. 1:8

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**Brian Bell** - What makes up a Postcard? (show one)

Whom it is from: Paul [A prisoner in Rome (under house arrest); wrote prob summer of 62ad, along w/Colossians]

Whom it is addressed to: Philemon. [Wealthy slave owner; house large enough to have a church in it; lived in Colossae]

The stamp: Holy Spirit! Authenticity...no question.

The Postmark(when and from where a piece of mail was sent): Colossae.

Its content: To inform Philemon that his slave was not only safe but saved. To ask Philemon to forgive Onesimus.

Sometimes a picture: A picture of friendship, acceptance, salvation, forgiveness, freedom, providence, reconciliation, grace. Here is an unforgettable picture of "Christianity in action!"

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[Ray Pritchard in his sermon on Philemon](#) has a section he calls Individual Example, stating "Then there is an enormous lesson about the power of individual example. Consider what Paul the prisoner did:

- \*He led Onesimus to Christ—You can do that
- \*He risked a friendship to help a new believer—You can do that.
- \*He took a stand in a small way—You can do that.
- \*He applied the gospel to a personal need—You can do that.
- \*He saw God's hand at work and gave God all the credit—You can do that.
- \*He personally intervened to help someone in need-You can do that.
- \*He offered to pay the debt Onesimus owed—You can do that.
- \*He didn't complain about an unjust system and about how he unfairly imprisoned and he didn't focus on anything but the problem at hand—you can do that.
- \*He didn't try to be a hero and change the world. He just tried to help out wherever he could—You can do that.

Paul didn't do anything unusual, strange or extraordinary. He simply did what any Christian should do—and could do. That's the power of **individual example**.....

**Pritchard** ends his message with a section he calls "**Put That On My Account**"

By the way, did you see the gospel in Philemon? It's there because Paul never wrote anything without the gospel. You can find it in several places, but most prominently in verse 18 when Paul tells Philemon that if Onesimus owes him anything, "put that on my account." In all the New Testament, you will not find a better illustration of substitutionary atonement. What Onesimus owed, Paul volunteered to pay. When Paul paid the debt, Philemon would be satisfied and Onesimus would be free of any obligation.

This is the gospel in human terms. All of us were God's Onesimus. We were slaves to sin, chained to evil, continually running away from God. But Jesus went to the Cross, paid the price for our sins, so that God's justice was satisfied once and for all.

All that is left for us is to accept the work of Christ on our behalf. To say it another way, either you can pay for your sins by spending eternity in hell or you can trust completely in the fact that Jesus has already paid the debt on your behalf.

Here is a wonderful word for Christians to remember. When the devil rises us to accuse us, Jesus says, "Put that on my account." When the world points out our faults, Jesus says, "Put that on my account." When our friends point out our many failures and our enemies gloat over our mistakes, and when our own conscience condemns us, when in short we feel like the biggest sinners in the world, Jesus stands before the Father, raises his pierced hands and declares, "Put that on my account."

In putting it this way we can see how the gospel touches every situation of life. We were once slaves but through Jesus Christ we have been set free. What do we do now? Love God and the person in front of you. That's an excellent for all of us to begin.

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**John Butler - INSTRUCTIVE GREETING - [Sermon Starters](#)**

Philemon 1:1 "Paul a prisoner of Jesus Christ and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer" (Philemon 1:1).

The opening verses of Paul's epistles are full of instruction. This opening of the one chapter book of Philemon is no exception. Though a small book it is large in instruction from the very beginning.

FIRST—THE PRISONER

“Paul a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” The persecution of the Gospel and the perspective of trial are in this phrase.

- Persecution of the Gospel. “Prisoner of Jesus Christ.” Paul was one of the godliest men ever to walk on the face of the earth. He was the greatest missionary and evangelist of the church, yet the world was so out of sync with God that they put Paul in prison for his promoting Christ. A sinful world is no friend of the Gospel. Many are the attacks upon the people who embrace the Gospel/Christ, not because these people are bad, but because the attackers/persecutors are bad. They were so bad they even crucified our Lord. Paul was in prison because of his loyalty to Jesus Christ. This really condemns our world.
- Perspective of trials. “Of Jesus Christ.” Paul did not say he was in prison because of his persecutors. Saying he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ was not an indictment upon Christ but it showed Paul’s perspective of trials. In Philippians 1:12 Paul summarizes it all by telling his readers that all his troubles were simply God’s way of spreading the Gospel. We need Paul’s perspective of our troubles. God allows them when they will providentially advance His cause.

## SECOND—THE PROSELYTE

“And Timothy our brother” Timothy was a convert of Paul. He was also a loyal associate of Paul. His prominence in Paul’s life is attested by the two epistles Paul wrote to Timothy which are part of the ‘pastoral epistle’ section of the New Testament. The last epistle to Timothy is considered by many to be the last epistle Paul wrote before he was beheaded by Nero’s orders.

## THIRD—THE PHILANTHROPIST

“Unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow labourer.” Philemon was a great supporter of Paul’s ministry. We need more Philemon’s in the work of the Lord. God endows with wealth so we can help His work. Philemon illustrated this principle well. He is given two great compliments in our text.

- Affection. “Beloved.” Philemon would not be hard to love. Some saints are very difficult to love because they are not very loving. Philemon was loved because he loved the Lord and the Lord’s servants. So Paul called Philemon “beloved.” Whom we love has much to do with our character.
- Associate. “Fellow labourer.” In spite of his wealth, Philemon was not afraid to roll up his sleeves and go to work for the cause of the Gospel. We need more workers like that in the Gospel vineyards.

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## Paul’s Persuasive Arguments - Spiros Zodhiates

- A. He appeals to his present condition of imprisonment (Philemon 1:1).
  - B. He conjoins Timothy’s entreaty (Philemon 1:1).
  - C. He appeals not only to Philemon, but also to Apphia, probably his wife, and one Archippus, a spiritual fellow soldier of Paul and Timothy. This is as if Paul were asking Philemon to consult others there in considering Paul’s request for Onesimus, who undoubtedly was well-known to them all.
  - D. Paul wanted Philemon not to consider this merely as a personal matter but as it would affect “the church in thy house” (Philemon 1:2).
  - E. Paul speaks of the love and faith of Philemon (Philemon 1:4, 5).
  - F. He gently reminds Philemon that the faith he experienced is a common faith (the fellowship, *koinōnía*, from *koinós*, common) which must be energized in extending the good effect (*agathón*, communicable good; Philemon 1:6).
  - G. He refers to Philemon’s past benevolence (Philemon 1:7).
  - H. Paul does not command, but requests Philemon to do that which he needs to do toward Onesimus, not because of duty and apostolic authority, but because of love. What one does because of obligation never brings the same joy as when it is done from the love of Christ in his heart (Philemon 1:8, 9, 14).
  - I. God’s grace made Onesimus his son in the faith (Philemon 1:10).
  - J. God’s grace made Onesimus, who was useless to Philemon, now useful both to him and to Paul. A useless derelict can be changed (Philemon 1:11, 12).
  - K. Paul preferred to send Onesimus back to his master instead of enjoying the service he could render to him in prison (Philemon 1:13, 15).
  - L. Paul promises personal restoration of anything Onesimus may have stolen from Philemon (Philemon 1:18). That which Onesimus could not do, Paul was willing to do on his behalf. This points out the importance of restoration (Luke 19:8) and sacrifice in order to restore another believer’s honor (Excerpt from [Sermon Starters](#))
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**J Vernon McGee** on Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus - If we had been there we might have had a conversation with Paul like this:

"Poor Paul, it's too bad these Romans put you in jail."

"They didn't put me in jail."

"Oh, we know what you mean. Those hateful religious rulers brought a charge against you."

"They didn't put me in jail either."

"Who put you in jail, then?"

"Jesus Christ. I'm His prisoner."

"You mean to tell me that you would serve Someone who would put you in prison?"

"Yes, when it's His will for me to be in prison, I'm in prison. When it's His will for me to be out of prison, I'll be out of prison. When it's His will for me to be sick, I'm going to be sick. I belong to Him. Since I belong to Him, I have learned to be content in whatsoever state I am in (Phil 4:11-13+). Everything is all right. Don't worry about me." (**BORROW** [Thru the Bible Commentary - page 182](#))

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**John MacArthur** entitles Philemon 1:1-7 The Spiritual Character of One Who Forgives. In his sermon, MacArthur introduces this Philemon

"We are going to begin this morning a study of a brand new book in the New Testament, the book of Philemon, and I want you to turn to it. It's just very brief, one chapter, 25 verses, **a lesson on forgiveness.**"

The following is from his introduction in the [MacArthur Commentary on Philemon - scroll up and down to see full pages](#)

For a Christian, unwillingness to forgive is unthinkable. It is a rebellious, blatant, open act of disobedience to God. We are to forgive others as God has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). Failure to do so will bring at least four unpleasant results.

**First**, failure to forgive will imprison believers in their past. Unforgiveness keeps the pain alive. Unforgiveness keeps the sore open; it never allows the wound to heal. Dwelling on the wrong done feeds anger and resentment and robs one of the joy of living. Forgiveness, on the other hand, opens the prison doors and sets the believer free from the past.

**Second**, unforgiveness produces bitterness. The longer believers dwell on offenses committed against them, the more bitter they become. Bitterness is not just a sin; it is an infection. The writer of Hebrews warns, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled" (Heb. 12:15). A bitter person's speech is cutting, sarcastic, even slanderous. Bitterness distorts a person's whole outlook on life, producing violent emotions, intolerance, and thoughts of revenge. It is especially devastating to the marriage relationship. Bitterness shuts off the affection and kindness that should exist between the partners. The root of bitterness and unforgiveness all too often produces the weed of divorce. Forgiveness, on the other hand, replaces bitterness with love, joy, peace, and the other fruits of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22-23).

**Third**, unforgiveness gives Satan an open door. Paul warns believers in Ephesians 4:26-27, "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity." To the Corinthians he wrote, "Whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:10-11). It is no exaggeration to say that **most of the ground Satan gains in our lives is due to unforgiveness** (If love fulfills the law toward others [Rom. 13:8], lack of love violates it. Unforgiveness is lack of love.) Forgiveness bars that avenue of demonic attack.

**Fourth**, unforgiveness hinders fellowship with God. Our Lord solemnly warned, "If you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14-15). As noted in the introduction, that passage speaks not of the completed, past forgiveness of salvation, but of ongoing relational forgiveness between believers and the Father. It is a serious matter nonetheless to know that one cannot be right with God if he is unforgiving of others. Forgiveness restores the believer to the place of maximum blessing from God. It restores the purity and joy of fellowship with God.

The importance of forgiveness is a constant theme of Scripture. There are no less than seventy-five different word pictures about forgiveness in the Bible (**ED NOTE: THE REVISED EDITION OF THE BOOK QUOTED BY DR MACARTHUR SAYS THERE ARE NOT JUST 75 BUT ACTUALLY 88 DIFFERENT WORD PICTURES OF FORGIVENESS!** - [SEE THE 2010 VERSION](#)). They help us grasp the importance, the nature, and the effects of forgiveness.

To forgive is to turn the key, open the cell door, and let the prisoner walk free.

To forgive is to write in large letters across a debt, "Nothing owed."

To forgive is to pound the gavel in a courtroom and declare, "Not guilty!"

To forgive is to shoot an arrow so high and so far that it can never be found again.

To forgive is to bundle up all the garbage and trash and dispose of it, leaving the house clean and fresh.

To forgive is to loose the moorings of a ship and release it to the open sea.

To forgive is to grant a full pardon to a condemned criminal.

To forgive is to relax a stranglehold on a wrestling opponent.

To forgive is to sandblast a wall of graffiti, leaving it looking like new.

To forgive is to smash a clay pot into a thousand pieces so it can never be pieced together again.

(**BORROW** [John Nieder and Thomas Thompson, Forgive and Love Again](#) [Eugene, Oreg.: Harvest House, 1991 - Note the link is to the 2010 edition of this book] - I like what Nieder and Thompson suggests stating you need to "*Allow your mind to dwell on God's sketches of forgiveness. They will give you insight into what happens who you forgive. For example, imagine yourself as an archer. An arrow from an enemy has wounded you. Perhaps the arrow represents hateful words, emotional abuse or unfaithfulness. You pull the arrow out of your flesh, but instead of aiming it at your assailant, you shoot it as far away as you possibly can. That's what it means to forgive! Or think of yourself as a banker. In your hand is a note detailing a huge debt owed to you. What debts of others dos your note list? Slander? Fraud? Rape? You carefully take the note and look at it once more. But instead of putting it back in the file, your tear it into a thousand pieces. That's forgiveness. When we forgive, we consciously, before God, cancel the debt. We discard the note. We pardon the prisoner. We release the offender.* ) (As an aside I like the fact that there are some 45 mentions of the Holy Spirit in this book on forgiveness, because without the Holy Spirit supernatural forgiveness is not naturally possible. [Click here for the 45 uses of Holy Spirit in this book](#))

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#### QUESTION - [Who was Philemon in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - Philemon was a first-century Christian and a slave owner who also hosted a church in his home, most likely in Colossae. His name means "affectionate" in Greek, and, from all we know about Philemon, he lived up to his name. Paul had led Philemon to faith on one of his visits to Asia Minor and had stayed in Philemon's home when in that region. The only mention of Philemon in the Bible is in the [book](#) by that name. The book of Philemon is a personal letter from the apostle Paul to his friend Philemon whom he calls a "dear friend and fellow worker" (Philemon 1:1).

In the book of Philemon, Paul appeals to his friend on behalf of a runaway slave named Onesimus. Onesimus had somehow (SEE MY **COMMENT** BELOW) connected with Paul, who was imprisoned in Rome. Onesimus became a believer, but, because he was the property of Philemon, Paul sent him back to his owner with a letter.

**ED COMMENT:** YES "SOMEHOW" OR WHAT I LIKE TO CALL **SUPERNATURAL SERENDIPITY**, AKA DIVINE PROVIDENCE - God's ways are higher than our ways. Undoubtedly Onesimus had heard and rejected the Gospel in the household of Philemon, and yet the "Hound of Heaven" leads him hundreds of miles to a little man named Paul in a dark Roman prison to be saved by the same Gospel! Amazing grace indeed! Won't Heaven be a joy as we hear all the amazing the stories of how our Great God wrought so great a salvation in each of our lives! **What's the takeaway?** Nothing just "*happens to happen!*" in our lives beloved, but every jot and tittle is sovereignly orchestrated by the omnipotent, omniscient Master Composer of our lives, for our good and for His glory. Amen.

Through Paul's heartfelt appeal, we learn the following about Philemon:

- he owned at least one slave, as did most affluent people in that region of the world, now known as Turkey.
- he hosted a church in his home, along with "Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier" (Philemon 1:2). These were probably Philemon's wife and son.
- he regularly prayed for Paul and his ministry.
- he loved the church and its people.
- he would most likely do more than Paul asked in receiving Onesimus back with grace.
- he had a guest room in his home where Paul was welcome to stay.

The relationship between Paul and Philemon is clearly warm and respectful. Paul is comfortable enough with the friendship to gently

remind his friend that Philemon owed Paul his "very self" for introducing him to Jesus (Philemon 1:19).

The book of Philemon gives us a template for appealing to our Christian brothers and sisters about issues of disagreement. While Paul never criticizes Philemon for [owning slaves](#), he gently reminds him that Onesimus is now a brother in Christ and that truth should now define the relationship. It is probable that Philemon freed his returned slave, as he heeded Paul's instruction that, under the covenant of grace, both master and slave have equal standing in the body of Christ.

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### **Philemon 1:1 - WHOSE PRISONER ARE YOU? - Vance Havner**

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.... Philemon 1; see Ephesians 3:1, 4:1.

Paul was not the prisoner of himself—shut up to what he wanted to be or do—for he stood in the liberty wherewith Christ had set him free. He was not the prisoner of circumstances. He was not the prisoner of a parish, a church flunkey, for he was a pastor to all the churches. He was not imprisoned by a sect, confined within any ism. He had belonged to "the most straitest sect... a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5), and he belonged to "the way which they call heresy" (Acts 24:14), but his was the liberty of the Gospel. He was not a prisoner of Rome, nor of Caesar, but of Jesus Christ, Master of all conditions within and without.

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### **PRISONER OF THE LORD - Vance Havner**

The prisoner of Jesus Christ.... his prisoner.... Ephesians 3:1; Philemon 1:9; 2 Timothy 1:8.

Paul was in Nero's prison, but he was not Nero's prisoner. He was the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Back of all earthly incarceration, all dungeons of circumstance, all the jails of earth, stands our Lord and He is the Keeper of His people. Our times are in His hand. Stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage. However dark the shrouded room of sickness or sorrow, behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow keeping watch above His own. The Keeper of Israel does not slumber nor sleep. No man-made chains, no fetters of earth can bind our souls. We are prisoners of the Lord!

James Smith -

### **THE TASK AND ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT.**

#### **I. The Task.**

Invariably, in those days, runaway slaves were crucified. Paul must try to conciliate the master— Philemon— without humiliating the servant—Onesimus; to commend the repentant wrong-doer, without extenuating his offence; thus he must balance the claims of justice and mercy.

#### **II. Its Solution.**

1. Touching Philemon's heart by several times mentioning that he was a prisoner for the Gospel's sake.
  2. Frankly and fully recognized Philemon's most excellent Christian character, thus making it difficult for him to refuse to live up to his reputation, and to lead him to deal graciously with the defaulter.
  3. Delayed mentioning the name of the penitent until he had paved the way.
  4. Referred to Onesimus as his "son," thus establishing the new kinship in Christ.
  5. After presenting his request, assumed Philemon would do as he had requested (Philemon 1:21).
  6. Refused to command with the authority of an apostle, but entreated as a brother, as a bosom friend. See verses 8, 9, 20; especially "Dearly beloved" (Philemon 1:1).
  7. Frankly acknowledged the wrong done (11), and promised to make good any loss (Philemon 1:18, 19).
  8. By a careful choice of words, avoided irritation, as, for example, he says "departed" (Philemon 1:15), not fled or runaway, etc., etc.
  9. Feels the slave must not encounter his outraged master alone, so arranges for Philemon's friend, Tychicus, to accompany him and act as mediator. It is clear that Tychicus conveyed this letter to Philemon with Onesimus. (See Colossians 4:7-9).
  10. Mentions his plans to visit Philemon (22); and how could he meet him if he had refused to carry out his request?
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**QUESTION - [Why was Paul in prison?](#)**

**ANSWER** - [Paul](#) was in prison several times during his ministry, and, almost everywhere he went, there were people who *wanted* him in prison. It all began when Jesus confronted Saul the Pharisee on the [road to Damascus](#) and completely changed the course of Saul's life (Acts 9:1–20). God had chosen Saul, better known to most by his Roman name *Paul*, for a special mission: to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8). Fulfilling this calling would mean enduring much suffering (Acts 9:16), including beatings, shipwreck, stonings, and arrests for simply preaching the gospel (2 Corinthians 11:24–27). We know of three times Paul was imprisoned. Given that Paul was active in ministry for thirty-five years, he certainly could have been arrested and imprisoned at other times as well. Paul's arrests were a result of his being faithful to God's call on his life, not of committing evil.

Paul's first recorded arrest took place in Philippi in Macedonia during his [second missionary journey](#), sometime around AD 51. A demon-possessed slave girl kept following Paul and Silas and shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved" (Acts 16:17). The girl was disruptive and annoying, and finally Paul turned to her and commanded the demon to leave her. The girl's owners were furious that their source of income through soothsaying was gone, so they dragged Paul and Silas before the authorities and accused them of causing public riots. The magistrate, going against Roman law, had them beaten and thrown into prison without a trial (Acts 16:23–24).

But during this imprisonment, the Lord caused an earthquake. Paul's and Silas's chains came loose, and the prison doors swung open. When the jailer saw the doors open, he assumed the prisoners had escaped and, knowing he would be held responsible, drew out his sword to kill himself. But Paul called out to him, assuring him that all of the prisoners were still there. The jailer was so overcome with gratitude that he took Paul and Silas into his home and tended their wounds. Paul spoke to him about Jesus, and the jailer and his entire household received Jesus as Lord and were baptized (Acts 16:31–34). Paul's first imprisonment resulted in glory for God and the salvation of many.

Paul's second recorded arrest, which took place in Jerusalem, was prophesied beforehand (Acts 21:11); even with the warning, Paul chose to continue toward the capital. James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem greeted him warmly. They also informed him of Jewish believers who thought Paul was teaching other Jews to reject their Jewish heritage. Hoping to demonstrate this was not true, and at the advice of the elders, Paul joined four men in their purification rights. This required a visit to the temple. But some non-believing Jews from Asia recognized Paul in the temple and stirred up the crowds against him, shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place" (Acts 21:28). None of this was true, but, nonetheless, the people rioted and tried to kill Paul. Paul was quickly arrested by the Romans and put in jail. This occurred sometime around AD 57.

The commander of the regiment in charge of Paul allowed him to speak to the crowd. Acts 22 records Paul's sermon, which included his own personal testimony of encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus. The crowd shouted for Paul's death (Acts 22:22). The Roman commander sent Paul to the barracks with orders that he be flogged and interrogated (Acts 22:24). Unbeknownst to the commander, Paul was a Roman citizen, and therefore it was illegal for him to be flogged without having been found guilty. On this occasion, Paul spared himself a beating by bringing the fact of his Roman citizenship to the attention of a [centurion](#). Alarmed, and still unsure why the Jews were accusing Paul, the commander decided to send Paul to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body (Acts 22:30).

The next day, Paul made his defense before the [Sanhedrin](#), saying he was on trial for his hope in the resurrection of the dead. The [Pharisees](#) held to the doctrine of resurrection, but the [Sadducees](#) did not; thus, Paul leveraged the disagreements within the Sanhedrin to defend his belief in the gospel (Acts 23:6–8). Some of the Pharisees rose to Paul's defense, and the ensuing dispute within the Sanhedrin became so violent that the Roman commander ordered Paul to be taken back to the barracks for his own safety. "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome'" (Acts 23:11).

While Paul was in prison in Jerusalem, some of the Jews conspired to assassinate him, but the plot was discovered by Paul's nephew, who warned the Roman commander. Paul was then taken by night under heavy guard to Caesarea where his imprisonment continued. Paul soon stood trial before the [governor Felix](#). Felix was seemingly convicted by the message of the gospel but responded in fear rather than repentance (Acts 24:25). Felix kept Paul in prison for two more years, hoping for Paul to offer a bribe (Acts 24:26). As a favor to the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison when he was succeeded by [Porcius Festus](#) around AD 59 (Acts 24:27).

In Jerusalem, the chief priests and Jewish leaders, who still hated Paul, presented their case against him before Festus and asked that Paul be transferred to Jerusalem. In reply, Festus invited some of the Jewish leaders to come to Caesarea where Paul was being held. Another trial followed, but none of the charges could be proved. Festus wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, so he asked if Paul would go to Jerusalem to stand trial there. Paul refused, appealing to Caesar instead. Before Paul could be sent to Rome, [King Agrippa](#) arrived in Caesarea. Festus asked for Agrippa's advice, and Paul stood before Agrippa—another opportunity to share the gospel (Acts 26). Because Paul had appealed to Caesar, he was then sent on to Rome around AD 60 (Acts 27).

Although a prisoner in Rome, Paul was allowed to live in a house and receive care and provision from friends and family (Acts 28:30–31). He was under this house arrest for two years. Paul “welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (Acts 28:31). It was during this house arrest that Paul wrote the books of Ephesians, Philemon, Colossians, and Philippians. Again, God did not waste His servant’s suffering but inspired Paul to write part of what would become our New Testament. Paul was released from this imprisonment sometime around AD 62.

Paul’s last arrest, which is not detailed in Acts, occurred somewhere around AD 66. Once again, he was held under Roman guard, but this time he was confined to a jail cell. From there, Paul penned his second letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 2:8–9). In the last of Paul’s “prison epistles,” his tone is weary, and he realizes the end of his earthly ministry is coming soon (2 Timothy 4:6–8). He encourages Timothy to keep the faith (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2; 4:2) and to come to see him if at all possible (2 Timothy 4:9, 13). Paul was feeling lonely as many of his co-workers had gone elsewhere for ministry; at least one had even deserted Paul (2 Timothy 4:10–12, 16–18).

In prison, Paul wrote with hopeful confidence, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7–8). He claimed, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (2 Timothy 4:18). At the end of his third imprisonment, Paul was martyred by the Roman Empire. He was, indeed, brought safely to be with the Lord (Philippians 1:21–23; 2 Corinthians 5:8). No more would evil men attack him. He would never see a prison again.

Paul’s life after conversion is a picture of total devotion to the purposes and plans of God. His words in Galatians 2:20 explain how Paul viewed his life: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Paul could endure imprisonment as an innocent man because he counted his life as nothing (Acts 20:24; Philippians 3:7–10). Even though treated unjustly by the nation and people he loved, Paul continued to preach the gospel and used every opportunity to share the truth of Jesus, even with prison guards (Philippians 4:22).

Paul was in prison because people “loved darkness instead of light” (John 3:19) and they “suppress the truth by their wickedness” (Romans 1:18). Paul’s accusers did not want to hear the message of salvation, so they imprisoned and eventually killed the messenger. Jesus warned us that we should not be surprised when the world hates Christians because it hated Him first (John 15:18; 1 John 3:13). May we all embrace suffering for Christ with the grace and humility that the apostle Paul showed.

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#### **QUESTION - [What are the prison epistles?](#)**

**ANSWER** - The prison epistles—[Ephesians](#), [Philippians](#), [Colossians](#), and [Philemon](#)—are so named because they were written by the apostle Paul during one of his incarcerations. Paul mentions this imprisonment in each of the prison epistles: Ephesians 3:1 and Ephesians 4:1, Philippians 1:13, Colossians 4:3, 18, and Philemon 1:10. It is generally accepted that Paul wrote the prison epistles during his first Roman imprisonment.

The exact date he wrote each of the prison epistles is unknown, but the two-year period he spent under house arrest in Rome has been narrowed down to the years AD 60–62. Paul’s imprisonment in Rome is verified by the book of Acts, where we find references to his being guarded by soldiers (Acts 28:16), being permitted to receive visitors (Acts 28:30), and having opportunities to share the gospel (Acts 28:31). These details, along with Paul’s mention of being with “those who belong to Caesar’s household” (Philippians 4:22), support the view that Paul wrote the prison epistles from Rome. Paul’s Roman incarceration produced three great letters to the churches of Ephesus, Colossae, and Philippi, as well as a personal letter to his friend Philemon.

Three of the prison letters, also called the imprisonment or captivity letters, were bound for three churches. Two of these churches (in Ephesus and Philippi) he founded on his second missionary journey (Acts 20:1–3). One (in Colossae) he had never visited but was familiar with. Paul’s letters reflect his pastor’s heart, full of love and concern.

Colossians was written explicitly to defeat the heresy that had arisen in Colossae that endangered the existence of the church. In his letter, Paul dealt with key areas of theology, including the deity of Christ (Colossians 1:15–20; 2:2–10), the error of adding circumcision and other Jewish rituals to salvation by faith (Colossians 2:11–23), and the conduct of God’s people (chapter 3). The letter to the church at Ephesus also reflects Paul’s concerns for the beloved, especially that they would understand the great doctrines of the faith (chapters 1–3) and the practical outworking of that doctrine in Christian behavior (chapters 4–6). The epistle to the Philippians is Paul’s most joyful letter, and references to joy abound within its pages (Philippians 1:4, 18, 25–26; 2:2, 28; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10). He encourages the Philippian believers to rejoice in spite of suffering and anxiety, rejoice in service, and continue to look to Christ as the object of their faith and hope.

The fourth prison letter was written to Paul's "friend and fellow laborer," Philemon (Philemon 1:1) as a plea for forgiveness. Philemon's slave, [Onesimus](#), had run away from Philemon's service to Rome, where he met the aging apostle and became a convert to Christ through him. Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother in Christ who is now "profitable" to both of them (Philemon 1:11). The theme of the book of Philemon is forgiveness and the power of the gospel of Christ to undermine the evils of slavery by changing the hearts of both masters and slaves so that spiritual equality is achieved.

While the prison epistles reflect Paul's earthly position as a prisoner of Rome, he makes it clear that his captivity was first and foremost to Christ (Philemon 1:9; Ephesians 3:1; Colossians 4:18; Philippians 1:12–14). Paul's time in prison was for the purpose of spreading the gospel in the Gentile capital of Rome. The Lord Himself told Paul to "take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11). Paul's time in captivity is no less profitable to us today than it was to the first-century churches he loved so well.

### Philemon 1:2 and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

**Arthur Way** - To PHILEMON, our dear friend, and sharer in our toil, and to APPHIA our sister, and to ARCHIPPUS our fellow-soldier, and to the believers that meet in your house.

KJV Philemon 1:2 And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:

BGT Philemon 1:2 κα πφ τ δελφ κα ρχ ππ τ συστραπ τ μ ν κα τ κατ ο κ ν σου κκλησ ,

NET Philemon 1:2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your house.

CSB Philemon 1:2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your home.

ESV Philemon 1:2 and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

NIV Philemon 1:2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:

NLT Philemon 1:2 and to our sister Apphia, and to our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the church that meets in your house.

NRS Philemon 1:2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

NJB Philemon 1:2 our sister Apphia, our fellow soldier Archippus and the church that meets in your house.

NAB Philemon 1:2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church at your house.

YLT Philemon 1:2 and Apphia the beloved, and Archippus our fellow-soldier, and the assembly in thy house:

MIT Philemon 1:2 and to sister Apphia, to our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the church that meets at your home.

- **Archippus:** Col 4:17
- **our fellow soldier:** Php 2:25 2Ti 2:3,4
- **the church:** Ro 16:5 1Co 16:19 Col 4:15

### Related Passages:

Philippians 2:25+ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and **fellow worker** and **fellow soldier**, who is also your messenger and minister to my need;

Romans 16:5+ also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

1 Corinthians 16:19+ The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

Colossians 4:15+ Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.

Colossians 4:17+ (A GOOD WORD FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN) Say to Archippus, "Take heed ([present imperative](#)) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."



Archippus, Fellow Soldier

## SALUTATIONS TO THE BRETHREN IN COLOSSAE

and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier ([sustratiotes](#)), and to the church ([ekkllesia](#)) in your house - Apphia (a common name in [Phrygian](#) inscriptions) is Paul's sister by the "new birth," not by physical birth. It is notable that Paul is addressing this to a woman, for unlike the [misogyny](#) of pagan cultures and Islam, the Lord Jesus Christ became the true "Liberator of women!" And so we see Apphia is linked with Philemon as a recipient of this letter and thus many commentators felt that she was Philemon's wife. This does make sense, for as his wife, ultimately she would have to weigh in on the decision to receive Onesimus back again into the household, something she would have been equipped to do having been given a new heart by the Spirit. Rupprecht adds that "She is as much a party to the decision as her husband, because according to the custom of the time, she had day-to-day responsibility for the slaves."

Archippus was a fellow soldier ([sustratiotes](#)) not in the Roman army but the army of the Captain of the hosts (Joshua 5:14,15+), the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lightfoot on church in your house says that, " There is no clear example of a separate building set apart for Christian worship within the limits of the Roman Empire before the third century, though apartments in private houses might be specially devoted to this purpose." Scroggie points out that "The letter is addressed to this group of Christians as well as to the family, because, if Onesimus is received back by Philemon, he would be a member of this Christian circle, and it was important therefore, to secure their good will."

Steven Cole - Paul not only addressed this letter to Philemon, but also Apphia (probably Philemon's wife), Archippus (perhaps the pastor of the church; Col. 4:17), and the entire church that gathered in their home. Paul included all of them because the matter of forgiving Onesimus and accepting him as a brother in Christ was a matter of corporate testimony. It was an opportunity for God to be glorified and for the gospel to spread in that city. Godly relationships in our homes and in the church glorify God and demonstrate the reality of the gospel in our lives.

Guzik on Apphia - Apphia was probably the wife of Philemon, and Archippus was probably his son. This address to family members is unique among the letters of Paul, but it makes sense considering the content of the letter to Philemon. In this letter Paul will appeal to Philemon regarding a runaway slave who has met Jesus and found refuge with Paul. In the customs of that day, Philemon's wife Apphia was the supervisor of the slaves in the household, so the letter concerned her also. Regarding the escaped slave, "She is as much a party to the decision as her husband, because according to the custom of the time, she had day-to-day responsibility for the slaves." (Rupprecht)

Scroggie adds this note on sister - Let every Christian man remember that every Christian woman is his " sister " ; let every Christian woman remember that every Christian man is her "brother" not in word but in deed and in truth, and a nobler and purer atmosphere will pervade the Christian Church, and the fact will make life sweeter and stronger....Philemon is a " fellow-worker " ; Apphia is a " sister " ; and Archippus is a " fellow-soldier." If "fellow-worker" tells of achievement, "fellow-soldier" speaks rather of endurance ; and every Christian is called to both. (Phil. 2:25).

It is estimated that for two hundred years the church met in homes, Oesterley noting that "Up to the third century we have no certain evidence of the existence of church buildings for the purpose of worship; all references point to private houses for this. In

Rome several of the oldest churches appear to have been built on the sites of houses used for Christian worship.”

**Archippus** is one of two men Paul calls **fellow soldier** (the other being [Epaphroditus](#). The use of "soldier" alludes to the difficulties, opposition, and dangers encountered in the spread of the the Gospel of Christ. **The church in your house** indicates Philemon was well off but more importantly that he sought to share what God had blessed him with, which is supported by Paul's description of Philemon's love and faith he had to all the saints (Phile 1:5). Most commentators feel that Archippus was the son of Apphia and Philemon. If so, Paul's letter is addressing the entire family (and the church family) for they would all play a significant role in how Onesimos would be received back into Colossae.

**Scroggie** - Short as the letter is, yet no less than eleven persons are mentioned in it; five at the beginning Paul, Timothy, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and five at the end Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke; and throughout is the central figure, the subject and occasion of the letter, Onesimus.

**Boice - Fellow soldier** described "A shoulder-to-shoulder fighting accounted for the success of Rome's armies. Prior to the triumph of Rome, men fought mostly as individuals. They often dressed alike and were armed alike, but they did not fight side by side with each other. The Roman armies did, and as a result the phalanxes of the legions were the terror of the ancient world. The soldiers marched abreast behind a solid wall of shields. And as they marched they struck their shields with their spears in unison and sang their battle songs. In such a way we are to advance in harmony against the spiritual powers arrayed against us."

**THOUGHT** - In past days a famous slogan was "[You're in the Army now!](#)" This slogan applies to all of God's children. They have been enlisted in His army to fight the good fight of faith against the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and the [devil](#). Sadly many believers do not understand the fact that when we were "**rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,**" (Col 1:13<sup>+</sup>), the kingdom of darkness now actively opposes us. As a result, many believers are "wounded" in spiritual warfare because they are ignorant of the invisible battle that is raging. Like my old medical school professor used to say when I would say I did not know the answer to his question -- "You can't not know!" Well that was true in medicine, but it is far more true in spiritual warfare.

Paul used the soldier metaphor in his last letter to his young disciple Timothy exhorting him to be ready for the spiritual battle...

**Suffer hardship** ([aorist imperative](#) - Do this now! Do it effectively! Don't delay! It is urgent!) with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. (2Ti 2:3-4<sup>+</sup>)

#### Related Resources:

- [A Good Soldier](#)
- [A Good Soldier of Jesus Christ](#)
- [Three Kinds of Soldiers - Ten Principles of Warfare](#)
- [The Roman Soldier by Edward Gibbon \(from Decline & Fall of the Roman Empire\)](#)
- [The Roman Soldier - Description from Josephus](#)
- [A Few Soldier Stories & Sermons](#)
- [Good Soldier Hymns](#)
- [Good Soldier Devotionals](#)
- [Good Soldier - from the writings of C H Spurgeon](#)
- [More Sermons on Good Soldiers](#)
- [A Good Soldier of Jesus Christ - C H Spurgeon](#)

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**Fellow soldier** (4961) [sustratiotes](#) from [sun](#) = together with, emphasizing an intimate relationship + [stratiotes](#) = a soldier; see study of related verb [strateuomai](#) = wage war) is an interesting combination word, the prefixed preposition "[sun](#)" speaking of an intimate association and thus picturing saints fighting **side by side** against onslaught from seen and unseen foes. Phillips picks up on this picture, translating it as **comrade-in-arms**.

**Gilbrant** - Figuratively used the term can refer to: (1) the fellowship in conflicts, victories, and disciplines of Christian life; (2) the honor of being associated with Paul and his sufferings (Bauer); and (3) according to Thayer, the common danger and endurance of hardships with others for the cause of Christ (*Greek-English Lexicon*). ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Church** (1577) [ekklesia/ecclesia](#) from [ek](#) = out + [klesis](#) = a calling, verb = [kaleo](#) = to call) literally means called out (but see note by Louw-Nida below) and as commonly used in the Greco-Roman vernacular referred to citizens who were *called out* from their homes



to be publicly assembled or gathered to discuss or carry out affairs of state. **Wuest** writes that "The word **assembly** is a good one-word translation of **ekklesia**."

**Ernest Martin** - References in Philemon to brother (vv. 1, 7, 16, 20) and sister (2), to God as Father (3), and to a house church (2), are among many references and allusions in the NT to **the church as a family or household**. This seems to be the dominant figure (e.g., Mark 3:33–35; Luke 22:32; Rom. 8:15–17, 29; 1 Tim. 5:1–2; Heb. 2:11–18); it is used **more extensively than body or building or any other analogies**. The **family imagery** fits with Paul's comments on entrance by birth or adoption, and on relationships of nurture, sharing, and love.

**John Walvoord** has a helpful summary of **ekklesia/ecclesia** - This word translated church or assembly is found in at least four important meanings in the New Testament. It is used **(1)** to mean an assembly of people. In this sense it has no special theological meaning. It can refer to Israel as a gathered people in the wilderness (Acts 7:38) or a regular assembly of citizens (Acts 19:39) or a group of people gathered for religious worship (Heb. 2:12). **(2)** The same word is used for an assembly of Christians in a local church (Acts 8:1, 8:3; 11:22, 26) and in the plural for a group of such churches (1Cor. 16:19; Gal. 1:2). Each assembly or church has a local gathering composed of professed Christians. That all in the assembly are not necessarily true believers is clear from the messages to the seven churches of Asia (Rev 2:1-29; Rev 3:1-22). **(3) Ecclesia** is also used of the total of professing Christians without reference to locality and is practically parallel in this sense to Christendom (Acts 12:1; Ro 16:16; 1Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Rev. 2:1-29, Rev 3:1-22; etc.). The same word is used **(4)** of the body of Christ, composed of those baptized by the Holy Spirit into the church (1Cor. 12:13). **Ecclesia** used in this connection becomes a technical word referring to the saints of this age. (Borrow [The Millennial Kingdom](#) on page 224)

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**John Gill** has an excellent summary of the Christian as a **soldier** noting that "the life of **every believer** is a warfare; he is always engaged in a war with sin, and Satan, and the world; and is often called to fight the fight of faith, to contend earnestly against false teachers for the faith once delivered to the saints, to stand up for it, and fast in it; and is provided for with the whole armour of God, with weapons of warfare, which are not carnal, but spiritual and mighty, being enlisted as a volunteer under the great Captain of his salvation, Jesus Christ, under whose banner he fights, and is more than a conqueror through him: but though this is the common case and character of all the saints, it more especially belongs to ministers of the Gospel; who are set for the defense of it, and at the front of the battle, and are called to meet the enemy at the gate, and endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ"

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**Pastor Steven Cole** preached a sermon on Philemon entitled [Godly Relationships](#) and in that message he used letter "to spell out ten principles for godly relationships as seen in how Paul relates to Philemon." Here are those 10 principles that are based on Paul's artful, tactful letter to Philemon. To dig deeper into each one read the sermon [Godly Relationships](#).

- 1. BE RIGHTLY RELATED TO GOD BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST**
- 2. AFFIRM THE VALUE AND CONTRIBUTION OF EACH PERSON.**
- 3. PRAY FOR THE PERSON AND TELL HIM SO.** (Philemon 1:6)
- 4. WHENEVER POSSIBLE, APPEAL RATHER THAN COMMAND.** (Philemon 1:8-10, 14)
- 5. DON'T PRESUME UPON A RELATIONSHIP FOR YOUR ADVANTAGE.**
- 6. USE TACT.**
- 7. BE WILLING TO BEAR THE COST OF A RELATIONSHIP.**
- 8. EXPECT THE BEST AND FOLLOW THROUGH TO MAKE SURE THAT IT'S DONE.** (Philemon 1:21-22)
- 9. MAKE THE PERSON FEEL INCLUDED ON THE TEAM.** (Philemon 1:23)
- 10. NEVER FORGET GOD'S GRACE TOWARD YOU.** (Philemon 1:3, 25)

You've probably heard the little ditty, "To dwell above with the saints we love, O that will be glory! But to dwell below with the saints we know, well, that's a different story!" That's why we need to learn how to relate in a godly way that glorifies God and shows the reality of the gospel in our lives. This short letter to Philemon leaves us with the question, "How are your relationships?"

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**Spurgeon** - "The church in thy house." —Philemon 2 (Morning and Evening)

Is there a Church in this house? Are parents, children, friends, servants, all members of it? or are some still unconverted? Let us

pause here and let the question go round—Am I a member of the Church in this house? How would father's heart leap for joy, and mother's eyes fill with holy tears if from the eldest to the youngest all were saved! Let us pray for this great mercy until the Lord shall grant it to us. Probably it had been the dearest object of Philemon's desires to have all his household saved; but it was not at first granted him in its fulness. He had a wicked servant, Onesimus, who, having wronged him, ran away from his service. His master's prayers followed him, and at last, as God would have it, Onesimus was led to hear Paul preach; his heart was touched, and he returned to Philemon, not only to be a faithful servant, but a brother beloved, adding another member to the Church in Philemon's house. Is there an unconverted servant or child absent this morning? Make special supplication that such may, on their return to their home, gladden all hearts with good news of what grace has done! Is there one present? Let him partake in the same earnest entreaty.

If there be such a Church in our house, let us order it well, and let all act as in the sight of God. Let us move in the common affairs of life with studied holiness, diligence, kindness, and integrity. More is expected of a Church than of an ordinary household; family worship must, in such a case, be more devout and hearty; internal love must be more warm and unbroken, and external conduct must be more sanctified and Christlike. We need not fear that the smallness of our number will put us out of the list of Churches, for the Holy Spirit has here enrolled a family-church in the inspired book of remembrance. As a Church let us now draw nigh to the great head of the one Church universal, and let us beseech him to give us grace to shine before men to the glory of his name.

From Spurgeon's sermon [A Pastoral Visit](#) - It strikes me that there would be a great deal of good done if persons who have large rooms in their houses would endeavour to get together little congregations; there are many, even of our poorer friends, who live in neighbourhoods of London destitute of the means of grace, who might promote a great blessing if they occasionally opened their houses for a prayer-meeting or religious assembly. We need no consecrated places for the worship of God.

“Where'er we seek him he is found,  
And every place is hallowed ground.”

Certainly our text does not give any countenance to the calling of certain buildings “churches.” Buildings for worship, whether erected by Episcopalians or Dissenters, are frequently called “churches.” If I ask for “the church” in any town, I am forthwith directed to an edifice, probably with a spire or a steeple, which the inhabitants call “the church.” Why, they might as well point me to a sign-post when I asked for a man; a building cannot be a church. A church is an assembly of faithful men, and it cannot be anything else. I cannot see how such a piece of architecture as we now call “a church” could very well have been in Philemon's house; it must have been a large house if it had such a thing in it for an ornament. The fact is, it is a misnomer, a misuse of language; and we must mind that we do not get into it. For my own part, I like the good old-fashioned name of “meeting-house” as well as any. It is a place where the people of God meet; and although “meeting-house” does not sound very smart, nor fine, nor fashionable,—and that is everything, nowadays, with many people,—yet it is far better than misusing language, as it is misused when bricks, and stones, and mortar receive a title belonging exclusively to godly men and women.

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**Spurgeon on Christian soldier** - From his sermon [A Good Soldier of Christ Jesus](#) -

Paul does not appear to have pictured true believers as sluggards sound asleep upon the downiest beds; his description of a Christian in the text is that of a soldier, and that means something very far different either from a religious fop, whose best delight is music and millinery, or a theological critic who makes a man an offender for a word, or a spiritual glutton who cares for nothing but a lifelong enjoyment of the fat things full of marrow, or an ecclesiastical slumberer who longs only for peace for himself.

He represents him as a **soldier** and that, I say, is quite another thing. **For what is a soldier?** A soldier is a practical man, a man who has work to do, and hard, stern work. He may sometimes when he is at his ease wear the fineries of war, but when he comes to real warfare he cares little enough for them; the dust and the smoke, and the garments rolled in blood, these are for those who go a soldiering; and swords all hacked, and dented armor, and bruised shields, these are the things that mark the good, the practical soldier. Truly to serve God, really to exhibit Christian graces, fully to achieve a life-work for Christ, actually to win souls, this is to bear fruit worthy of a Christian. A soldier is a man of deeds, and not of words. He has to contend and fight. In war times his life knows little of luxurious ease. In the dead of night perhaps the trumpet sounds to boot and saddle, just at the time when he is most weary, and he must away to the attack just when he would best prefer to take his rest in sleep. The Christian is a soldier in an enemy's country always needing to stand on his watchtower, constantly to be contending, though not with flesh and blood, with far worse foes, namely, with spiritual wickednesses in high places.

The Christian is a self-sacrificing man as the **soldier** must be. To protect his country the **soldier** must expose his own bosom; to serve his king he must be ready to lay down his life. Surely he is no Christian who never felt the spirit of self-sacrifice. If I live unto myself I am living unto the flesh, and of the flesh I shall reap corruption. Only he who lives to his God, to Christ, to the truth, to the church, and to the good old cause, only he is the man who can reckon himself at all to be a **soldier** of Jesus Christ.

A **soldier** is a serving man. He does not follow his own pleasure; he is under law and rule; each hour of the day has its prescribed

duty; and he must be obedient to the word of another and not to his own will and whim. Such is the Christian. We serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Though no longer the slaves of man so as to dread his frown, we are servants of Christ who has loosed our bonds.

The **soldier** is full often a suffering man. There are wounds, there are toils, there are frequent lyings in the hospitals, there may be ghastly cuts which let the soul out with the blood. Such the Christian **soldier** must be ready to suffer, enduring hardness, not looking for pleasure of a worldly kind in this life, but counting it his pleasure to renounce his pleasure for Christ's sake.

Once again, the true **soldier** is an ambitious being. He pants for honor, seeks for glory. On the field of strife he gathers his laurels, and amidst a thousand dangers he reaps renown. The Christian is fired by higher ambitions than earthly warrior ever knew. He sees a crown that can never fade; he loves a King who best of all is worthy to be served; he has a motive within him which moves him to the noblest deeds, a divine spirit impelling him to the most self-sacrificing actions. Thus you see the Christian is a **soldier**, and it is one of the main things in Christian life, to contend earnestly for the faith, and to fight valorously against sin.

Paul does not exhort Timothy to be a common, or ordinary **soldier**, but to be a "good **soldier** of Jesus Christ;" for all **soldiers**, and all true **soldiers**, may not be good **soldiers**. There are men who are but just **soldiers** and nothing more; they only need sufficient temptation and they readily become cowardly, idle, useless and worthless; but he is the good **soldier** who is bravest of the brave, courageous at all times, who is zealous, does his duty with heart and earnestness. He is the good **soldier** of Jesus Christ who, through grace, aims to make himself as able to serve his Lord as shall be possible, who tries to grow in grace and to be perfected in every good word and work, that he may be in his Master's battles fit for the roughest and sternest service, and ready to bear the very brunt of the fray. David had many **soldiers**, and good **soldiers** too, but you remember it was said of many, "These attained not unto the first three." Now Paul, if I read him rightly, would have Timothy try to be of the first three, to be a good **soldier**. And surely I would this morning say to my dear comrades in the little army of Christ meeting here, let each one of us try to attain unto the first three; let us ask to be numbered among the King's mighties, to do noble work for him and honorable service, that we may bring to our Master's cause fresh glory. Be it ours to covet earnestly the best gifts, and as we have had much forgiven, let us love much, and prove that love by signs following.

Before I proceed fully to open up this metaphor, let me say that though we shall use military terms this morning, and stirring speech, it should ever be recollected that we have no war against persons, and that the weapons which we use are not such as are forged for the deadly conflicts of mankind. **The wars of a Christian are against principles, against sins, against the miseries of mankind, against that evil one who has led man astray from his Maker, against the iniquity which keeps man an enemy to himself; and the weapons that we use are holy arguments and consecrated lives, devotion and prayer to God, and teaching and example among the sons of men.** Ours is battling for the peace, and fighting for rest. We disturb the world to make it quiet, and turn it upside down to set it right; we pull down strongholds that they may not pull down the Zion of God; we dash down the mighty that the humble and the meek may be established. We have no sympathy with any other war, but count it an evil of the direst sort, let it be disguised as it may. Now with that caution, whatever I shall seem to say will not sound as though I loved or excused ordinary warfare, for nothing can be more abhorrent to the Christian man than wholesale slaughter; nothing can be more desired by us than the promised era, when men shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Now let us come to the work of this morning.

**First, we shall describe a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and when we have done so, we shall exhort you to be such.**

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#### QUESTION - [Who was Archippus in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - Archippus is mentioned in Colossians 4:17 and Philemon 1:2. In his letter to Philemon, Paul refers to Archippus as a "fellow soldier." In Colossians 4:17, Paul requests his readers to "tell Archippus: 'See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.'" Apparently, then, Archippus was a young man from Colossae tasked with some sort of ministry in the church.

Many believe Archippus to have been the son of Philemon and Apphia, close friends of Paul's. The connection between Archippus and Philemon seems clear in Philemon 1:1-2, "To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home. . . ." Paul is writing to a household. Philemon; his wife, Apphia; and his son, Archippus comprise the family unit. The church of Colossae met in their home.

Some believe Paul's words to Archippus to "complete the ministry" are a gentle rebuke for having neglected certain of his duties. But a majority see Paul's admonition to Archippus as simple encouragement, similar to Paul's exhortations in his epistles to Timothy and Titus (see 2 Timothy 4:5). One tradition holds that Archippus was a leader in Laodicea, a city about 12 miles away from Colossae. It seems strange to send an admonition to Archippus through leaders of another church, but Paul's intent was that the [letter to the Colossians](#) should be read in Laodicea, too: "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans" (Colossians 4:16). In any case, Archippus would receive the message.

Ultimately, we do not know much about Archippus other than he was a Christian in the early church who was granted a ministry from the Lord and who soldiered for the faith. Paul's encouragement to Archippus and his family should encourage all of us to also "complete the ministry" God has given us.

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#### **QUESTION - [Is a home church a true biblical church?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Churches in the New Testament era were indeed small assemblies that met in homes (Acts 2:46; 20:20). So, the practice of attending a home church, or house church, is biblically allowable. There also seem to be some good reasons to have house churches as opposed to large gatherings: greater intimacy, stronger relationships, single-mindedness, etc. The fact that large churches usually have their own small groups that meet in homes speaks to the value of the house church model. Several considerations should be made, however, concerning the reasons for creating a house church or choosing to attend one.

First, the fact that first-century Christians did something does not establish it as a pattern for all generations to follow, unless there is also a clear command to do so. Simply because Scripture records an event or practice does not, of itself, establish a mandate (or, in some cases, even approval). So, for example, the fact that early Christians in Jerusalem sold what they owned and shared the profits with other believers (see Acts 2:44–45) does not mean that we must do so today—although such selflessness and generosity would certainly be acceptable. Home churches are "biblical" in the sense that there is precedent in Scripture, but there is no biblical obligation to attend a home church.

Many believers who attend house churches interpret Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14 as establishing a principle of participation, which implies the need for a smaller church gathering: "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. . . . Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged" (1 Corinthians 14:26, 29–31). Some read this passage as not only *descriptive* of what was happening in Corinth but also *prescriptive* for all churches at all times, based on Paul's words later in the context: "as in all the churches of the saints" and "was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized" (verses 33, 36–38). Nowhere else in Scripture do we find more consecutive verses addressing what to do when the local church gathers.

Second, home churches motivated solely by an effort to counter the ["institutional church"](#) have a questionable foundation. The given reason for starting a home church is usually to more closely align with the biblical model, but the unstated reason often seems to be displeasure with large church movements. While the complaints against large churches may be valid, they can lead to a divisive, "us-vs.-them" mentality that should be avoided (see Ephesians 4:3).

One final consideration is the issue of accountability. Any church, large or small, should follow the instructions of 1 Timothy 3:1–13 regarding [elders and deacons](#). Members of a house church should make sure that (a) there are recognized elders and (b) the elders are biblically qualified. These men should be held accountable even as they hold the group accountable to follow sound doctrine (Titus 1:9).

In conclusion, there is nothing unbiblical about Christians gathering regularly in houses or large buildings or any other venue. Some benefits of a house church could be reproducibility, thorough discipleship through participation, a family atmosphere, and better financial stewardship. The Bible does not give any guidelines as to the proper size or location of a church meeting. What it does do is explain what is to take place at those meetings (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2). So long as biblical teaching (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxy) are foremost in the assembly, the format and location really do not matter.

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**Philemon 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Arthur Way** - GRACE BE TO YOU, AND HEART PEACE, FROM GOD OUR FATHER, AND OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

KJV Philemon 1:3 Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

BGT Philemon 1:3 χ ρ ις μ ν κ α ε ρ ν η π θεο πατρ ς μ ν κ α κυρ ου ησο Χριστο .

NET Philemon 1:3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

CSB Philemon 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

ESV Philemon 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NIV Philemon 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NLT Philemon 1:3 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

NRS Philemon 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NJB Philemon 1:3 Grace and the peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NAB Philemon 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

YLT Philemon 1:3 Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ!

MIT Philemon 1:3 Grace to you all, and peace from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Ro 1:7 2Co 13:14 Eph 1:2

#### Related Passages:

2 Corinthians 13:14+ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

**Grace** ([charis](#)) to you and **peace** ([eirene](#)) from God our Father ([pater](#)) and the Lord ([kurios](#)) Jesus ([lesous](#)) Christ ([Christos](#)) - It is notable that **Grace** ([charis](#)) "bookends" this letter which not surprisingly is filled with gracious words! Note also that the source of the blessings, for, both **grace** and **peace** are **from** (only one preposition governing both names) the **Father** and the Son, thus affirming the full Deity of the **Lord Jesus Christ** and emphasizing their unity (Jn 10:30+). Note the possessive pronoun "our" in "our Father," which speaks not of one's relation by creation, but by redemption, which is the only grounds by which the Father could pour forth on us His grace and peace.

**Scroggie** on **grace** - This is one of the greatest words in the Christian vocabulary. We are not likely to explore all its meaning, to sound all its depths, nor to scale its illusive heights. Yet we must not leave it in the abstract, or we shall miss what may be known of its meaning. This may be said to be threefold. **Grace** stands for the whole sum of the unmerited blessings which come to men through Jesus Christ (2Cor 13:14+). It means, the unconditioned, undeserved, spontaneous, eternal, stooping, pardoning love of God, and thus describes a disposition in the Divine nature; it then comes to mean the manifestation and activities of that disposition; the Divine love in exercise; and finally it points to all the fruitful results in the believer's life of those Divine operations. From this we see how singularly full is the meaning of "**grace**," with its fountain in God its flows from God to us and its fullness in ourselves. Of His fullness we all receive and "grace for grace; wave upon wave as the ripples press shoreward; pulsation after pulsation of unbroken light." (Jn 1:16+)

**Scroggie** on **peace** - This is another essentially Christian word, and so it was sung by the Angel Chorus that announced the Advent of the Saviour (Lk 2:14+). It presupposes a need; it implies war, strife within and among us; and it assures us that this need not be. The content of "**peace**," as of "grace" is threefold, **peace** with God; **peace** with ourselves; and **peace** with our fellows. We first have **peace** with God; then, the **peace** of God; and finally and ever more we realise that ours is the God of **peace**. Where this **peace** is, spiritual and social harmony is restored, and the raging passions of the soul are stilled. It secures also a true adjustment of relations. That is why Paul introduces it here. The harmony in this house has been broken, and the relations have become disordered. It is urgently necessary that **peace** should again sit upon the throne, that **peace** which is expressive of a right relationship between God and man. It will be well now to look at these blessings together. Here the Western and Eastern forms of salutation blend. Grace is Greek, and Peace is Hebrew, and in combination the force of each is strengthened. Their relation to one another is vital. This is the usual Pauline greeting, but nowhere is the order inverted. It is always "grace and peace." These stand related to one another as, root to fruit ; as spring to stream ; as cause to effect : as centre to circumference : as foundation to superstructure. The **peace of God** never precedes the **grace of God**; there must be the expression of **grace** on His part before there can be the experience of **peace** on our part. "In all the manifold forms in which restless hearts need peace, the peace of God brings it to them." Sometimes "mercy" is added to "grace and peace," then it becomes the link between "grace in God's heart and "peace" in ours. Paul is quite sure that if grace reaches Philemon as it might and should do, peace also will come to his heart and home. The benediction is both a prayer and a prophecy. Paul asks for these blessings for the Colossian family, and he is confident that they will have them. But Paul is not content to wish his friends these blessings, he would lead their thoughts and affections to.

**Scroggie** on **Lord Jesus Christ** - He gives Him His full title. We see Him human in **Jesus**, divine in **Lord**, official in **Christ**. The **Christ** was the meeting place of God and Man in one Personality. If God comes to us through the Lord, Christ Jesus; and we draw near to Him through Jesus Christ, the Lord. If the Father is the Fontal Source of grace and peace, the Son is the Flowing Stream. These blessings could not come to us from either of the Divine Persons alone.

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**Grace** (favor) ([5485](#)) [charis](#) from from **chairo** = to rejoice. English = charity. Beggars need "*charity*" even as sinners need *grace*, for

we are all spiritual paupers outside of Christ, but "*God gives where he finds empty hands*"-Augustine [cp [Mt 5:3+](#)] is a word which defies a simple definition but at its core conveys the sense of favor while the specific nuances of **charis** depend on the **context** in which it is used. Someone has written that the word **grace** is probably the greatest word in the Scriptures, even greater even than "love," because **grace** is love in action, and therefore includes it. It is hardly too much to say that God has in no word uttered Himself and all that was in His heart more distinctly than in this word grace (charis)!

**Grace** is God's unmerited favor and supernatural enablement and empowerment for initial salvation (justification) and for daily sanctification. Grace is everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything.

**Peace** (1515) **eirene** from **eiro** = to join or bind together that which has been separated) literally pictures the binding or joining together again of that which had been separated or divided and thus setting at one again, a meaning conveyed by the common expression of one "having it all together". It follows that peace is the opposite of division or dissension. Peace as a state of concord and harmony is the opposite of war. Peace was used as a greeting or farewell corresponding to the Hebrew word shalom - "peace to you". The expression "having it all together" speaks of everything in place and as it ought to be. When things are disjointed, there is lack of harmony and well being. When they are joined together, there is both.

**Eirene** can convey the sense of an inner rest, well being and harmony. The ultimate peace is the state of reconciliation with God, effected by placing one's faith in the gospel. In eschatology, peace is prophesied to be an essential characteristic of the Messianic kingdom (Acts 10:36).

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**Scroggie** sums up Paul's introduction - **Paul** is about to ask a Christian master to receive back into his service a slave who had robbed him and run away, but who since has been converted to God. **How will the Apostle approach the subject?** By a full and generous recognition of relationships human and divine. Paul himself is Christ Jesus' **prisoner**. Timothy is a Christian "**brother**." Philemon is "**beloved**," and a "**fellow-worker**." Apphia is a Christian "**sister**." Archippus is a "**fellow-soldier**." The household is a Christian "**Church**." God is the "**Father**" of them all. Jesus Christ is the "**Lord**" of them all. The Divine "**grace**" is available for them all. The Divine "**peace**" may be possessed by them all. Paul prays that it may be so; and he is confident that it will be so. All this is only the first of three distinct stages of approach to the request he intends to make, and reveals in what noble setting Paul saw all the events and details of the Christian life. Every time, he "hitched his wagon to a star." It reveals also that kindness and courtesy, too rare among Christians, which yet counts for so much in the complex life and exacting service of to-day. When a servant of God with a world reputation such as Paul had, associates with his name a much younger Christian, and calls him "brother," he, by that act, wins a devoted friend and disciple. "private," such as Archippus was, as a cf fellow-soldier,"he may reckon on that Tommy to follow him in the fight to the death. When a master-workman, such as Paul was, speaks of an obscure person like Philemon as his "fellow-worker,"he has made him capable of better work than ever before. It is this "*milk of human kindness*" that feeds our hearts; it is generous acknowledgment and praise, such as Paul bestowed, that tone up life and service, and make men and women capable of unthought-of deeds. Let us from this simple yet profound introduction learn what Christianity is at its best.

#### Philemon 1:4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,

**Arthur Way** - I make mention always of you, Philemon, in my prayers to my God, and it is always with thanksgiving.

KJV Philemon 1:4 I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,

BGT Philemon 1:4 Ε χριστ τ θε μου π νποτε με αν σου ποιο μενος π τ ν προσευχ ν μου,

NET Philemon 1:4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers,

CSB Philemon 1:4 I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers,

ESV Philemon 1:4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers,

NIV Philemon 1:4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers,

NLT Philemon 1:4 I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon,

NRS Philemon 1:4 When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God

NJB Philemon 1:4 I always thank my God, mentioning you in my prayers,

NAB Philemon 1:4 I give thanks to my God always, remembering you in my prayers,

YLT Philemon 1:4 I give thanks to my God, always making mention of thee in my prayers,

MIT Philemon 1:4 I give thanks to my God always as I mention you in my prayers.

- Ro 1:8 Eph 1:16 Php 1:3 Col 1:3 1Th 1:2 2Th 1:3 2Ti 1:3

#### Related Passages:

Romans 1:8 First, I **thank** my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Ephesians 1:16 do not cease giving **thanks** for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;

Philippians 1:3 I **thank** my God in all my remembrance of you,

Colossians 1:3 We give **thanks** to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

1 Thessalonians 1:2 We give **thanks** to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;

2 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to give **thanks** to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;

2 Timothy 1:3 I **thank** God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day,

### PAUL'S COMMENDATION OF PHILEMON

In this short letter Paul expresses his appreciation for Philemon with sincere appreciation, not empty flattery - beloved friend (Philemon 1:1), a fellow laborer (Philemon 1:1), a man of faith & love (Philemon 1:5), an effective Christian (Philemon 1:6), a refreshing Christian (Philemon 1:7), a man who obeyed God's will (Philemon 1:21), a praying man (Philemon 1:22).

**THOUGHT:** How would my (your) friends describe me (you)?

I (present tense - continually) **thank** ([eucharisteo](#)) **my God always** ([pantote](#)), (present tense - continually) **making mention** (making remembrance) **of you in my prayers** ([proseuche](#)) - Paul does not just command us to "**Pray**" ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) without ceasing" but he practices what he preached!

**Spurgeon** - Paul knew Philemon was a true believer, and therefore prayed that others might feel the power of his piety, by seeing how he acted in the present case.

**NET NOTE** - An offer of thanksgiving (eucharisto) to God is a customary formula for Paul in many of his epistles (cf. Rom 1:8, 1 Cor 1:4, Eph 1:16, Col 1:3, 1 Thess 1:2, 2 Thess 1:3). The content of the thanksgiving typically points to the work of God in the salvation of the believers to whom he [Paul] writes.

**Guzik** observes that "In Paul's letters, four times he says he makes mention for people: To the Romans (Romans 1:9), to the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:16), to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:2), and here at Philemon 4. Making mention means that Paul did not always pray long, intricate prayers for Philemon, but he did often make mention of Philemon in his prayers."

**Scroggie** on **I thank my God** - That (THANKS) is the note on which Paul generally begins (the letter to the Galatians and the second to Corinth are the exceptions), and on which we also should begin, unless we can give good reason for doing otherwise. There is usually much in the character and conduct of our fellow Christians for which to give praise, and the exercise is good, alike for those who give it, and those who get it. Christian praise is never [fulsome](#) flattery, and, at its best, it will always, as here, be given to God rather than to the individual, though in the individual's hearing, and for his benefit. Further, the giving of thanks should be a habit with us. Paul says, "**I thank my God always.**" If it was not for one person or thing, it was for another. No life is so utterly barren of good as to present no ground whatever for thanksgiving. (**THOUGHT** - How are you doing in this area of genuine thanks?)

**Lightfoot's** paraphrase of vv 4-7 is, "I never cease to give thanks to my God for thy well-doing, and thou art ever mentioned in my prayers. For they tell me of thy love and faith; thy faith which thou hast in the Lord Jesus, and thy love which thou showest towards all the saints. And it is my prayer that this active sympathy and charity, thus springing from thy faith, may abound more and more, as thou attainest to the perfect knowledge of every good thing bestowed upon us by God, looking unto, and striving after Christ. For indeed it gave me great joy and comfort to hear of thy lovingkindness, and to learn how the hearts of God's people had been cheered and refreshed by thy help my dear brother." **Scroggie** comments "This pregnant section is in two parts, but these are so run into one another that only with care are they discerned and disentangled. One part is praise, and the other is prayer; but the Apostle's heart is so full that his words have not time to form logical sequence."

**Believer's Study Bible** - Philemon 1:4-7 This paragraph serves a dual function in the overall plan of the epistle. First, it expresses Paul's thanksgiving to God for Philemon's Christian character. Second, it prepares Philemon for the request which Paul plans to make in Philemon 1:17.

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**Prayers** (4335) **proseuche** from **pros** = toward or immediately before + **euchomai** = to pray or vow) is the more general word for prayer and is used only of prayer to God. The prefix **pros** would convey the sense of being immediately before Him and hence the ideas of adoration, devotion, and worship. The basic idea is to bring something, and in prayer this pertains to bringing up prayer requests. The idea is setting one's focus on God ([Read Hezekiah's response](#) to a potentially "big" anxiety producing problem) and so of exhibiting a worshipful attitude. In classical Greek was the technical term for calling on a deity and bringing an offering with a prayer that it be accepted. Later the idea was changed slightly, so that the thing brought to God was a prayer. In later Greek, prayers appealed to God for His presence. The NT transforms the classical stiffness into the warmth of genuine conversation. Proseuche is used 37 times in the NT. Note the concentration of prayer in the early church! (Acts) What has happened to us as a church in America? How many churches have Wednesday night prayer meetings? These are rhetorical questions. How might the paucity of prayer in the church in America relate to how infrequently we see the power of the Lord at work in our midst?

**Always** (3842) (**pantote** from **pás** = all, every + **tóte** = when, then) an adverb which literally is "every when" means always, at all times, ever (more), on all occasions. In **English always** is defined - invariably, forever, perpetually, on every occasion, throughout all time, without variation.

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### **Jon Courson - Philemon 4-5 - BORROW [A Day's Journey](#)**

There's lots of talk today about preventive medicine—keeping people healthy rather than merely taking care of them when they're sick. Paul here models not preventive medicine, but preventive ministry when he says to Philemon, 'Hearing that your family's walking with the Lord and that there's a church in your house causes me to pray for you constantly.'

We generally only pray for people when we hear they're sick or struggling, going through tough trials or facing hard times. And pray we must. But in addition to that, I suggest we pray like Paul. I suggest we pray for those who are doing well that they might do even better.

It's when the enemy sees people doing well that he decides to launch an attack against them. Why? He knows he's lost their souls, but if he can pull them down in depression or discouragement, he knows they'll be unable to impact others whose souls he's not yet lost. Satan doesn't spend his time on the lost. You will never read in the New Testament where Satan himself is warring against an unbeliever. He saves himself totally and exclusively for those who are in Christ, for those who are walking with God. In every instance where you see Satan in the New Testament, you will always see him coming against believers in order to minimize their effectiveness for the Kingdom.

This makes it all the more important for us to pray for those doing well, for they are sure targets of the enemy.

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**Philemon 1:4-7 - Pure Water** - The legend is told of a desert wanderer who found a crystal spring of unsurpassed freshness. The water was so pure he decided to bring some to his king. Barely satisfying his own thirst, he filled a leather bottle with the clear liquid and carried it many days beneath the desert sun before he reached the palace. When he finally laid his offering at the feet of his sovereign, the water had become stale and rank due to the old container in which it had been stored. But the king would not let his faithful subject even imagine that it was unfit for use. He tasted it with expressions of gratitude and delight, and sent away the loyal heart filled with gladness. After he had gone, others sampled it and expressed their surprise that the king had even pretended to enjoy it. "Ah!" said he, "it was not the water he tasted, but the love that prompted the offering." Many times our service is marked by multiplied imperfections, but the Master looks at our motives and says "It is good."

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**Philemon 1:4-7 - Remembering to Thank People** - One day in the early thirties, William Stidger and a fellow pastor sat in a restaurant talking about the worldwide depression—the suffering people, rich committing suicide, the jobless. The pastor said, "In two or three weeks I have to preach on Thanksgiving Day. What can I say?"

Stidger said it was like the Spirit of God answered that question: "Why not thank those people who've been a blessing in your life and affirm them during this terrible time?" He thought of an English teacher who had instilled in him a love of literature and verse, affecting all his writing and preaching. So he wrote to her.

In a matter of days he got a reply in the feeble scrawl of the aged. "My Dear Willy: I can't tell you how much your note meant to me. I am in my eighties, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely, and like the last leaf of autumn lingering behind. You'll be interested to know that I taught in school for more than 50 years, and yours is the first note of appreciation I ever received. It



came on a blue, cold morning, and it cheered me as nothing has done in many years."

### Remember in Prayer

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers. Philemon 1:4

Today's Scripture & Insight : Philemon 1:1-4

Malcolm Clouff was named a 2021 Maundy Money honoree by Queen Elizabeth II, an annual service award given to British men and women. Clouff, who was one hundred years old at the time of the recognition, was honored for having given out one thousand Bibles during his lifetime. Clouff has kept a record of everyone who's received a Bible and has prayed for them regularly.

Clouff's faithfulness in prayer is a powerful example of the kind of love we find throughout Paul's writings in the New Testament. Paul often assured the recipients of his letters that he was regularly praying for them. To his friend Philemon, he wrote, "I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers" (Philemon 1:4). In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, "Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers" (2 Timothy 1:3). To the church in Rome, Paul emphasized that he remembered them in prayer "constantly" and "at all times" (Romans 1:9-10).

While we might not have a thousand people to pray for like Malcolm, intentional prayer for those we know is powerful because God responds to our prayers. When prompted and empowered by His Spirit to pray for a specific individual, I've found a simple prayer calendar can be a useful tool. Dividing names into a daily or weekly calendar helps me be faithful to pray. What a beautiful demonstration of love when we remember others in prayer. By: Lisa M. Samra (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

What has helped you be faithful in prayer? How have you been blessed by someone's prayers for you?

Father, help me to be faithful in prayer, knowing You always hear me.

### **Philemon 1:5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;**

**Arthur Way** - For I am hearing ever of the love and faith that you show a faith that looks up to our Lord Jesus ; a love that flows out to all His consecrated ones.

KJV Philemon 1:5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;

BGT Philemon 1:5 κοων σου τν γτην κα τν πιστιν, ν χεις πρς τν κριον ησο ν κα ες πντας το ς γους,

NET Philemon 1:5 because I hear of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.

CSB Philemon 1:5 because I hear of your love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.

ESV Philemon 1:5 because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints,

NIV Philemon 1:5 because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.

NLT Philemon 1:5 because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people.

NRS Philemon 1:5 because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus.

NJB Philemon 1:5 because I hear of the love and the faith which you have for the Lord Jesus and for all God's holy people.

NAB Philemon 1:5 as I hear of the love and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus and for all the holy ones,

YLT Philemon 1:5 hearing of thy love and faith that thou hast unto the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,

MIT Philemon 1:5 I am hearing about your love and faith you have expressed toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the holy ones.

- **because I hear of your love:** Ga 5:6 Eph 1:15 Col 1:4
- **toward the Lord Jesus:** Philemon 1:7 Ps 16:3 Ac 9:39-41 Ro 12:13 15:25,26 1Co 16:1 1Jn 3:23 5:1,2

## Related Passages:

1 John 3:23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and **love one another**, just as He commanded us.

## PAUL'S PRAISE FOR PHILEMON'S LOVE

**Because** - There is no Greek word for **because** but in context Paul is clearly explaining his persistent prayer and thanksgiving for Philemon. Imagine if the great apostle told you were continually on his prayer list and praying lips!

**I hear (akouo) of your love (agape) and of the faith (pistis) which you have toward the Lord (kurios) Jesus (Iesous) and toward all the saints (hagios) - Way = "a faith that looks up to our Lord Jesus ; a love that flows out to all His consecrated ones." NET = "because I hear of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints." We nowhere read of "faith towards all the saints"; that would be asking too much. Complete reliance can be placed in One alone. Remember that in the Scripture saints refers to all genuine believers, not to a special group of elite believers as in some denominations! There ain't no saints who are "ain'ts"!**

**Spurgeon's** exposition - Paul recalls how much Philemon had done in the comforting of persecuted and poor saints. And when you are about to ask a favor of anyone, it is well to show your gratitude for what you or others have already received from him.

**Scroggie** on **Lord (kurios) Jesus (Iesous)** - In these names His Divinity and Humanity blend. He whom we trust is both God and Man. As God alone, we could never have known Him. As Man alone, He could never have saved us. But as the God-Man He is revealed as Redeemer. He expects our trust, and is worthy of it.

**I hear of your love (agape)** - Note that Paul had no email or text messaging service, but he had other saints who told of Philemon's love and faith, both "action" words. In short, the life of Philemon as a walking, living testimony to others (*May his tribe increase Lord. Amen*). In other words the saints who gave the good report on Philemon had seen and experienced these attributes in real time. **Agape** may involve emotion, but it **must** always involve **action**. Similarly, **faith** is not believing in spite of evidence—that's superstition—but obeying in spite of circumstances and consequences.

Maclaren says "we have, as it were, 'faith towards the Lord Jesus' imbedded in the centre of the verse, while 'thy love . . . toward all the saints,' which flows from it, wraps it round."

**NET NOTE** - **Your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints** The Greek is somewhat awkward here. It appears as though the text reads "...the love and faith which you have for the Lord Jesus and for all the saints" (ED: AS IN NASB) In other Pauline letters the emphasis seems to be "faith in Christ Jesus and love for all of the saints." In accord with Paul, John also advocates this combination of "faith in Christ and love for the saints." The believers' invisible **faith** becomes visible in the demonstration of **love** for others. This, of course, is not only desired, but commanded (1 John 3:23). Although Paul's comment here may appear as a stock expression to the casual reader, praising Philemon for his track record of faithfulness to Christ demonstrated in love for the saints is actually integral to the author's argument in this short but pithy letter. **Paul will soon ask Philemon to demonstrate this love toward Onesimus, his runaway slave.**

**Steven Cole's** interpretation of this verse - We can't be dogmatic, but I think Paul is praying that Philemon's generosity ("fellowship") that stems from his faith will grow in effectiveness as he learns all of the good things that God has given to him for Christ's sake. In other words, as Philemon realizes what God has generously given to him, it will cause him to overflow with generosity and grace towards others. [Godly Relationships](#)

**Scroggie** points out "it should be noticed that the Apostle departs from the usual order, and places **love** before **faith**. It is a delicate touch, spontaneous and artless, arising out of, and calculated to secure the object he had in view in writing this note, namely, to call forth to new activity the "love of Philemon. What Paul wanted his friend to do was not so much a *work of faith*, as a *work of love*; and so he mentions "love" first. Nor must we overlook the relation to one another of these qualities. Love the stream is first named, and then, faith its source. The circumference is first shown, and then, its centre. The effect is here made to enfold the cause. It was possible for Philemon to be strong in faith and weak in love, and it is his love that Paul now appeals to, though in speaking of it he reminds him of the rock on which it rests.

**Scroggie** on **faith in the Lord Jesus** (Greek literally reads "faith toward [pros] the Lord Jesus") - Another thought in this great utterance is not so obvious, the thought suggested by the preposition "**towards**" (pros). Maclaren's paragraph on this must be quoted in full. "*The idea is that of a movement of yearning after an unattained good. And that is one part of the true office of faith. There is in it an element of aspiration, as of the soaring eagle to the sun, or the climbing tendrils to the summit of the supporting stem. In Christ there is always something beyond, which discloses itself the more clearly, the fuller is our present possession of Him.*

*Faith builds upon and rests in the Christ possessed and -experienced, and just therefore will it, if it be true, yearn towards the Christ unpossessed. A great reach of flashing glory beyond opens on us, as we round each new headland in the unending voyage" Faith is towards the Lord Jesus, reaching out after Him, and ever more fully finding Him. This Faith is the Root of which Love is the Fruit.*

*A loveless faith is cruel,  
and a faithless love is sentimental.*

**Scroggie** - Now we turn to the enveloping clause, (b). **'Love towards all the saints.'** In Galatians 5:6 Paul speaks of "faith working through love." Ideally, **faith** is the inspiration of **love**, and **love** is the manifestation of **faith**. A **loveless faith** is cruel, and a **faithless love** is sentimental. The true relation of these qualities to one another should never be forgotten. Observe who are the objects of love, **"the saints."** One point of the compass, **faith**, is fixed in the centre, Christ Jesus; and the other point, **love**, describes the great circumference which embraces all the saints. Of course, **love** is also towards the Lord Jesus. We cannot **love** one another aright, who do not first **love** Him. Paul here relates the love to the saints, probably for two reasons. First, because where there is **love** towards the saints, love towards God is assumed. Second, because he was writing to draw out Philemon's **love** towards a saint. And this brings to notice another point, namely that, Christian **love** is to be towards **"ALL"** the saints. Philemon's **love** is to be active, not only towards Paul, but also towards Onesimus. It is much easier to **love** some people than others, but it is a Christian duty to **love** all. Well may we pray, "Lord increase our love!" It will help us if we remember that the **love** referred to is not the **love** of natural affection, but the **love** of divine principle. It is not the **love** which awaits to be drawn out by its object, but is the very love of God, shed abroad in our hearts, and ever active towards the least worthy.

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**Love (26) agape** is unconditional, sacrificial love and Biblically refers to a love that God is (1Jn 4:8,16), that God shows (Jn 3:16, 1Jn 4:9) and that God enables in His children (fruit of the Spirit - Gal 5:22+) because we have no capacity to generate (**agape love**) on our own (The Spirit gives us the desire and the power to love like this - Php 2:13+). **Agape** is unrestricted, unrestrained, and unconditional. **Agape** love is the virtue that surpasses all others and in fact is the prerequisite for all the others. **Agape** is not based on pleasant emotions or good feelings that might result from a physical attraction or a familial bond. **Agape** chooses as an act of self-sacrifice to serve the recipient. From all of the descriptions of **agape** love, it is clear that true **agape** love is a sure mark of salvation. Where there is love there is sure to be faith, but, alas, there may be faith in the absence of love. Faith is a foundation, and love a superstructure, and while the superstructure presupposes the foundation, it is possible to have the latter without the former.

**Wuest** has several comments on agape love writing "**Agape** is a love that impels one to sacrifice one's self for the benefit of the object loved...(it) speaks of a love which is awakened by a sense of value in the object loved, an apprehension of its preciousness."

**Barclay** adds that **Agape** is not passion with its ebb and flow, its flicker and its flame; nor is it an easy-going and indulgent sentimentalism. And it is not an easy thing to acquire or a light thing to exercise (**ED: IN FACT SINCE IT IS LOVE LIKE GOD LOVES, RELIANCE ON THE SPIRIT IS THE ONLY WAY TO EXERCISE IT!**). **Agape** is undefeatable goodwill; it is the attitude towards others which, no matter what they do, will never feel bitterness and will always seek their highest good. There is a love which seeks to possess; there is a love which softens and enervates; there is a love which withdraws a man from the battle; there is a love which shuts its eyes to faults and to ways which end in ruin. But Christian love will always seek the highest good of others and will accept all the difficulties, all the problems and all the toil which that search involves. It is of significance that John writes in love to warn.

**Faith (4102) pistis** is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture usually speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. **Faith** implies both knowledge and action. One may receive knowledge of a certain truth and may even offer verbal agreement, but "trust" or "confidence" is not said to be present until one's behavior reflects that truth. Biblical faith is not synonymous with mental assent or acquiescence which by itself is a superficial faith at best and not genuine (saving) faith.

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**A W Pink** - THOUGH THE EPISTLE OF PHILEMON is one of the shortest books in the New Testament, it is one of the least read by God's people and is certainly one of the least preached from. We have therefore decided to devote a few paragraphs to it, though more in the way of general remarks than a detailed exposition of the prayer itself, for it is full of important instruction and valuable lessons. The epistle of Philemon is the only strictly private letter of Paul's which has survived the passage of time. Doubtless he wrote many more, but this one alone God saw fit to preserve in the canon of Scripture. All his others were either addressed to local churches or were pastoral letters of authoritative direction. This one, though written under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents its writer to us from quite a different angle. Here we view the "prisoner of Jesus Christ" throwing off as far as possible his apostolic dignity and parental authority over his converts, speaking simply from the heart as one Christian to another, in an admirable strain of humility and courtesy. It is therefore of peculiar interest and value inasmuch as it falls outside of what may be termed Paul's official sphere of ministry, affording us an insight into his personal and private life.

In this epistle Paul throws off the restraint of authority and employs the language of familiar intercourse, addressing Philemon as

“brother” (Philemon 1:7), which breathes the spirit of freedom and equality. We see how, under the apostolic mission, as well as under divine inspiration, there was room for the free play of personal character and intimate correspondence. We come to know Paul better as an apostle as we see him not as Paul the apostle, but as Paul the minister and the man. We learn the valuable lesson as to the place which true courtesy and delicacy occupy in Christian character. We see the worth of the greatest plainness of speech at the right time. We understand how true courtesy is distinct from artificial and technical culture of manners, and is the natural outcome of that “lowliness of mind” in which “each esteems other better than himself.” We are moved by the sympathetic love which does not look only on its own things but even in greater degree on the things of others. A careful comparison of this letter with Paul’s other letters will discover a marked difference of tone throughout it.

### **Regarding Philemon**

Philemon appears to have been a Christian of some eminence, residing at Colossae (Col. 4:9), who had been saved under Paul’s ministry (Philemon 1:19). Onesimus was one of his slaves who had robbed his master, forsaken his service, and fled five hundred miles to Rome. This was providentially overruled for his eternal good, for the hand of God directed him to hear Paul’s preaching (Acts 28:30–31) which was blessed of the Spirit to his conversion (Philemon 1:10). Though Onesimus had greatly endeared himself to the one who was (instrumentally) his spiritual father, and had been useful to Paul in his imprisonment, Paul realized it was only right to send him back to his master. Accordingly he wrote this touching letter to Philemon, begging that his erstwhile refractory slave might be given a favorable reception. His design was to effect a reconciliation between Philemon and his fugitive servant, now a brother in Christ. The apostle had full confidence that his appeal would not be in vain. It is highly probable that Paul’s request was granted, and that Onesimus was received into his master’s favor and later given his freedom. Tradition says that he afterward became a minister of the gospel.

In the course of his letter Paul used the most touching arguments and affectionate inducements to move Philemon to grant his request.

- (1) An implied appeal to his love for the saints in general (Philemon 1:5).
- (2) From consideration of the one who made this request, who might have used his apostolic authority, but chose rather to entreat him in love, by an appeal to his own condition—aged, in prison (Philemon 1:8–9).
- (3) From the particular relation of Onesimus to Paul—his own son in the faith (Philemon 1:10).
- (4) From the transformation which had been accomplished in him—he was “now profitable” (Philemon 1:11).
- (5) From the strong affection which Paul had for Onesimus (Philemon 1:12).
- (6) From his unwillingness to act without the approval of Philemon (Philemon 1:13–14).
- (7) From the special relation Onesimus now sustained to Philemon—“a brother beloved” (Philemon 1:15–16).
- (8) From the intimate bonds which existed between Paul and Philemon (Philemon 1:17).
- (9) From the assurance given by Paul that he would personally make good any loss which Philemon had incurred (Philemon 1:18).
- (10) From joy and refreshment which his granting of this plea would afford the apostle (Philemon 1:20). Was a more powerful appeal ever made, or such an earnest and winsome suing for the pardon and kindly reception of a disloyal slave!

### **Teaching of This Epistle**

Many important truths are exemplified in this epistle. In it we have a striking demonstration of the sovereignty and abundant mercy of God on a dishonest slave. Though sin abounded, divine grace did much more abound. We are made to realize the Christian duty of peacemaking, seeking to bring together two brethren in Christ who are alienated. Paul’s unhesitating acknowledgment of this runaway slave as “my very heart” (Philemon 1:12, ASV) intimates what ties of affection should be felt between the minister and his people, the parent and his child, the master and his servant, in all the circumstances of life. How delicately yet forcibly the apostle urged Philemon (and us), “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies” (Col. 3:12–13)! Admire and emulate the humility of Paul who did not consider it beneath him to be concerned in performing such an office as to reconcile a master to his servant. See here a blessed setting forth of the spiritual equality of all who are in Christ Jesus. The chief of the apostles freely owned this converted servant as “a brother beloved.”

Yet observe the balance of truth here. Though there was such equality so far as their standing before God and their spiritual inheritance were concerned, yet those facts in no way set aside inequalities in other relations and respects. The rights which masters have over their servants are not canceled when the latter become Christians. That new relation into which we are taken by virtue of a living union with Christ must not be regarded as annulling the obligations of natural relations, nor of the arrangements and

responsibilities of ordinary society so far as they are not sinful. Though in Christ there was now no difference between Philemon and Onesimus, that did not alter the fact that one was still a master and the other a servant; the saving grace which had been communicated to the soul of the latter would be most suitably exercised in showing forth the respect and submission which was due the former. There is a natural order established by God on earth between husband and wife, parent and child. There is also a governmental order which God has allowed men to institute by His authority, and He requires His people to conduct themselves suitably to the order He has ordained: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet. 2:13–15).

### Typical Teaching of the Gospel

Finally, note that we have in this epistle an exquisite typical picture of the grand truths set before us in the gospel.

First, the sinner's deep need is portrayed in the case and condition of Onesimus. God is our Creator, Owner, and Ruler; therefore as creatures and subjects we are under bonds to serve and obey Him. But fallen man is "born like a wild ass's colt," thoroughly intractable, unwilling to bear the yoke. Not only is he a rebel against the divine government but he is, morally, a thief, misusing his time and talents, and thereby robbing God of His glory. In consequence, he is "alienated from God," a wanderer in the far country of self-pleasing and sin. See how all of this is illustrated in Onesimus, who became an unprofitable servant by revolting against his master, stealing from him, and becoming a fugitive. Note that the "if he hath wronged thee" (Philemon 1:18) is not an expression of doubt but of concession, meaning "since he hath" (compare John 14:3; Colossians 3:1).

Second, the experience of Onesimus shows that the condition of no sinner is hopeless (Luke 19:10; Hebrews 7:25).

Third, the ministry of one of God's servants was used in his conversion.

Fourth, in Paul's offering to be bondsman for Onesimus (Philemon 1:18) we have a figure of the grace of Christ in voluntarily becoming the Surety of His people, assuming the whole of their debt. "Put that on mine account" expresses the same readiness which the Redeemer had to be charged with the sins of His redeemed.

Fifth, carefully note that more than a bare reconciliation was to be effected between Philemon and Onesimus: "Receive him as myself" (Philemon 1:17). Not only are the guilt and pollution of the believing sinner removed from before the sight of God, but he is "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6). Thus the basic truth of imputation was here illustrated. Onesimus was not only exempted from the punishment of his crimes but—through the benevolence of his benefactor—made partaker of benefits which he had not merited. Believers receive the reward of Christ's righteousness by a reciprocal transference (2 Cor. 5:21).

Sixth, in all of Paul's pleading on the behalf of Onesimus we have an image of the intercession of Christ for "his own." Seventh, the real change effected in the character and conduct of the one saved by Christ appears in the return of Onesimus to his master. A chief evidence of genuine repentance is a prompt performance of those duties which had previously been neglected.

Very few words must suffice upon Paul's prayer for Philemon. First, its object: "my God" (Philemon 1:4). The first lesson in prayer Christ taught us was that the special relationship which He sustains to His children should be owned by them: "Our Father which art in heaven" (Luke 11:2). "I will praise thee, O Lord my God" (Ps. 86:12). "God, even our own God, shall bless us" (Ps 67:6). Second, its heartiness: "Making mention of thee always in my prayers." Paul was no casual supplicant. Third, its occasion: "I thank my God ... hearing of thy love and faith." The fact that thanks were returned to God for those graces was an acknowledgment that He is the Author of them: they do not originate with man. They are the fruit of the Spirit, evidences of His regenerating work. Thanksgiving should be offered to God not for ourselves only but for our fellow Christians also. This was always Paul's custom (Ro 1:8; Ephesians 1:15–16; Colossians 1:3–4).

"Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints" (Philemon 1:5). Wherever one grace exists the other is found. In the mystical Body of Christ, believers have communion both with the Head and with all its members: with the One by faith, with the other by love. Hence we find the two things so often taught by the apostle, not only as equally essential but as equally necessary to prove our interest or participation in that Body. Without love for the saints we are no more members of Christ than without faith in Him. Fourth, its petition: "That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus" (Philem. 6). Request was here made that Philemon might be divinely enabled to give still further proof of his faith and love, by bringing forth more abundant fruit, in acts of benevolence, in ministering to the needs of others. Thereby those graces would be "effectual" in promoting the glory of Christ and the welfare of fellow saints read of Christianity throughout Spain.—Editor] (See full discussion - [Gleanings from Paul](#))

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### James Smith - IN CHRIST JESUS. Philemon 1:5-8

There are eleven references to the **Lord Jesus** by name in this short Epistle of but one chapter. **The specially significant phrase, "In Christ Jesus," occurs oftener than in the same number of verses anywhere else in Scripture.** The Lord Jesus is referred to in many offices, as follows:

**I. The Object of the faith and love of His people** (Philemon 1:5). "A faith that looks up to our Lord Jesus" (Way).

**II. The Channel through which God's grace and peace becomes ours** (Philemon 1:3, 25).

**III. The Source of any good thing in us** (Philemon 1:6).

**IV. The Transforming Power** (Philemon 1:16).

In Philemon 1:11 we have two pictures of one man. Here is a play upon the meaning of the name of Onesimus, which is "Profitable." Profitable by name, he became, through sin, unprofitable to his Master, but through the grace of the Lord, and through Christ's wonderful transforming power, profitable to both Paul and his friend Philemon. The Lord transforms waste into wealth. "In the Lord" (Philemon 1:16), that is the explanation of the wonderful transformation in Onesimus.

**V. Gives Boldness to His servants** (Philemon 1:8).

**VI. Gives Satisfaction and refreshment to workers, by prompting their converts to generous and praiseworthy actions** (Philemon 1:20).

**VII. Gives Restfulness in the consciousness that He knows all, and that nothing can come to us save by God's permission** (Philemon 1:1, 9, 23).

Observe, Paul calls himself, not a prisoner of the Roman authorities, true though that was, but of Jesus Christ. Behind Rome he saw the Lord, and knew his imprisonment could not have been but for Divine permission.

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#### Alan Carr - [QUESTIONS FOR MODERN DAY PHILEMON'S](#)

Intro: The context of the book. This little letter is called the greatest piece of writing ever put on paper. Even unbelievers have seen the greatness of this little story. There are several ways to preach from this book. In fact, one of the greatest examples of redemption and reconciliation in the entire Bible is right here, III. The Story. Tonight, I want to take a little different approach to this book and instead of trying to identify with Onesimus, I want us to try and identify with Philemon. Here is a Christian man who has been greatly wronged and is called upon to put it all behind him and forgive. I believe that there are some lessons here for every believer tonight. Please give me your attention as I preach on the subject, Questions For Modern Philemon's.

#### **I. Philemon 1:11, 18 HAVE YOU EVER BEEN WRONGED? (ED: THAT'S RHETORICAL OF COURSE!)**

A. The Context. Apparently, Onesimus had stolen property from Philemon and had run away, costing Philemon much money. (The average price of a slave was 500 denarii)

B. Being wronged by our fellow man is an unfortunate fact of life! Luke 17:1; Matt. 18:7.

C. When we are wronged, we must know how to react. If we react as the world teaches, then we jeopardize our testimony. If we react as the Bible teaches, we glorify God and point men to a Savior who can make a difference in the lives of men. Notice the next three questions that Paul asks:

#### **II. Philemon 1:12 DO YOU HAVE THE CAPACITY TO FORGIVE?**

A. The Context. Receive = "To take to oneself, To take by the hand, To grant access to one's heart." Literally to totally forgive and be reconciled to another.

(The difficult position Philemon was forced into - If he was lenient, other slaves would do the same, if he was harsh, he would hurt his ministry.)(Paul's solution - Philemon 1:18-19)

B. When we are wronged, do we have the capacity within us to forgive the offender? We are commanded to! (Matt. 18:20-35; Luke 17:1-5) We have a good example to follow - III. Jesus - Eph. 4:31-33; Col. 3:12-13. (see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#))

C. When we forgive, as Jesus did, then we are walking in love toward man and God - 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Matt. 22:39. (Now is the time to bury the hatchet!)

#### **III. Philemon 1:15-16 DO YOU HAVE THE CAPACITY TO ACCEPT OTHERS?**

A. Context. When Onesimus left, he was a sinner and a slave, when he came back, he was a saint and a brother to Philemon. Paul's request was for Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ.

B. Are we able to receive all men? Can we receive them regardless of what they have done, what color their

skin is, where they come from, etc?

C. As Christians, we are to practice the same type of acceptance that Jesus practiced, regardless of what they have done to us - Eph. 1:6; Gal. 3:28! (Illustration - The Prodigal Brother Luke 15:25-32!)

D. Others should not have to meet our standards to be accepted by us - James 2:1-9

#### IV. Philemon 1:17 DO YOU HAVE THE CAPACITY TO LOVE LIKE JESUS?

A. The Context. Philemon had no problem loving the saints, v.5 The true test of His faith would come when he was required to love Onesimus with the same degree of love. Philemon had some big shoes to fill!

B. The test of our faith is our ability to love others as Jesus loves them. Unconditionally, unreservedly, wholeheartedly!

1. Applied to the saints - 1 John 2:10; 3:11; 14; 17-18; 4:7-8; 11; 20-21

2. Applied to all men - Matt. 22:39

C. When we are able to love others, in spite of what they have done to us, then, and only then are we living out the Gospel.

**(ED COMMENT: IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CANNOT LOVE LIKE JESUS! WHY NOT? "YOU" IS THE OLD NATURAL "YOU" TRYING TO LOVE LIKE JESUS IN YOUR OWN "POWER." THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY WE CAN LOVE LIKE JESUS AND THAT IS BY CONTINUALLY JETTISONING SELF-RELIANCE AND DEPENDING ON THE SUPERNATURAL ENABLING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. SEE [The Holy Spirit-Walking Like Jesus Walked!](#))**

**Conclusion:** As you sit here tonight, are you aware of someone who has hurt you? Perhaps you have entertained thoughts of revenge. Maybe you've held a grudge against that person for some time. Let me tell you this, when you hold a grudge you are not hurting the person you are angry with, you are hurting yourself. You can never experience the fullness of God's forgiveness until you practice it in your life. There is no better time to begin than right now. How did you answer these questions?

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I hear of your love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints. Philemon 1:5

Last Sunday in my morning sermon, I mentioned that the Lord sometimes speaks to us through a mere phrase of Scripture. Later I received this letter: I've been meaning to send you a note since Sunday, as I wanted to tell you of finding strength in a simple phrase I saw on the way from New York last week. We'd gone to visit my mother. I'm concerned for her, as she's alone in the old farmhouse I grew up in. We don't know when she'll decide to move out, but it's obvious she'll soon need some sort of regular care. In addition, I'm pregnant, and I have a broken foot and several other concerns. I was fretting about it, but as we rolled down the highway, I saw a phrase someone had written in the dirt on the back of a truck. It simply said: "Trust Jesus." I couldn't get it off my mind. I recalled years ago singing a little song that said, "Why Worry, When You Can Pray?" I remembered the entire tune. I've found great comfort in that, and have ever since we returned, even though I'm 825 miles from my mom. It reminded me of the time Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dirt in John 8. We bolster the sinking spirits of all the saints whenever our love and faith writes a graffiti of grace in the grime of this world. (Robert Morgan - My All in All)

**Philemon 1:6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.**

**Arthur Way** - And so I pray that this faith which you share with us may leave its perfect work in your recognition of this, that all the good which is in us is for Christ Jesus' service.

Barclay - I pray that the kindly deeds of charity to which your faith moves you may be powerfully effective to increase your knowledge of every good thing that is in us and that brings us ever closer to Christ.

KJV Philemon 1:6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

BGT Philemon 1:6 πως κοινωνια τς πιστεος σου νεργς γνηται ν πιν σει παντς αγαθο το ν μν ες Χριστ ν.

NET Philemon 1:6 I pray that the faith you share with us may deepen your understanding of every blessing

that belongs to you in Christ.

CSB Philemon 1:6 I pray that your participation in the faith may become effective through knowing every good thing that is in us for the glory of Christ.

ESV Philemon 1:6 and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

NIV Philemon 1:6 I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

NLT Philemon 1:6 And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ.

NRS Philemon 1:6 I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ.

NJB Philemon 1:6 I pray that your fellowship in faith may come to expression in full knowledge of all the good we can do for Christ.

NAB Philemon 1:6 so that your partnership in the faith may become effective in recognizing every good there is in us that leads to Christ.

YLT Philemon 1:6 that the fellowship of thy faith may become working in the full knowledge of every good thing that is in you toward Christ Jesus;

MIT Philemon 1:6 I hear how the sharing of your faith has potential to produce among you knowledge of everything good in Christ.

GWN Philemon 1:6 As you share the faith you have in common with others, I pray that you may come to have a complete knowledge of every blessing we have in Christ.

RSV Philemon 1:6 and I pray that the sharing of your faith may promote the knowledge of all the good that is ours in Christ.

- **I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective:** 2Co 9:12-14 Php 1:9-11 Tit 3:14 Heb 6:10 Jas 2:14,17
- **through the knowledge:** Mt 5:16 1Co 14:25 Php 4:8 1Pe 1:5-8 2:12 3:1,16
- **in you for Christ's sake:** 2Pe 1:8

## PAUL'S PRAYER FOR PHILEMON'S FAITH

Note that verses 6-7 are somewhat difficult to interpret. **Barclay** says this verse "is very difficult to translate and about which much has been written." **Moule** adds "This is notoriously the most obscure verse in this letter." And if you observe the translations above, you can readily see the different ways this verse has been understood.

*and I pray* - Not in Greek but added by NAS translators in the context, clearly referring back to the idea of prayer.

**That** (in order that) **the fellowship** ([koinonia](#)) **of your** (singular - Philemon's) **faith** ([pistis](#)) **may become effective** ([energes](#)) **through the knowledge** ([epignosis](#)) **of every good** ([agathos](#)) **thing which is in you for Christ's sake** - **ESV** = " I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective." The first thing to notice is that Paul is praying for something that he has already commended Philemon for -- his **faith**. Now he is referring to the sharing of his faith. Thus the NIV has "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith."

The words **the fellowship** ([koinonia](#)) **of your** (singular - Philemon's) **faith** "convey the central concept on which Paul made his appeal. This expression, found only here, can have several possible meanings: (1) the fellowship established with others by your faith, (2) your participation with others in the faith, (3) the sharing of your faith with others (NRSV, NIV), or (4) the generosity which springs from your faith. Dogmatic conclusions about the exact meaning are out of place. Although Philemon's anticipated generosity in receiving Onesimus may suggest meaning (4), the reason for receiving him is that he is a Christian brother, and that theme favors meaning (1). (Ernest Martin - [Believer's Commentary](#))

The heart of the petition is that the fellowship of Philemon's **faith may become effective**. **Effective** ([energes](#)) emphasizes activity and productivity. Papyri used the word for a mill in working order and for land plowed and ready for producing a crop. The energy to be generated is to have a specific focus: knowledge which is narrowed to knowledge of everything good which is in us for Christ's sake. **Good** could refer to what the believer receives (salvation) and/or the good that is done to others. **For Christ's sake** means



that the **good** is leading to Christ or with Christ as the goal, which could be rendered "*all the good that is in us for the glory of Christ.*"

**Guzik** - Paul prayed for Philemon, desiring that the sharing of his faith would become effective as Philemon understood the work God did in him (every good thing which is in you).. This is the foundation for all effective evangelism: the overflow of a life touched and changed by God. God had done every good thing in the life of Philemon. Now, it was a matter of it being acknowledged by both Philemon and those he shared the faith with. When these good things were understood, others would come to Jesus. The reason why some sharing of the faith is not effective is because we don't know or can't communicate every good thing God has done for us. **The sharing of your faith:** It is possible that Paul means the sharing of material things, prompted by faith. The ancient Greek word for sharing is *koinonia*, and sometimes Paul used *koinonia*, which means "fellowship, sharing," to describe giving (2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Romans 15:6). "The apostle speaks here of the works of charity in which Philemon abounded toward poor Christians." (Clarke)

**Warren Wiersbe** explains it this way - Paul told Philemon that he was praying for him and asking God to make his witness effective ("the sharing of your faith") so that others would trust Christ. He also prayed that his friend would have a deeper understanding of all that he had in Jesus Christ. After all, the better we know Christ and experience His blessings, the more we want to share these blessings with others.

**William MacDonald** - The **sharing of your faith** means the practical kindness which Philemon showed to others. We can share our faith not only by preaching Christ but also by feeding the hungry, clothing the destitute, comforting the bereaved, relieving the distressed—yes, even by forgiving a runaway slave. Paul prayed then that Philemon's life of benevolence would lead many to acknowledge that all his good deeds came from **Christ Jesus**. There is tremendous power and influence in a life where the love of God is manifest. It is one thing to read about love in a book, but how compelling it is to see the Word become flesh in a human life!

**Scroggie** - We have seen that Paul's praise was more especially for Philemon's love; now we are to see that his prayer is more for Philemon's faith. The same report that led Paul to praise, sent him to prayer. These two can never lie far apart, for where there is occasion for the one, there is almost certainly need for the other. In the letter to the Philippians there is the same conjunction. Paul does not in this, or directly in the next paragraph, say how he would have Philemon's love to act. He will tell him in a moment or two. But he does here and now say how he would have Philemon's faith to act. We shall only barely state the significance of this brief but pregnant prayer. There are three clauses. It is, as to its matter, that Philemon's "fellowship," active sympathy and charity, springing from his faith,"may become effective," that is, may abound more and more. As to the means, it is that he may go on to attain to the perfect knowledge of every good thing in him. And finally this activity of faith is to have for its motive and end the glory of Christ. From this we learn, that Christian fellowship can flow only from Christian faith. That such fellowship is always practical. That, because of its origin and nature, it is effective. That the exercise of such faith springs from knowledge and leads to knowledge. That conduct, the product of character, in its turn produces character; and that the goal and final resting place of all our good purposes and performances is Christ Himself. Thus, on the way to make request for Onesimus, Paul tells Philemon of his praise and prayer on his behalf; and so prepares the way for Philemon's acquiescence.

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**Fellowship** (sharing, contribution) (2842) **koinonia** from **koinos** = that which is in common, belonging to several or of which several are partakers) describes the experience (in contrast to *koinonia* as an **act**) of having something in common and/or of sharing things in common with others. It describes a close association involving mutual interests and sharing or to have communion (Which Webster defines as "intimate fellowship") It denotes the active, joint participation, cooperation and/or sharing in a common interest or activity. Biblical fellowship is communion with God, which results in common participation with other believers in the Spirit of God and God's blessings. Believers have **fellowship** vertically with the Triune God through His Son Christ Jesus and horizontally with other saints. The "vertical fellowship" precedes and makes possible the "horizontal fellowship' between believers. The idea of **koinonia** is frequently referred to as **fellowship** (the state of sharing mutual interests, experiences, activities, etc.; a relation in which parties hold something in common; see excellent article on [Fellowship](#)).

**Knowledge** (1922) **epignosis** from verb **epiginosko** from **epí** = upon + **ginosko** = to know) is a strengthened or intensified form of "**gnosis [word study]**" and conveys the thought of a knowledge which is fuller, larger and more thorough. It also conveys the idea of a more intimate and personal relationship than the simple term *gnosis*. **W E Vine** says the verb form **epiginosko** suggests generally a directive, a more special, recognition of the object known than **ginosko**. Although the following passage uses the related verbs, it gives a good sense of the distinction between the simple (*gnosis*, *ginosko*) and the compound (*epignosis*, *epiginosko*) words. Paul writes "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I **know** (*ginosko*) in part, but then I will **know fully** (*epiginosko*) just as I also have been **fully known** (*epiginosko*)." (1Cor 13:12+) **Epignosis** refers to exact, complete, thorough, accurate, experiential knowledge, not just abstract, intellectual, head knowledge of God or even facts about Him. **Epígnosis** always describes moral and religious knowledge in the NT and especially refers to full and comprehensive knowledge of God's will that rests on the knowledge of God and of Christ found today in His Word.

**Effective** (1756) **energes** from **en** = in + **ergon** = work) describes that which is working, efficient, effective, operative or powerful. **Energes** describes activity which produces results or which is effective in causing something to happen or to come about. **Energes** is only used three times in the NT - 1 Co. 16:9; Phile 1:6; Heb. 4:12. Hebrews 4:12 is used in the somber warnings that have reverberated through Hebrews 3-4 describing them as *working and effective* words which are able to accomplish their purpose (pierce to the heart). Paul uses to describe "a wide (megas = great, large) door for **effective** (energes - God opened this door) [service] (not in the original Greek) has opened to me, and there are many adversaries (literally = those lined up against me). (1 Corinthians 16:9) Papyri use **energōs** of a mill in working order, of ploughed land, etc.

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## **G Campbell Morgan - Philemon 6 - That the fellowship of thy faith may become effectual.**

That was the burden of Paul's prayer for Philemon; and in sending Onesimus back to him, he was creating a new opportunity for his realization of that very thing. Philemon had faith, as Paul had already said; and it was a double faith, "toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints." That faith necessarily placed him in the realm of fellowship, and that was also two-sided: fellowship with the Lord Jesus, and fellowship with all the saints. Such was his faith, his conviction, that to which he had yielded himself. Such was his fellowship, his vital relationship, the good thing which was in him. Paul's prayer for him was that it might be effectual; that is, effective. Faith and fellowship are at once made valuable and vindicated as they are active. While a number of names are found in this letter, three stand out prominently, those of Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. They share a common faith; they are members of one fellowship. The circumstances were such as to give the fellowship of their faith an opportunity for action; that is, to become effectual. It was so in the case of Paul, as he sent Onesimus back to his master, even though he would have been serviceable to himself in his prison. It was so in the case of Onesimus, in that he went back to the master whom he had wronged in running away from him. The letter was written that it might be so in the case of Philemon as he received Onesimus, "no longer as a servant ... but a brother beloved."

## **A FOURFOLD FELLOWSHIP.**

**James Smith**

### **I. Fellow-believer. Trusting** (Philemon 1:6).

1. "Fellowship of your faith" is R.V. "This faith which you share with us" (Way.).
2. What a glorious fellowship is this of faith. What an honor to be numbered as a member of the Lord's Household of Faith.

### **II. Fellow-soldier. Fighting** (Philemon 1:2).

1. Apphia is called "The Sister" in R.V. Was she Philemon's wife or daughter?
2. It is generally understood that Archippus was Philemon's son.
3. Fighting follows trusting. Soon the young believer discovers this. Fightings without—yes, and fightings within—"Flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17). Remember it was immediately after God had given water (type of Holy Spirit) to Israel, that Amalek (type of flesh) fought Israel. (See. Exod. 17:1-8). Observe force of "Then" in verse 8. But in this fight, through our Heavenly Moses on the Mount—our Lord Jesus as Great High Priest—we are more than conquerors.

### **III. Fellow-laborer. Working** (Philemon 1:1).

1. Philemon is not mentioned in the Epistle to the Colossians, but Archippus, whom Paul associates (in Philemon 2) with Philemon, is mentioned in such a way as to imply that both were office-bearers (Colossians 4:17). "Sharer in our toil" is Way's translation. Philemon was one of Paul's converts.
2. "Our fellow-workman" (J.N.D.).

### **IV. Fellow-prisoner. Suffering** (Philemon 1:23).

1. Only Epistle where Paul begins by simply calling himself a "prisoner." Six times does he allude to this (Philemon 1:1,9,10,13,22,23).
2. The Epistle begins with Paul in bonds, but leads up to Paul in prayer.
3. Observe, "prisoner for Jesus Christ" (1, R.V.). He does not dwell on this in any spirit of boasting or proud

display, but for a benign purpose.

4. Suffering for the Lord falls naturally to the lot of all born-again ones. The lustings of the flesh, for example, cause suffering. Then grace does refine, making us more sensitive to the jeers and taunts of the world, and to the unkind and uncharitable criticisms of fellow-believers.

5. But let us never forget we are not the only sufferers, for this is the common lot of all believers. "Fellow-prisoner."

6. It is generally understood that the prominent brethren took turns in voluntarily sharing the Apostle's imprisonment, so as to minister to him in his bonds, "not being ashamed of his chain" (2 Timothy 1:16). By such a fellowship of suffering they must have refreshed the heart of the Apostle.

7. Epaphras is the shortened or provincial form of Epaphroditus.

**Philemon 1:7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.**

**Arthur Way** - Ah yes, great was the joy I felt, great the comfort, in the thought of your love ; for through you have the hearts of God's consecrated ones received restful comfort through you, Philemon, my brother.

KJV Philemon 1:7 For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

BGT Philemon 1:7 χαρ ν γ ρ πολλ ν σχον κα παρ κλησιν π τ γ π σου, π τ σπλ γχνα τ ν γ ων ναπ παυται δι σο , δελφ .

NET Philemon 1:7 I have had great joy and encouragement because of your love, for the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

CSB Philemon 1:7 For I have great joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

ESV Philemon 1:7 For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

NIV Philemon 1:7 Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

NLT Philemon 1:7 Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people.

NRS Philemon 1:7 I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

NJB Philemon 1:7 I have received much joy and encouragement by your love; you have set the hearts of God's holy people at rest.

NAB Philemon 1:7 For I have experienced much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the holy ones have been refreshed by you, brother.

YLT Philemon 1:7 for we have much joy and comfort in thy love, because the bowels of the saints have been refreshed through thee, brother.

MIT Philemon 1:7 For I have much joy and encouragement flowing from your love because the compassionate responses of the holy ones are refreshed by you, brother.

- **For I have come to have much joy:** 1Th 1:3, 1Th 2:13,19 1Th 3:9 2Jn 1:4 3Jn 1:3-6
- **because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed** Philemon 1:20 2Co 7:13 2Ti 1:16

Related Passages:

2 Corinthians 7:4; Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with **comfort**; I am overflowing with **joy** in all our affliction.

2 Corinthians 7:7 and not only by his coming, but also by the **comfort** with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I **rejoiced** even more.

2 Corinthians 7:13 For this reason we have been **comforted**. And besides our **comfort**, we **rejoiced** even much more for the **joy** of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

## MOTIVE FOR PAUL'S THANKSGIVING

Now Paul begins to make his appeal to Philemon in Philemon 1:8-21.

**For** ([gar](#)) - Term of explanation. This takes us back to Philemon 1:4 "I thank my God always," thus further explaining Paul's appreciation for Philemon which serves as bridge to the appeal he will make to Philemon in Philemon 1:8-22.

**I have come to have much joy** ([chara](#)) **and comfort** ([paraklesis](#) - encouragement) **in your love** ([agape](#)) - **NIV** - "Your love has given me great joy and encouragement." Paul refers to his **joy** (note it was not a little but "much joy") when he heard the good news about Philemon's **love** (this is second mention of his love - Phile 1:4). What a source of comfort to Paul in prison was the news of Philemon's sacrificial love to the saints.

**THOUGHT** - Does your sacrificial love produce joy and comfort in other saints when they hear of your love? And it is likely that you will never know of this effect in this life, but only at the Bema Seat of Christ.

**Because the hearts** ([splanchnon](#)) **of the saints** ([hagios](#)) **have been refreshed** ([anapauo](#)) **through you, brother** ([adelphos](#)) - Paul explains his joy and comfort is because the love of Philemon had refreshed the saints. Do our acts/actions refresh the saints or deplete the saints? **Hearts** ([splanchnon](#)) speaks of the whole person at the deepest level (the "viscera"). Philemon was mimicking the Master Who promised all weary and heavy laden who came "I will give you **rest** (same verb [anapauo](#))."

**Have been refreshed** is in the perfect tense signifying Philemon brought about the rest in the saints in the past and it had an enduring effect.

**Brian Bell** - We say "keep the faith". Not Philemon, he said, "share the faith!" He didn't keep it to himself, he shared it (communicated it) with others. Paul prayed that his faith would "go to work" (be effectual).

*The smallest deeds and words, good or bad,  
have an expanding influence*

**Scroggie** - This paragraph begins and ends on the note of praise, praise for the love of Philemon. His love was practical, for it met needs and made impressions. Through him the hearts of the saints had oft been refreshed; and not by words only, but by deeds. The detailed record is not on earth, but in Heaven. It is not by one great sacrifice on our part that the hearts of others are made stout for the journey and strong for the task, but by the constant performance of the petty kindnesses, no one of which might be worth recording, but which, in the aggregate, constitute a sublime record. Paul would say "As you have done, brother, so continue to do, and do for him who hands you this letter, Onesimus." The thanks which Paul had given to God for Philemon's past good deeds, would encourage him to do one more, and one that, no doubt would tax his love supply, viz., to receive back, as a brother, a robber-slave. Yet, what Philemon had done led Paul to believe that he would do this also; so he "praises for what is past, and trusts for what is to come." Another thought is here, namely, that **good deeds done in one place may be powerfully felt in another**; that what is done in one age, may be graciously fruitful in succeeding ages. When Philemon refreshed the hearts of these Colossian saints he little thought that his action would give "joy and comfort" to Paul his friend, far away in a Roman prison. A small pebble cast into a lake will start circles which, ever-widening, will reach its banks, however far apart. In like manner the smallest deeds and words, good or bad, have an expanding influence. **What is done or said here, may be carried by the winds like seeds to the ends of the earth, to make or mar, to gladden or sadden other souls.**

**William MacDonald** echoes this same idea - No one lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. Our actions affect others. We cannot measure the range of our influence. We have limitless potential for good or for evil..

**Believer's Study Bible** has an interesting note on Paul's use of [splanchnon](#) for hearts - In Philemon 1:7, translated "hearts," rhetorically prepares Philemon for his request. [Splanchnon](#) is also used in Philemon 1:12 and Philemon 1:20. This word came to be used for the inner man and the seat of the emotions. The idea seems to be that since Philemon refreshes the heart of the saints (Philemon 1:7), and since Onesimus is Paul's very heart (Philemon 1:12), then in order to refresh Paul's heart, Philemon must refresh Onesimus (Philemon 1:20).

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**Comfort** ([3874](#)) [paraklesis](#) from [parakaleo](#) = beseech <> [pará](#) = side of + [kaleo](#) = call) refers to calling to one's side (and coming

alongside) or one's aid which can be for the purpose of providing solace, comfort, consolation, exhortation, encouragement. **Comfort** is from Latin **com** = with + **fortis** = strong, and means to invigorate, to enliven, to cheer, to strengthen one's mind when depressed, to give new vigor to one's spirits, to give strength or hope to another, to ease their grief or trouble. The well-rounded all-inclusive idea is that of encouragement, of aid given the needy person, whether it be consolation, exhortation, or supplication.

**Hearts** (476) **splagchnon** originally referred to the upper abdominal viscera especially the intestines, which the ancients regarded as the seat of affections and emotions, such as anger and love. Figuratively, it refers to the inward parts indicating the breast or heart as the seat of emotions and passions. This word is always in the plural in the NT. The phrase "I feel it in the pit of my stomach" is a modern parallel. And we all know how that feels! So **splagchnon** refers to that deep, internal caring comparable to the modern expressions of deep feeling such as "broken-hearted" or "gut-wrenching".

**Saints** (40) **hagios** - set apart ones, separated ones, sanctified ones, holy ones. It is literally a holy one and properly means different, set apart, distinct, holy. **Hagios** describes one who is set apart for or by God and can be brought near or into God's holy presence. Its fundamental idea is separation, consecration, devotion to the service of Deity, sharing in God's purity and abstaining from earth's defilement.

**Saints** have been supernaturally set apart (sanctified by the Holy Spirit, 1Pe 1:2+, 2Th 2:13, Ro 15:16+, Acts 20:32+, Acts 26:18+, 1 Cor 1:30, 1Co 6:11+) for a special purpose (cp Ep 2:10+ - see also [God's Masterpiece](#), Mt 5:16+, Php 2:15+), set apart from the world (Gal 6:14+, cp Jas 4:4+, 1 Jn 2:15+, 1 Jn 2:16+, 1 Jn 2:17+), the power of [Sin](#) and the [fallen flesh](#) (Ro 6:6+, Ro 6:11+, Ro 6:12, 13, 6:14+) and the dominion of the [devil](#) (Col 1:13+, Acts 26:18+, Heb 2:14, 15+) and unto God (Ro 14:7, 8, 9+).

**Refreshed** (373) **anapauo** from **ana** = again, back, or even as intensifying the meaning of the verb + **pauo** = to cease or give rest) means (1) to cause someone to gain relief (by resting), refreshment, intermission from toil ( LXX use = 1Chr 22:18, Mt 11:28, 1Co 16:18, 2Co 7:13, Philemon 1:7, 20) (2) in the middle voice meaning to take bodily rest, as in sleep (Mt 26:45, Mk 14:41, 6:31 Septuagint - LXX use = Ex 23:12) and (3) to rest upon an object (1Pe 4:14). **Anapauo** means to rest or take a rest in a physical sense or also means to cause to rest, to calm, to give "inner" rest, to comfort or to refresh.

In general terms, **anapauo** can refer to: (1) Physical rest - As when one gains relief from a busy time by resting as in Mk 6:31. When Judas came to betray Jesus, He questioned why His disciples were resting (asleep, Mt 26:45, Mk 14:41). (2) Spiritual rest - As in Mt 11:28. In a sense the resting of the Spirit upon believers (1Pe 4:14) is a metaphorical description of His presence with the believer who believers who are suffering for Christ. In His parable of the rich farmer (Lk 12:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23), Jesus contrasts rest with anxiety about this life and its attendant fear of being without earthly possessions (which usually end up "possessing" the possessor!). In the parable, the "certain rich man" thought that he could "rest" in the fact that he had earthly goods, but Jesus shattered this false hope (for him and for all who trust in earthly possessions) by pointing out that true rest comes from knowing that the Father in heaven cares for us (Lk 12:24) 28, 30, 31) and will provide all we need (cp Php 4:19). This idea of spiritual rest is also seen in the refreshment (refresh in English = to restore or give new strength or energy to, to invigorate, to relieve after fatigue, to reanimate after depression, to revive what is drooping, to restore or maintain by renewing supply) in one's life by other believers (1Co 16:17, 18, 2Co 7:13, Philemon 1:7, 20). Does your presence refresh the saints or exhaust the saints?

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**ILLUSTRATION** from Brian Bell - Refreshing love! - The legend is told of a desert wanderer who found a crystal spring of unsurpassed freshness. The water was so pure he decided to bring some to his king. Barely satisfying his own thirst, he filled a leather bottle with the clear liquid and carried it many days beneath the desert sun before he reached the palace. When he finally laid his offering at the feet of his sovereign, the water had become stale and rank due to the old container in which it had been stored. But the king would not let his faithful subject even imagine that it was unfit for use. He tasted it with expressions of gratitude and delight, and sent away the loyal heart filled with gladness. After he had gone, others sampled it and expressed their surprise that the king had even pretended to enjoy it. "Ah!" said he, "it was not the water he tasted, but the love that prompted the offering." Many times our service is marked by multiplied imperfections, but the Master looks at our motives and says "It is good."

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**Philemon 1:7 - Rob Morgan - "R" Stands for Refresh** - The word "refresh" — I want to take you on a little tour of this word in the Bible.

- In Genesis 18, Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day, and he looked up and saw three men standing nearby. He hurried to meet them and he said in verses 4-5: Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way. Abraham understood that people traveling during the

hottest time of the day needed to pull off at rest stops. They needed some water and food and rest in the shade.

- In Exodus 23, the Lord gave some commandments about the Sabbath day, one day in seven, which was to be set aside as a day of rest. Ex 23:12 says: Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed. It's important to build periods of time into our weekly schedule in which our strength and our spirits can be replenished.
- In 2 Samuel 16, we have the story of King David being chased out of his capital city of Jerusalem because of a rebellion led by Prince Absalom. Verse 14 says, The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted, and there he refreshed himself. Sometimes we can't avoid growing exhausted, but it's dangerous to stay that way. Sometimes even in the middle of a crisis such as David faced, we have to pull off at rest stops to replenish our inner resources.
- One of the ways we replenish our inner resources is with Scripture, which brings me to the next verse – Psalm 19:7: The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.
- In the New International Version I'm using for this message, the next time this word occurs is in the Twenty-third Psalm: He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul.
- Proverbs 11:25 says: A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.
- In Jeremiah 31:25 the Lord said, I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.
- On the day of Pentecost in Acts 3, Peter said, Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.
- The apostle Paul said of his friends in 1 Corinthians 16:18: For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.
- He told Philemon: You, brother, have refreshed the hearts of God's people.

God made us to need constant replenishing. He did not make us to be perpetual motion machines. He could have done that, but He didn't. I don't know what it's going to be like in eternity, but here on this earth there is a continual cycle between expenditure and intake. We expend energy, we become drained, we pull off at a rest stop, we refuel, we're replenished, then we can work some more. That's the cycle of productivity, of life; and it's terribly important to keep the right balance between work and rest. We have to learn to replenish our resources and be periodically refreshed. This is the cycle God established at the Creation when He worked for six days and then rested on the seventh. He Himself didn't need to be replenished, of course, but He was establishing a pattern for us. If you are not refreshing and replenishing your energy through adequate rest, you'll eventually suffer some kind of breakdown.

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**Philemon 1:7 - Somebody Forgets** - A little fellow in the ghetto was teased by one who said, "If God loves you, why doesn't he take care of you? Why doesn't God tell someone to bring you shoes and a warm coat and better food?" The little lad thought for a moment then with tears starting in his eyes, said, "I guess He does tell somebody, but somebody forgets." God's plan is to care through His followers and that caring is the fruit of goodness.

**Philemon 1:8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper,**

**Arthur Way** - And so, though in Christ's Name I might, without any misgiving, enjoy upon you a thing which it is but fitting that you should do,

KJV Philemon 1:8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

BGT Philemon 1:8 Δι πολλῶν ἐν Χριστῷ παρηγοῶν ἔχω πεισθεῖν σοι τὸ ὀρθόν

NET Philemon 1:8 So, although I have quite a lot of confidence in Christ and could command you to do what is proper,

CSB Philemon 1:8 For this reason, although I have great boldness in Christ to command you to do what is right,

ESV Philemon 1:8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required,

NIV Philemon 1:8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do,

NLT Philemon 1:8 That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do.

NRS Philemon 1:8 For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty,

NJB Philemon 1:8 Therefore, although in Christ I have no hesitations about telling you what your duty is,

NAB Philemon 1:8 Therefore, although I have the full right in Christ to order you to do what is proper,

YLT Philemon 1:8 Wherefore, having in Christ much boldness to command thee that which is fit --

MIT Philemon 1:8 Consequently, I have much boldness in Christ to direct you to meet your obligation.

- **Therefore, though I have enough confidence:** 2Co 3:12 10:1,2 11:21 1Th 2:2,6
- **to order you to do what is proper:** 2Co 10:8

## PAUL BYPASSES HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

**Therefore** - Term of conclusion. **Swindoll** says "Paul pivots to his main purpose with the use of the word therefore, which connects what precedes with what follows: "In light of your Christlike character, Philemon, I want to ask something of you." **Scroggie** adds **therefore** "connects what follows, with the preceding verse and paragraph (Philemon 1:4-7). It is as though Paul had said, "*I have heard of your love, and now to your love I appeal. You have by its exercise refreshed the hearts of the saints; and I am confident that you will continue so to do; making their need, and not your personal feeling, your ground of action.*"

**Scroggie** - All this time the Apostle had Onesimus in mind, and was preparing Philemon for the mention of his name, and the request he was about to make. This ingenuity and tact to secure the reception of the run-away slave are a recognition of how unpleasant some duties are, even to the best of God's people, and of the necessity of our being urged to these in the way best calculated to get them performed. All Christian duties are not pleasant, and any worthy means which can render the performance of them less distasteful, should be adopted. The Apostle who knew the hearts of others so well, because he so well understood his own, uses this argument. "You have done good ; there is good to be done. Your past kindnesses constitute a reasonable ground of expectation that you will not be unkind even to the most unworthy." That is the force of the "**therefore.**" In these two verses (Philemon 1:8-9) Paul is still approaching the matter which occasioned the letter, and it is instructive to notice how he does so. He here intimates that he is about to make a request, but does not yet say plainly what it is. What he does now say is "I might enjoin, but I prefer to entreat. Did I **enjoin** (order) I would be well within my right, and would have good reason for so doing, but I entreat on the strength of the highest principle of action supported by a personal plea."

**Though I have enough confidence (parrhesia) in Christ to order (epitasso) you to do what is proper (aneko)** - NLT paraphrases it "That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do." **NIV** = "although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do."

*To waive one's rights is, more often than not,  
a sign alike of strength and grace*

**Scroggie** - His RIGHT TO ENJOIN. "*I have all boldness in Christ to enjoin thee*" By "boldness" (CONFIDENCE) he means "freedom"; he is at liberty to command Philemon with reference to Onesimus. This right attaches to his Apostolic authority, a note which is struck early in most of his Epistles. He was commissioned and commanded of God to commission and command, and this prerogative of the apostle's was recognised. This right does not belong to the Christian minister today as it did to the apostles. Their commission was special, and limited to the life-period of that circle. But even with them, the right was not without limit and safeguard. Paul recognises this when he says "**in Christ.**" His freedom, liberty, boldness was "**in Christ.**" By Christ; he had been called; for Christ he had been set apart; and only in Christ did he exercise his ministry. These two words reveal both the scope and the limit of Paul's authority. If "**in Christ**" he had a right to command, then how commanding- was that right. If again his right was only "**in Christ,**" how careful must be not to presume upon it in the energy of the flesh.

**THOUGHT** - So in our manifold relations, carrying with them, as they do, certain rights, we should learn that the exercise of these rights is conditioned ; that the relations in which we stand to one another, should be regulated by our common or special relation to Christ; and that there are times, when, to insist on the exercise of our rights, **would betray a want of tact, if not indeed moral weakness.** Let the present case serve as illustration. Had Paul used his apostolic authority, and commanded Philemon to take back Onesimus, in all probability he would have failed of his object; or, had he succeeded, as to the outward fact, he certainly would

not have done so as to the inward spirit. To waive ones rights is, more often than not, a sign alike of strength and grace. ([Scroggie](#))

*There is a power in power restrained, in right reserved*

[Scroggie](#) on **to do what is proper** "Here again, his "boldness/" or liberty, has both its scope and its limit appointed. As to limit; Paul had no right in reason to command anything that was not "becoming (PROPER)" Not even apostolic authority could commend such a course to any enlightened person. But, on the other hand, as to scope; the reason that such a course as Paul had in mind was "befitting," would greatly support his apostolic right. The word ([aneko](#)) he here uses, translated "that which is befitting," occurs only twice again in the N. T. and both are in the Prison Epistles (Eph. 5:4: Col. 3:18). In all three instances the word has the force of what is, or is not " becoming " as to moral obligation. When Paul says it is "befitting" that Philemon receive back Onesimus, he means a great deal more than that it is eminently desirable that he should do so. He means that, as a Christian, Philemon is under moral obligation so to do, and that if he declines, he will be chargeable with a flagrant neglect of his duty. It was the strength of Paul's request that enabled him so readily to lay aside his authority, and make appeal to Philemon on the merits of the case. It is as though he had said, "There is no need for me to bring to bear my apostolic authority; the duty is so obvious, and your sense of obligation is so true, that the matter has but to be put before you, and, distasteful as it may be to the flesh, much as it may go against your grain, you will do your duty." Can we be trusted in this way? Have we this fine sense of what is morally "becoming"? Paul, then, could command, but he will not. It is not always well for us to do all that we can do. There is a power in power restrained, in right reserved. There are good and better ways of accomplishing desirable ends, and we should always choose the better.

[Brian Bell](#) - Why not use his apostolic authority? It would not help Philemon grow in grace or gain a real blessing from the experience. Law is a much weaker motivation than love! So, no pulling rank, no issuing orders, just an appeal on the basis of love!

**Spurgeon** - He says in effect, "I am an apostle, and I am your spiritual father, so I might have spoken with authority to you, and have said, 'It is your duty to do this;' but I am not going to do anything of the kind. I am going to plead with you, and beseech it of you as a kindness and a favor. Pay a loving tribute to my old age; and beside that, I am a prisoner shut up in the dungeon for Christ's sake; hear the clanking of my chains, and grant my request for love's sake." This is the best of pleading. Philemon's heart would be sure to yield to it.

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### **Philemon 1:1–25 Finding Strength in Submission**

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love.

Philemon 8–9

During the Reformation, when Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli were exchanging strong words about Biblical interpretations and ecclesiastical practices, Zwingli spent a troubled morning walking the mountain trails of his beloved Switzerland. From a distance he observed two goats making their way toward each other on a path barely stitched to the side of a cliff. It was obvious that these nimble creatures could not pass one another.

As the goats approached each other, each feinted a power move at the other in what looked like the beginning of a battle. In a surprise twist, however, one goat suddenly collapsed onto the narrow ledge so the other goat could walk over its back. Then each moved on.

Zwingli was impressed. Here was strength defined by submission. It allowed two opponents to survive a crisis so both could get on with more important things. Zwingli applied the lesson to his next encounter with Luther.

The same principle is evident in Paul's words to Philemon. Philemon's slave Onesimus had run away, met Paul in Rome and become a Christian. Now Paul was sending the slave back to his master, urging Philemon to receive Onesimus, not as mere property, but as a brother. Instead of butting heads with Philemon, Paul extended a hand of love. Was this a sign of weakness? Psychological manipulation?

Both possibilities and a variety of others enter a marital relationship. Sometimes we badger one another. Sometimes, like goats poised for battle on a mountain trail, we come close to butting heads. Sometimes we spit and snarl and lash out. Sometimes we sit together and lovingly hash things out.

What is helpful and healthy in good relationships is honesty. Not just truthfulness that blurts out every last thought, but self-awareness that is not deceptive. It is as important that I learn to be honest with myself as it is to be truthful with my partner. If Paul was in touch with his own thoughts and feelings when he wrote to Philemon, he could state his case without deploying manipulative or subversive tactics. He could focus on Philemon's well-being and circumstances while maintaining his own perspective.



Too often we allow our emotions to derail relationships because we are blinded by excessive self-importance. The strength of our emotions, especially when we are at odds with each other, inflates our tendency for self-preservation and diminishes our sense of the other's importance in our lives. We need to keep relationships personal and issues impersonal as we build faithfulness with one another.

Disagreements are inevitable in any relationship. But the ways in which we work through them can bind us more tightly together in love. Paul's kindness to Philemon offers a very good example to follow.

Wayne Brouwer

Let's Talk

What do we tend to disagree about? What happens in our relationship whenever that topic comes up? How do our feelings get involved?

When we disagree, does one of us generally dominate the other? What is dangerous about that? How could we change that pattern?

How do we show our respect for one another when we disagree about something? If we videotaped one of our arguments and showed it to a friend or a marriage counselor, what would they say? (Strength in Submission)

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### James Smith - BESEECH. Philemon 1: 8-10

Note the intensity of feeling apparent by Paul's use and repetition of the strong word "beseech." But pray also note the Apostle's great wisdom in waiving his authority to command.

**I. Paul's Authority** (Philemon 1:8). "Therefore, though I might with Christ's authority speak very freely and order you to do what is fitting, it is for love's sake that—instead of that— ... I entreat you" (W.).

Paul had authority to command Philemon to reinstate Onesimus, because

- 1st. He was an Apostle.
- 2nd. He was Philemon's spiritual father.
- 3rd. Philemon was an office-bearer under Paul.

**II. Paul's Wisdom** (Philemon 1:9).

Paul wisely decided, in this case, not to exercise his authority, but to appeal to their mutual love, and to his aged and suffering condition. Elder brethren, and Christian leaders in Churches, would be well advised to more frequently emulate Paul's example, and to take care that their responsible position does not create a permanent, officious, domineering, autocratic, and dictatorial spirit. Such can easily be developed. Note the frequency in Paul's Pastoral Epistles of his commendation of a "gentle" spirit. There is a world of wisdom in that exhortation.

**III. Paul's Success** (Philemon 1:10).

There is no doubt whatever that Paul succeeded in his plea. His skill in presenting his case, and, above all, his gentle, loving entreaties were overwhelming. More success would be granted in many difficult Assembly and Church matters if Paul's example were more frequently copied.

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### Philemon 1:8-19 [Another Chance](#)

[You] have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. —Colossians 3:10

For almost 100 years, a huge piece of flawed Carrara marble lay in the courtyard of a cathedral in Florence, Italy. Then, in 1501, a young sculptor was asked to do something with it. He measured the block and noted its imperfections. In his mind, he envisioned a young shepherd boy.

For 3 years, he chiseled and shaped the marble skillfully. Finally, when the 18-foot towering figure of David was unveiled, his student exclaimed to Michelangelo, "Master, it lacks only one thing—speech!"

Onesimus was like that flawed marble. He was an unfaithful servant when he fled from his master Philemon. But while on the run he came to know the Master Sculptor. As a changed man, he served God faithfully and was invaluable to Paul's ministry. When Paul

sent him back to Philemon, he commended him as one “who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me” (Philemon 1:11). He asked Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother (Philemon 1:16).

Paul knew what it meant to be given another chance after past wrongs (Acts 9:26, 27, 28). He knew personally the transformation God can accomplish. Now he saw it in the life of Onesimus. The Lord can chisel His image on our flawed lives and make us beautiful and useful too. — Albert Lee (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Christ takes each sin, each pain, each loss,  
And by the power of His cross  
Transforms our brokenness and shame  
So that our lives exalt His name.  
—D. De Haan

Our rough edges must be chipped away  
to bring out the image of Christ.

### **Philemon 1:9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—**

**Arthur Way** - Yet by our love do I appeal to you instead, and plead with you. I plead, not with authority, but simply as Paul, an old, old man and now too I plead from a prison cell, where I lie for Christ Jesus' sake.

KJV Philemon 1:9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

BGT Philemon 1:9 δι τ ν γ πην μ λλον παρακαλ , τοιο τος ν ς Πα λος πρεσβ της νυν δ κα δ σμιος Χριστο ησο .

NET Philemon 1:9 I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love— I, Paul, an old man and even now a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus—

CSB Philemon 1:9 I appeal to you, instead, on the basis of love. I, Paul, as an elderly man and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus,

ESV Philemon 1:9 yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you-- I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus--

NIV Philemon 1:9 yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul--an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus--

NLT Philemon 1:9 But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me-- Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.

NRS Philemon 1:9 yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love-- and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

NJB Philemon 1:9 I am rather appealing to your love, being what I am, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

NAB Philemon 1:9 I rather urge you out of love, being as I am, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus.

YLT Philemon 1:9 because of the love I rather entreat, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ;

MIT Philemon 1:9 But rather than do that, I encourage you to do what I am about to mention because of love. Such a one as I am, Paul, an old man now, and a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

- **yet for love's sake:** Ro 12:1 2Co 5:20 6:1 Eph 4:1 Heb 13:19 1Pe 2:11
- **Paul:** Ps 71:9,18 Pr 16:31 Isa 46:4
- **now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus:** Philemon 1:1 Eph 3:1 4:1

## THE BASIS OF PAUL'S APPEAL IS LOVE

**Yet** - Introduces the contrast between what he could do based on apostolic authority and what he instead chooses to do based on love. "I have all liberty to order (command)....yet, I rather appeal."

**for love's (agape) sake I rather appeal (parakaleo) to you** - Paul defaults to [agape](#) love, not to apostolic authority. In short, Paul is not appealing based on the fact that he is an apostle (although he could "pull rank" on Philemon).

*Love must ever remain the greatest motive to noblest action*

**Scroggie** - We must all feel, as Philemon did, that his request is much more powerful than his command could have been ; that his call is more compelling than any charge. Consider here THE RULING PRINCIPLE OF His ENTREATY. "**For love's sake.**" It would seem that the reference is not to Philemon's love for Paul, or Paul's for Philemon, but to **love as a Christian principle of action, at all times and everywhere**. The Apostle had just been commending Philemon's **love**, and thanking God for it. He will not now command it, but **appeal** to it, confident that nothing more is necessary. Love must ever remain the greatest motive to noblest action, just because it carries with it the heart as well as the reason. **Love** does not stop to nicely calculate the strict requirements of duty, but acts spontaneously and generously.

*It is not duty that inspires us to love, but love that moves us to duty.*

**Maclaren** says : "*Authority is the weapon of a weak man, who is doubtful of his own power to get himself obeyed, or of a selfish one, who seeks for mechanical submission rather than for the fealty o willing hearts. Love is the weapon of a strong' man who can cast aside the trappings of superiority, and is never loftier than when he descends, nor more absolute than when he abjures authority, and appeals with love to love.*" Loyalty to duty may save our Christian countenance in the eyes of the world, but **only wholehearted love to Christ will make the Christian life attractive to men**. It is to such **love** that Christ appeals. He does not say: *If ye keep my commandments ye will love me*"; but, "*If ye love me keep my commandments.*" It is not duty that inspires us to **love**, but **love** that moves us to duty. Paul understands the heart too well to mistake the note he should now strike. A true man will do his duty. A true Christian will do more. The one will be moved by a sense of obligation. The other, by the divine impulse of love, it is love that gets things done when everything else fails.

**Guzik** - A loving appeal is often better than an authoritative command. Paul wasn't hesitant to command when the situation demanded it (1 Corinthians 5:4-5), but in wisdom he knew when to use the loving appeal.

**Since I am such a person as Paul, the aged** - I think Way's translation picks up the gist of Paul's appeal - "I plead, not with authority, but simply as Paul, an old, old man." He is appealing here to Philemon's compassion and sympathy (old and in prison) before he makes the actual appeal regarding Onesimus.

**Scroggie** - **THE PERSONAL PLEA IN THIS THIS ENTREATY.** "*Being such an one as Paul the aged, and now a prisoner also of Christ Jesus.*" It will be a sorry day when [sentiment](#) counts for little or nothing in our choice of action. Sentiment is not sentimentality. [Sentiment](#) is emotion awakened by things that appear to have worth. It is to [sentiment](#) that Paul now appeals, and his appeal is legitimate. He has said : "*Philemon, I am about to ask of you something which I have a right to command. It is something eminently becoming, and I appeal, not to your sense of duty, but to your Christian love. In considering my request, will you please remember that I am an old man, and am in prison far from home.*" This last touch is an illustration of consummate artlessness. The power of it is at once felt. It is an appeal to [sentiment](#) as far from being sentimental as anything could well be. Paul's first plea is on the count of his old age. He was not old, if years be reckoned, being only about sixty, but he was worn by work and suffering. At any time the end might come. His life was behind him, and his reward just before. But what had that to do with Philemon receiving back Onesimus? Paul puts it into the scale as something that should weigh with his friend. It is as though he said, "*Not much longer shall I be here to make requests of you; not much longer will you have opportunity to give me joy and comfort. I am old and tired*" The **appeal** on the ground of old age is one that might not be so effective today, when, alas, regard and respect for the aged are not shown as once they were. With Philemon, at any rate, it would count. There is an alternative reading which substitutes "ambassador "for " aged," and though this is supported by Lightfoot, it is not followed by the Revisers, except in the margin;and impresses one as being out of harmony with the spirit and purpose of this appeal.

**and now also a prisoner (desmios) of Christ Jesus** - Paul is appealing from a prison cell, not because he has written multiple NT epistles. We see his humility in his appeal. Paul reiterates he is a **prisoner of Christ Jesus** and not the powerful Roman Empire.

**Scroggie** - Paul's second plea is that he is a prisoner. "A prisoner also." It is sad enough to be in prison for the best of causes when one is young, but it is a great trial when one is old. Of course, Paul was not at this time in a cell, but in "his own hired house" and at liberty to receive his friends (Acts 28). (**ED: NOT SURE THIS STATEMENT IS CORRECT**) Yet it was captivity, and everyone loves

his freedom. Philemon was free and Paul was not, and the elderman puts in that plea. Yet, he does not groan about his condition; rather, he glories in it, for he says, I am, "A prisoner of Christ Jesus." This is how he began his letter, and he returns to it more than once. The Jews and the Romans must take the responsibility for his being there, yet, behind all human hatred is the divine hand. Paul was in prison at Rome in the plan of God. This plea therefore is not only pathetic but also majestic; it is not only tender, but also\* heroic; and would go a long way to secure Paul's object. Then, do not let us despise personal and secondary motives in order "to reinforce duty which is binding from other and higher considerations." "If Paul can get his friend to do the right thing by the help of these subsidiary motives, still, it is the right thing; and the **appeal** to these motives will do Philemon no harm, and, if successful, will do both him and Onesimus a great deal of good." Now, Paul is ready to mention the objectionable name. **He has taken 133 words out of a total of 333, to get directly to the matter in hand.** But this is not mere verbiage; **every word counts.** Elihu, in the Great Drama, takes 52 lines to say that he is going to speak. But he was a young man, and Paul was an old man, that perhaps accounts for it.

**Swindoll** quips that Paul "doesn't begin with "Thus saith St. Paul the Apostle, handpicked by the Lord Jesus Christ, recipient of visions, author of inspired Scripture!" Rather, he refers to himself as "Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus" (Philemon 1:9). And he doesn't order Philemon to obey, but instead he appeals to him, twice using the word [parakaleo](#), a word of gentle encouragement (Philemon 1:9-10)."

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### Philemon 1:1-9 [Paul, The Aged](#)

Being such a one as Paul, the aged, ... I appeal to you for my son Onesimus. —Philemon 1:9-10

Celebrating my 60th birthday really changed my perspective on life— I used to think people in their sixties were "old." Then I started counting the number of productive years I might have left and set the number at 10. I went along with this dead-end kind of thinking until I remembered a very productive co-worker who was 85. So I sought him out to ask what life after 60 was like. He told me of some of the wonderful ministry opportunities the Lord had given him over the last 25 years.

The apostle Paul, referring to himself as "aged" in Philemon 1:9, really resonates with my own sense of aging: "Being such a one as Paul, the aged, ... I appeal to you for my son Onesimus" (vv.9-10). Paul was asking Philemon to take back his runaway servant Onesimus. Some scholars believe Paul was in his late forties or early fifties when he wrote this—certainly not a senior citizen by today's standards. But life expectancy in those days was much shorter. Yet despite awareness of his mature years, Paul went on to serve the Lord for several more years.

While we may experience physical or other kinds of limitations, what really matters is that we continue doing what we can for the Lord until He calls us Home. -- Dennis Fisher (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Think not your work of no account  
Although it may be small;  
The Lord marks well your faithfulness  
When you give Him your all.  
—D. De Haan

God can use you at any age—if you are willing.

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### Robert Hawker - Such an one as Paul the aged.—Philemon 9.

AND what was Paul in the moment here represented? Verily an aged servant of his Master, but not retired from the scene of action. Paul, though grown old in the Lord's service, was still as hotly engaged as ever, in the Lord's battle. Art thou such an one, my soul, as Paul was? Then learn from hence, that however many, or however heavy, former campaigns have been, there is no rest for thee this side Jordan, no more than for Paul; no winter quarters for the true soldiers of Jesus Christ. Until thy Captain undress thee for the grave, the holy armour in which he hath clad thee is not to be taken off Art thou such an one as Paul the aged? Then, like Paul, see that thou art strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. And how sweet the thought! Thy Jesus, who hath borne thee from the womb, and carried thee from the belly, knows well the burthen of thy increasing years, and all the infirmities belonging to them, and will carry both thee and them. Yes, my soul, those very infirmities which the tenderest-hearted friend sometimes feels impatient at, and even thyself, thou knowest not how to bear, Jesus feels, Jesus commiserates, Jesus will soften! He that hath carried all thy sins, carrieth also all thy sorrows. Doth he not say so? Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you, Isaiah 46:3, 4. Precious Lamb of God! henceforth I cast all my burdens upon thee. Thou hast never called thyself, I AM, for nothing. Thou hast indeed made me, and new-made me. Thou hast borne all my sins in thine own body on the tree. Art thou not both the Alpha and the Omega, both the Author and Finisher, of my salvation? Oh,

yes: thou hast been every thing to me, and for me, from the womb of creation; borne me on eagle's wings; made me, and new-made me; redeemed me, in a thousand redemptions, and been better to me than all my fears! What, indeed, hast thou not done for me? And now then, being such an one as Paul the aged, shall I now doubt, or now fear, when every pain, and every cross, and every new assault from sin, and Satan, bid me go to Jesus. Oh! for grace, ever to keep in view what thou hast said and done, and what thou hast promised. Yes, yes: it is enough; Jesus hath said, "even to your old age I am he." The same I have been, the same I will ever be. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. Shout, my soul, and cry out Hallelujah! He that hath been my first, will be my last; my strength, my song, my salvation for ever! (The Poor Man's Morning Portion)

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## Leading with Love

Read: Philemon 8–18

I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. Philemon 9

In his book *Spiritual Leadership*, J. Oswald Sanders explores the qualities and the importance of tact and diplomacy. "Combining these two words," Sanders says, "the idea emerges of skill in reconciling opposing viewpoints without giving offense and without compromising principle."

During Paul's imprisonment in Rome, he became the spiritual mentor and close friend of a runaway slave named Onesimus, whose owner was Philemon. When Paul wrote to Philemon, a leader of the church in Colossae, asking him to receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ, he exemplified tact and diplomacy. "Although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. . . . [Onesimus] is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord" (Philem. 8–9, 16).

Leaders who serve will serve as good leaders.

Paul, a respected leader of the early church, often gave clear commands to the followers of Jesus. In this case, though, he appealed to Philemon on the basis of equality, friendship, and love. "I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary" (v. 14).

In all our relationships, may we seek to preserve harmony and principle in the spirit of love.

Father in heaven, in all our relationships, give us grace and wisdom to be wise leaders, parents, and friends.

Leaders who serve will serve as good leaders.

By David C. McCasland

INSIGHT Paul's appeal of love to Philemon was rooted in his spiritual parenthood. In other letters, Paul spoke of himself as a father to those he brought to Christ (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Gal. 4:19). In this personal letter, Paul noted that Onesimus had become his spiritual son (v. 10). Then at the end of his letter, to reinforce his appeal, Paul reminded Philemon that he too was his spiritual son (v. 19). Paul used his fatherly authority to bring about reconciliation. It was the appeal of a father's love and an appeal to family love for the reconciliation of two spiritual siblings. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

### **Philemon 1:10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,**

**Arthur Way** - I plead with you on behalf of my child, for him whose father I have, here in this prison, become -- my child Onesimus.

KJV Philemon 1:10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

BGT Philemon 1:10 παρακαλᾷ σε περὶ τοῦ μωτκνοῦ, ὃν γέννησα ἐν τῷ δεσμοῦ, ὃν σίμων,

NET Philemon 1:10 I am appealing to you concerning my child, whose spiritual father I have become during my imprisonment, that is, Onesimus,

CSB Philemon 1:10 appeal to you for my son, Onesimus. I fathered him while I was in chains.

ESV Philemon 1:10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.

NIV Philemon 1:10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

NLT Philemon 1:10 I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison.

NRS Philemon 1:10 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment.

NJB Philemon 1:10 I am appealing to you for a child of mine, whose father I became while wearing these chains: I mean Onesimus.

NAB Philemon 1:10 I urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment,

YLT Philemon 1:10 I entreat thee concerning my child -- whom I did beget in my bonds -- Onesimus,

MIT Philemon 1:10 I appeal to you in behalf of my "child" whom I fathered while bound as a prisoner. I speak of Onesimus,

GWN Philemon 1:10 appeal to you for my child Onesimus Useful. I became his spiritual father here in prison.

- **I appeal to you for my child Onesimus:** 2Sa 9:1-7 18:5 19:37,38 Mk 9:17 1Ti 1:2 Tit 1:4
- **Onesimus:** Col 4:9
- **whom I have begotten in my imprisonment:** 1Co 4:15 Ga 4:19

## PAUL'S APPEAL TO PHILEMON ON BEHALF OF ONESIMUS

**Scroggie** - **DISCLOSURE OF THE OBJECT OF THE LETTER.** (Philemon 1:10-19). Relative to the length of the letter, the Apostle has been a long time coming to the point he had in view in writing it. But he has now reached it, and definitely asks Philemon to take Onesimus back. The disclosure of the object of the letter, occupying verses 10-19, is in four parts, as follows: (a) The Request (10-12). (b) The Desire (13-14). (c) The Situation (15-17). (d) The Promise (18-19). These verses it will repay us to consider in detail, so full are they not only of "the milk of human kindness," but of principles far-reaching in their effects upon our life and institutions.

**Scroggie** - (a) The Request (10-12). The most natural parts of this section are those furnished by these three verses, each of which throws into prominence one idea. We shall speak of that idea in verse ten as 1. FATHER AND SON. (10). "*I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds Onesimus.*" Let us notice here, first of all 1. PAUL'S LOVING SOLICITATION FOR ONESIMUS. "*I beseech thee for . . . Onesimus*" The extraordinary tactfulness which the Apostle has displayed thus far in the letter, is here also in evidence. **Indeed this is the critical sentence in his letter.** He now ventures to mention the **offensive name**, but everything may depend upon how he does it. The order of the words in the original text indicates his hesitation to write it; and then, he puts it last, not first. (**ED: ONESIMUS IS LAST WORD IN THE SENTENCE**). Perhaps nowhere is the Apostle more thoroughly Christian than here; and by Christian, I mean, like Christ. Had Onesimus been the most distinguished person of his day or Paul's own son gone astray and needing to be pleaded for, the Apostle could not have exhibited more earnest and loving solicitation. But Onesimus was not distinguished, except for crime; and he was at the other end of the social scale from Paul, poor ignorant, and hated; yet this man, whose name was to flame down nineteen hundred years, pours upon this slave his love, as the woman poured her ointment upon Jesus. That is a product only of the Christian faith. The famous letter of Pliny to Sabinianus on behalf of an offending servant of the latter, is curt and cold in comparison with Paul's to Philemon. "*The one is based throughout on a religious motive; the other, on a casual and somewhat contemptuous feeling of kindness.*" It is only as that love of Christ, which led Him to die for the lowest, is shed abroad in our hearts (Ro 5:5), that we shall think of and feel for the very least of His ransomed ones, as Paul did for Onesimus. This is one of the glories of Christianity, and something which the world cannot imitate or counterfeit.

**I appeal** (**parakaleo** - I am appealing) **to you for my child** (**teknon**) **Onesimus, whom I have begotten** (**gennaō**) **in my imprisonment** (**desmos**) - This is Paul's first mention of Onesimus. One wonders what emotions flooded Philemon as he read this sentence for he had not heard that name for some time? First, note Paul's tact is to **appeal**, not to demand (or command) as an apostle. Second, note the pronouns "**my**" and "**I**" linking Paul himself closely to Onesimus, who clearly had been born again as the result of Paul's evangelism. Paul did not literally father a child while in prison!

We often talk today about prison ministry (which is a wonderful ministry in which to engage) where those on the outside minister to those on the inside, but here Paul gives us an account of a prison ministry from one on the inside to one on the outside! Instead of bemoaning his depressing conditions and unjustified imprisonment, Paul takes the "high road" and continues his labor for the Lord in winning converts, yet not him "but the grace of God with" him. (1Cor 15:10)

**Scroggie** - Further, by this verse we are taught, 2. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF SPIRITUAL RELATIONS. "*I beseech thee for my child.*" The Apostle might have spoken of Onesimus in many ways at this point, but he selects a word, than which, none could

possibly be more binding or endearing. How great this utterance is we may judge by imagining Paul to have written, " *I beseech thee for thy slave.*" That, of course, would immediately have recalled to the memory of Philemon all that was offensive, and might have steeled his heart against anything that the Apostle had further to say. But Paul does not yet relate Onesimus to Philemon, but only to himself, and that, in the most endearing way. There are two words in the N.T. translated "child "; one [pais](#), means, a child in legal relation, and is translated "servant" in many places (e.g. Luke 15:26). The other [teknon](#), means, a child by natural descent; and is derived from the verb [tikto](#), to bear, to bring forth children. You will readily see that the latter word points to a relation much more vital and dear than the former, and it is the latter word which Paul uses here. He follows it up immediately by the words "whom I have begotten" ; and this verb is the one used of women bringing forth children ([gennaō](#)). There was not a word in his vocabulary which could have expressed more powerfully Paul's estimate of the new relation, or more tenderly his own affection for the runaway slave. Such an utterance would altogether disarm Philemon of objection to receive back Onesimus. He would feel that to refuse to recognise the new situation and relation would almost dechristianise him. But the significance of this utterance passes beyond Paul and Onesimus and Philemon, to us. It tells of the sovereignty of spiritual relations; generally, of the vital relation of all believers to one another; and particularly, of the closeness of the bond which binds the soul-winner to the souls he wins. This conviction and affection were ever strong in Paul. Writing to the Galatians he says : "*My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you* " (Gal 4:19). How different the sentiment of Moses recorded in Nu 11:12. The whole difference between two dispensations is reflected in these passages. When shall we learn that "*in Christ Jesus is neither Jew nor Greek; bond nor free?*" Distinctions of race, education, social standing, or wealth, cannot sever or weaken the link which binds all Christians to one another. Britisher and African, learned and ignorant, rich and poor, prince and peasant, master and slave, are brothers and sisters "in Christ Jesus." Christianity recognises the fact of social distinctions, but does away with the tyranny and offensiveness of them' in the life of the Church. Spiritual relations are sovereign.

*A man's influence may be wider as his sphere is more circumscribed*

[Scroggie](#) - on **whom I have begotten ([gennaō](#)) in my imprisonment ([desmos](#))** - From it this verse teaches still more. From it we may learn of, 3. THE FRUITFUL POSSIBILITIES OF TROUBLE. One need not be idle because he is bound. When God's servants are bound, His Spirit and Word are not; spiritual children may then be born to them. Captivity may be eminently liberating, and affliction wonderfully productive. A man's influence may be wider as his sphere is more circumscribed. In bonds we may give birth to Christian brethren. **If we believe that our lives are plans of God, we shall look differently at our troubles, and more often turn them into triumphs.** It was good that Paul was imprisoned, if only to give birth to Onesimus, and to write this letter which has so profoundly affected the thought and action of Christendom. **Our very death-throes may become birth-pangs; our crushing may mean a new creation.**

**Spurgeon** - "He came to hear me preach in the prison. He has been listening to me while I am still a captive, and he has been given to me, as another son in the gospel, to be a comfort to me in my bonds. I beseech you for him."

[Guzik](#) - Paul often spoke of his converts as his "children." Timothy (1 Corinthians 4:17), Titus (Titus 1:4), the Corinthian Christians (1 Corinthians 4:14) and the Galatian Christians (Galatians 4:19) were each called Paul's "children."

"*All of us are Onesimuses!*"

-- Martin Luther

The slave Onesimus' conversion and Martin Luther's quote remind me of Paul's words in Romans 6 where he states "But thanks be to God that though **you were slaves ([doulos](#)) of Sin**, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed ([eleutheroō](#)) from **Sin**, you **became slaves ([doulos](#)) of righteousness.**" (Romans 6:17-18+)

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, Paul's emancipation proclamation begs the practical question - who is my master?

[David Guzik](#) has an interesting note - When Paul made this appeal on behalf of Onesimus, he followed deep traditions in Roman culture. There was an ancient Greek law (inherited by the Romans) allowing any escaped slave sanctuary at an altar. The altar could even be the hearth of a private family home; then the head of the family was obligated to give the slave protection while he tried to persuade him to return to his master. If the slave refused, the head of the family would put the slave up for auction and give the price for the slave to the former master. Paul gave Onesimus protection, and now was working the issue out with Philemon.

**R Kent Hughes** points out that "Onesimus was in big trouble, for he was guilty of two capital crimes: running away and theft. They were capital because they were sins against the existing social order. If allowed to spread, they would mean the demise of slavery and the Roman Empire, for the Empire was built on slavery. Rebellious slaves, if not eliminated, were at least branded on the forehead with F for Fugitivus (Fugitive) or CF for Cave Furem (Beware of thief!). Onesimus theoretically could have gotten both, if his master was in a *good* mood. Almost contemporary to this letter to Philemon, Pedanius Secundus, a wealthy Roman, was murdered by one of his 400 slaves. During the trial, Tacitus reports, the prosecution argued for the execution of all 400 slaves. The prosecution won, and the 400 were publicly executed as an example. In the hands of a cruel master, Onesimus could have been

subjected to a cruel death. Onesimus was in immense trouble. Slave hunters, with descriptions and warrants in hand, often mixed among the transient population of Rome. It is very probable that Onesimus used a pseudonym and at times even disguised himself. (Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon: The Fellowship of the Gospel and the Supremacy of Christ)

**Brian Bell** - The providence of God is amazing. A runaway slave jumps a ship from Greece to Italy (1700 mile journey). Hides out in the Metropolis of Rome "never to be found out". By the providence of God he runs into Paul, gets saved. Is now accountable to "do the right thing."

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**Begotten** (conceived) (1080) **gennao** from **genos** = offspring, in turn from **ginomai** = to become) means to beget, to bring forth, to give birth, to procreate a descendant, to produce offspring, to generate. To beget is spoken of men (Mt 1:2-16), whereas to bear is spoken of women. The passive voice means to be begotten or to be born. Gennao describes the commencement of life where previously none had existed. In fact most of the uses of gennao refer to biology (birth) but as noted some refer to spirituality (new birth). Gennao can refer literally to begetting or conceiving a child or figuratively to spiritually "begetting" a person, resulting in them finding new life when they are born again (Jn 3:3, 5) In a similar use Paul presents himself as the spiritual father of the Corinthians. (1Cor 4:15)

**Child** (5043) **teknon** from **tikto** = bring forth, bear children, be born) is strictly a child produced, male or female, son or daughter. **Teknon** was used in secular Greek writings as a form of familiar, tender or affectionate address to speak of one kindly even if they were adults referring to them as "my son" or "my child". In the NT, pupils or disciples are called **children** of their teachers, because the latter by their instruction nourish the minds of their pupils and mold their characters. (2Ti 1:2) **Teknon** takes on special theological significance when the Bible calls believers the **children of God** ([Click here](#) for NT uses of this wonderful phrase - note one use by Paul is not of those who are born again and uses **genos** -- "offspring" -- not **teknon** in the Greek text - see if you can determine which one is not referring to the born again members of the family of God) or more literally "born ones" of God. In using **teknon** in this context the NT is not saying believers are "childlike" but that we are members of God's family as thus heirs (Ro 8:17).

**Imprisonment** (chains) (1199) **desmos** from **deo** = to bind, fasten with chains) literally refers to bonds or the means of restraint such as by tying or fastening like a fetter (chain or shackle for the feet) speaks of "restriction of movement in the literal sense of "chains," and the metaphorical sense of "imprisonment" or "crippling disease." (Renn) **Desmos** in Jude 6 refers to "eternal chains" that keep fallen angels bound in darkness until the judgment day. As a physician, I love the picture of **desmos** in our English word **desmosome** which describes the material that binds one cell to another. In the early church fathers **desmos** was used of the "bond of love" (1 Cl 49:2), describing something that held people together in a common interest.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - The story is told of two brothers, convicted of stealing sheep, who were branded on the forehead with the letters ST, to indicate "sheep thief." One brother couldn't bear the stigma. He became bitter and moved away, never to return. The other brother chose a different course. He said, "I can't run from what I did, so I'll stay here and win back the respect of my neighbors." As the years passed, he built a solid reputation for integrity. One day a stranger saw him, now an old man, with the letters still on his forehead. He asked a townsman what they signified. "It happened a long time ago," said the villager. "I've forgotten the particulars, but I think the letters are an abbreviation for 'saint'" (Our Daily Bread, August, 1982)

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**Philemon 1:10** - C H Spurgeon - There are two passages in the Epistles which, when put together, have often amazed me. Paul compares himself both to a father and to a mother in the matter of the new birth: he says of one convert, "Whom I have begotten in my bonds" (Philemon 1:10), and of a whole church he says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). This is going very far, much further than modern orthodoxy would permit the most useful servant to venture. Yet it is language sanctioned, even dictated by the Spirit of God Himself, and therefore it is not to be criticized. Such mysterious power does God infuse into the instrumentality which He ordains that we are called "laborers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). This is at once the source of our responsibility and the ground of our hope. (from The Soul Winner)

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**Philemon 1:10-18 - MECHANICAL PIETY - J H Jowett** - THE Apostle Paul declares that benefits may be given in one of two ways—"of necessity" and "willingly." One is mechanical, the other is spontaneous. I once saw a little table-fountain playing in a drawing-room, but I heard the click of its machinery, and the charm was gone! It had to be wound up before it would play, and at frequent periods it "ran down." A little later I saw another fountain playing on a green lawn, and it was fed from the deep secret resources of the hills!

There is a generosity which is like the drawing-room fountain. If you listen you can hear the mechanical click, and a sound of friction, arising from murmuring and complaint. And there is a generosity which is like the fountain that is the child of the hills. It is clear, and sweet, and musical, and flows on through every season! One is "of necessity"; the other is "willingly." And "God loveth a cheerful



giver.”

And prayer can be of the same two contrary orders. One prayer is mechanical, it is hard, formal, metallic. The other is spontaneous, forceful, and irresistible. Listen to the Pharisee—“Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are.” It is the click of the machine! Listen to the publican—“God be merciful to me, a sinner!” It is the voice of the deeps.

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**Jon Courson** - Philemon 1:10 -- **BORROW [A Day's Journey](#)**

While he was chained to a Roman guard, Paul came into contact with a man named Onesimus who was a fugitive in the city of Rome, a runaway slave who had stolen goods from his master. It is possible that Paul somehow bumped into Onesimus in the marketplace and began to dialogue with him. It is also possible that Onesimus was apprehended and chained to the same guard as Paul. We are not exactly sure how the paths of Onesimus and Paul crossed, but cross they did.

Onesimus found there was no freedom in freedom itself, for although he was free from his master, he was still a slave to his own conscience, to his own sin. But Onesimus was to discover that although there is slavery in freedom—there is also freedom in slavery.

How?

Jesus calls all who are weary and heavy laden to voluntarily, willingly take His yoke upon them. And all who do, find freedom in their labor for Him. That's why Paul said, 'I am a bondsman—a slave by choice (Romans 1:1). Marriage proves this point, for it is, in a sense, slavery. And it can either be glorious or miserable, depending on with whom you are linked!

The question in this life is not whether or not you're yoked, but to whom are you yoked? If we are yoked to Jesus, we are yoked to the quintessentially excellent Master, to the One who loves us so much, to the One who's so good for us and so good to us.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Mickey Cohen was one of the most infamous gangsters of the fifties, and something of a publicity hound. On one occasion he visited an evangelistic meeting and there showed an interest in Christ. Christian leaders, realizing that Cohen's conversion could have a great influence upon others, visited him regularly. One night after a lengthy conversation on Revelation 3:20, he “opened the door of his life.” There were great expectations, but as the months passed there was no substantive change in the gangster's life. Finally his Christian friends confronted him. Cohen responded that “no one had told him he would have to give up his work or his friends. After all, there were Christian football players, Christian cowboys, Christian politicians; why not a Christian gangster?” Onesimus was not like that. Christ was everything to him, and he was totally transformed. Soon he became one of Paul's devoted disciples, doing whatever he could to ease his imprisonment—running errands, doing manual labor to help with expenses, counseling others. As Onesimus grew, the conviction that he must return to Philemon also grew. Perhaps he had heard of the Lord's words from the Sermon on the Mount: “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23, 24). Onesimus determined to make things right. (Hughes)

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**Philemon 1:11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.**

**Arthur Way** - Onesimus -- of little service was he to you in days gone by; but now both to you and to me may he do loyal service.

KJV John 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

BGT John 1:11 ε ς τ δια λθεν, κα ο διοι α τ ν ο παρ λαβον.

NET John 1:11 He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him.

CSB John 1:11 He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.

ESV John 1:11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

NIV John 1:11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

NLT John 1:11 He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.

NRS John 1:11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

NJB John 1:11 He came to his own and his own people did not accept him.

NAB John 1:11 He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him.

YLT John 1:11 to his own things he came, and his own people did not receive him;

MIT John 1:11 He came into his own possessions, and his own people did not accept him.

- **who formerly was useless to you:** Job 30:1,2 Mt 25:30 Lu 17:10 Ro 3:12 1Pe 2:10
- **but now is useful both to you and to me:** Lu 15:24,32 2Ti 4:11

#### Related Passages:

2 Timothy 4:11+ Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is **useful** to me for service.

## THE SUPERNATURAL TRANSFORMATION OF ONESIMUS

**Scroggie** - The thought in the next verse may be summarised as, II. PAST AND PRESENT. (11). "Who was once unprofitable to thee, But now is profitable to thee and me."

**Who formerly was useless ([achrestos](#)) to you, but now is useful ([euchrestos](#)) both to you and to me - Formerly was useless** is his "B.C." state, Before Christ. Onesimus (whose name means profitable) was **useless** to Philemon but because he is now a new creature in Christ (2Co 5:17+), he is useful to both Philemon and Paul.

**THOUGHT** - Were not every one of us (1) slaves (to sin) and (2) useless (to the Lord) when our condition was "B.C."? That's rhetorical of course! But now in Christ we are God's masterpiece "His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (USEFUL) for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Eph 2:10+). In 2Ti 2:21+ Paul speaks of the potential of every saint writing "if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, **useful ([euchrestos](#)) to the Master**, prepared for every good work." These truths beg the question am I living up to my potential in Christ (Php 4:13+)? Am I storing up for myself treasure in heaven (Mt 6:20+) like Robert Murray M'Cheyne who died at age 30 from typhus after visiting the sick?

**Robert Murray M'Cheyne** would "seal his letters with a sun going down behind the mountains, and the motto over it, '*The night cometh*'. (Jn 9:4KJV+) He felt that the time was short and studiously sought to deepen this impression on his mind. To solemnise his spirit for the Sabbath's services, he would visit some of his sick or dying hearers on the Saturday afternoon; as he once expressed it to the writer, 'Before preaching I like to look over the verge [of life]'. Having in himself a monitor that his own sun would go down early, he worked while it was day, and his avidity to improve every opportunity frequently brought on attacks of dangerous illness." (From [Recollections of Robert Murray M'Cheyne – Part 2](#) by James Hamilton)

*Nothing is really to profit that does not serve the Divine purpose,  
and is not "according to God's good pleasure."*

**Scroggie** - Attention is here called to, 1. THE UNPROFITABLENESS or THE UNCONVERTED. Paul speaks of Onesimus as having been "unprofitable:" This refers, probably, not only to the offensive act, but to his whole service, reflecting, as it did, his character. This is another tactful touch. Philemon might be beginning to think that Paul had not taken a serious enough view of the slave's offense; but Paul anticipates that, and makes it plain that he is fully alive to the sinfulness of the man's sin. He was a good-for-nothing, and a bad-for-anything. **In thus describing Onesimus, Paul describes us all.** Our Lord spoke even of those who did their duty as "unprofitable" (Luke 17:10); how worthless then, must they be who do not even that! We have "together become unprofitable." The verb **achrestos** occurs here only (Ro 3:12) in the New Testament. The substantives *achreios* only in Mt 25:30 Luke 17:10; and **achrestos** only in our text. "Unprofitable"! Yes, that describes all who are out of Christ, even though they may make profession of Him, as did the man with one talent (Mt 25,30). Nothing is really to profit that does not serve the Divine purpose, and is not "according to God's good pleasure." We are all Onesimuses in this respect. **Solemn reflection!**

*Every duty will be done better by a man  
if he has the love and grace of Jesus Christ in his heart.*

**Scroggie** on **but now is useful ([euchrestos](#))** - . It goes on to tell of 2. THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE GOSPEL. "Who once was . . . but now is," This is a thoroughly Pauline expression. In Ro 6:21, we have, "*then . . . now*"; and in Eph. 2:12-13, we

read: "at that time ye were without Christ . . . but now, . . ." ; and here, Onesimus "was once unprofitable . . . but now . . ." This is the wonderful story of the **possible** becoming **actual**; of the sinful past being reversed; of the sinner being made a son. No class was so degraded as the slaves of Paul's day; and, no doubt, Onesimus was typical of his kind, a liar a thief, and treacherous. Yet, here he is, the worthless runaway, made "**profitable**" to his master and to Paul. How was such an amazing change brought about? By the Gospel, which was and is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." (Ro 1:16) Well does **Maclaren** say: "*Christianity knows nothing of hopeless cases. It professes its ability to take the most crooked stick and bring it straight, to flash a new power into the blackest carbon, which will turn it into a diamond. Every duty will be done better by a man if he has the love and grace of Jesus Christ in his heart. New motives are brought into play, new powers are given, new standards of duty are set up. The small tasks become great, and the unwelcome sweet, and the difficult easy, when done **for** and **through** Christ. Old vices are crushed in their deepest source; old habits driven out by the force of a new affection* (ED: SEE EXPULSIVE POWER OF A NEW AFFECTION), *as the young leaf-buds push the withered foliage from the tree. Christ can make any man over again, and does so re-create every heart that trusts Him. Such miracles of transformation are wrought to-day as truly as of old.*" This must be the confidence of us all as we go forth in the service of Christ, that His arm can reach the outermost and undermost, and save to the uttermost. If ever we are tempted to wonder if God can save some persons, let us read his letter again, and especially these words. "**Who once was unprofitable....but now is profitable**"

*It is well not to be always grave on the way to the grave.*

**Scroggie** But this verse has another value which we should not overlook. 3. THE APOSTLE'S SENSE OF HUMOR. "Onesimus 1 means "profitable." But he belied the promise of his name. Great importance was attached names in Bible times, and frequently these were changed. For example, Jacob to Israel: Simon to Peter. In this case the name was all right. It was the nature that was wrong. Onesimus did not need a new name, but he did need to live up to the one he had. It is a disclosure of the rich and sane humanity of Paul, that, at this most critical point in his communication, he should indulge in this playfulness. It is recorded of Whitefield that on one occasion, from the pulpit, he made an appeal to one Shuter, a comedian, who had often played the character of Ramble. The preacher's words were: "And thou, poor Ramble, who hast so often rambled from Him. oh, end thy ramblings and come to Jesus." So here, Paul says to Philemon, "*Profitable has up to now been unprofitable to you, but I will promise you that from now, if you will receive him back, he will be true to his name.*" Someone has said that the only human quality not reflected in the Bible is humour. It is evident that the person who said that, had no sense of humour. In many places in both Testaments, where it is not obvious in our translations, there is a playfulness such as we have here, which gives point and effect to purpose. How saving is a sense of humour! How powerful a little playfulness may be! Be sorry for the man who has not sometimes a twinkle in his eye. and a laugh in his voice, who never drops a joke from his pen. It is well not to be always grave on the way to the grave.

**J Vernon McGee** - Since his name literally means profitable, Paul is saying, "When you had Profitable, you didn't have Profitable. Now that you don't have Profitable, you do have Profitable." You see, as a slave Onesimus wasn't very useful. He didn't work because he wanted to work. His heart wasn't in it, and I guess I can't blame him for that. But now Paul is sending him back to Philemon as a believer, and he says, "He is going to be profitable to you now. However, I don't want him to be received as a slave." (**BORROW** [Thru the Bible Commentary](#))

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**Useless** (890)(**achrestos** from **a** - negation = without + **chrestos** = profitable. Literally it means without profit, unprofitable, worthless, unserviceable, unfit for. Described a "do-nothing" person. Not serving any beneficial purpose. **Achrestos** sometimes has an active meaning in which someone makes no use of something. **Achrēstos** is also used to refer to that which is not used because it is new, obsolete, or it is not to be used because it is unseemly. Occasionally, **achrēstos** is can mean "unkind" or "cruel."

**Achrestos** is used in the Greek of the Apocryphal books - Fruit is **achrēstos** when it is not ripe to eat (Wisdom of Solomon 4:5). The labor of those who despise wisdom and instruction is "unprofitable" (Wisdom of Solomon 3:11). And the ungodly son is a "useless" child (Sirach 16:1).

**Useful** (2173) **euchrestos** from **eú** = well + **chráomai** = furnish what is needful) means easy to make use of, serviceable. Pertains to being helpful or beneficial, very profitable. **Euchrestos** conveys the sense of that which is easy to make use of. The apostle wanted Timothy to be **useful** to Jesus Christ, the Master, just as Mark proved "**useful** (euchrestos) to (him) for service" in his apostolic work (2Ti 4:11+). This word contrasts with **useless** in 2Ti 2:14+. Used once in Septuagint (Pr 31:13) and 3 times in the NT (2Ti 2:21; 4:11; Philemon 1:11)

**Philemon 1:12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart,**

**Arthur Way** - I send him back to you-- ah, to me he is a piece of my very heart!

KJV Philemon 1:12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

BGT Philemon 1:12 ν ν πεμψ σοι, α τ ν, το τ σπι ν τ μ σπλ γχνα·

NET Philemon 1:12 I have sent him (who is my very heart) back to you.

CSB Philemon 1:12 I am sending him back to you as a part of myself.

ESV Philemon 1:12 I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.

NIV Philemon 1:12 I am sending him--who is my very heart--back to you.

NLT Philemon 1:12 I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

NRS Philemon 1:12 I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you.

NJB Philemon 1:12 I am sending him back to you -- that is to say, sending you my own heart.

NAB Philemon 1:12 I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you.

YLT Philemon 1:12 whom I did send again, and thou him (that is, my own bowels) receive,

MIT Philemon 1:12 I sent him to you, though he is like my vital organs.

GWN Philemon 1:12 I am sending him back to you. This is like sending you a part of myself.

- **I have sent him back to you in person:** Mt 6:14,15 18:21-35 Mk 11:25 Eph 4:32
- **that is, sending my very heart:** De 13:6 2Sa 16:11 Jer 31:20 Lu 15:20

## RETURN TO SENDER

This title would be better rendered "Return to Slavemaster."

**Scroggie** The final thought in this paragraph is to the effect that Onesimus was III. SENT TO BE RECEIVED. The state of the text here seems to reflect the emotion of the writer. He was sending Onesimus back, but not without a struggle. Paul begins to ask Philemon to receive Onesimus, but "in the swift rush of his thoughts" he forgets to do so until he gets to verse 17.

**I have sent him back** ([anapempo](#)) **to you in person - Sent...back** ([anapempo](#)) can mean literally to send Onesimus back to Philemon, but it also was used in a legal sense to refer a case to a higher authority. Barclay thus renders it *'I am referring this case of Onesimus to you, that you may give a verdict on it that will match the love you ought to have.'*

**that is, sending my very heart** ([splugchnon](#)) - Sending my **heart** is clearly figurative/idiomatic meaning "one who means a great deal to me." Paul had grown very fond of Onesimus and to send him back is to send a bit of his own heart. This would serve to draw out Philemon's compassion, for obviously he loved and respected Paul and would be hesitant to cause him emotional pain.

**Scroggie** Observe first of all: 1. THE APOSTLE'S IDENTIFICATION OF HIMSELF WITH THE SLAVE. *'My very heart!'* The word here employed [splugchnon](#) refers to the viscera, which the Greeks distinguished as nobler, and lower; the nobler viscera being the seat of the affections. The Hebrews, who did not make this distinction, regarded the bowels as the seat of emotion and affection. The A.V. follows the Hebrew idea, and the R.V. the Greek idea. Either way, no word could be used to express more completely the thought of identification. Onesimus was Paul's **very heart**; or as he says in (Philemon 1:17), "**Myself.**" Only a large and generous nature could speak this way, and of such an one; and in doing so Paul reminds us of Him Who said, *"He that receiveth you, receiveth Me."* (Mt 10:40) **There is no more wonderful truth in the New Testament than that of the Saviour's identification with sinners, in His death; and the believer's identification with Him in His risen life.** It is that great truth apprehended and believed that will lead to a fuller and richer fellowship among all believers, regardless of superficial and temporary distinctions.

**NET NOTE - sent...back** - Although the tense of the Greek verb here is past (an aorist tense) the reader should understand that Onesimus may well have been standing in the very presence of Paul as he wrote this letter.

*One of the surest evidences of the presence of grace in the heart  
is the resumption of neglected duties, a return to the things from which we have run away*

**Scroggie** But further, we may learn from this verse a lesson on, **2. THE RESUMPTION OF NEGLECTED DUTIES.** "*Sent back in his own person.* Think for a moment, not of the fact that Paul sent Onesimus back, but of that still more remarkable fact that Onesimus went back. Here is an extraordinary thing! A slave, a criminal, deliberately going back to the master whom he had robbed and from whom he had run away, not knowing what sort of reception he would get, but, at best, going back to the slave's yoke.

**Could anything better demonstrate the reality of his conversion than that?** To say that, as slavery is anti-christian, Onesimus was under no obligation to return, is to wholly miss the significance of his action. Slavery was not then believed to be anti-christian, nor for long centuries after. By the law of the times Onesimus belonged to Philemon in the relation of slave to master, and when the runaway went back he was only doing his plain duty. You may say, "Then what was wonderful about it?" Two things, first, that he recognised it to be his duty; and second that he acted upon it." Much more enlightened people than he, do not always apprehend their duty; and many more, who know what is right, do it not. One of the surest evidences of the presence of grace in the heart is the resumption of neglected duties; a return to the things from which we have run away. The man out of whom a legion of demons was cast, besought Jesus that he might itinerate with Him; but Jesus said, "Go home." Jonah was bidden go East to Nineveh; but he went West towards Tarshish, and the Lord dealt with him. Upon repentance and restoration his duty still pointed to Nineveh, and thither he had to go. **The sad experiences our disobedience brings upon us do not cancel the evaded duties which occasioned them. Neglected duties must be gone back to.**

*The truth enlightens the conscience;  
then political and social abuses disappear*

**Scroggie** - This verse raises also the momentous matter of, **3. THE ATTITUDE or CHRISTIANITY TO SLAVERY.** "*Whom I have sent back.*" Now we think not so much of the fact that Onesimus went back, as that Paul sent him back. The great Apostle to the Gentiles, the Church's first theologian, and the proclaimer of the Gospel of the soul's **emancipation**, deliberately sends a Christian brother back to **slavery**. This raises a subject of first rate importance, on which, this little letter throws a flood of light. Neither here, nor anywhere in the New Testament is slavery directly condemned, nor, perhaps, were all the implications of the Christian Gospel apprehended by the Apostles! yet, **beyond all question, slavery is anti-christian, a sin against God, and treason towards man.** The time had not come, in Paul's day, for its abolition, nor was Society ready for such an advance for centuries after Paul; but in the New Testament are laid down those principles which were bound ultimately to destroy that nefarious traffic. "*Historically it is true that as Christianity has grown slavery has withered.*" This veiled yet unmistakable attitude of the New Testament towards slavery is also its attitude towards all unchristian institutions; it is the uncompromising antagonist of all the miserable anomalies of our present civilisation. Its triumphs, however, are not by way of **revolution**, but of **reformation**. The truth enlightens the conscience; then political and social abuses disappear. So Paul sent Onesimus back to slavery. This is expressed in the simple but impressive words, of the next paragraph,

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**Sent...back** (375) **anapempo** from **ana** = again + **pempo** = to send) means literally to send up ans was a legal technical term send (up) to a higher or proper tribunal or official (Lk 23.7); send (back) to the previous tribunal or official (Lk 23.11) to send back to a previous location (Philemon 1:12). BDAG - (1) 1 to send up from a lower position to a higher, send up (2) 2 to send on to someone in authority, send (up), (Lk 23:7, Acts 25:21) (3) to send back to a previous location, send back (Lk 23:11 ; Philemon 1:12; Lk 23:15). **Anapempō** is used of sending someone up to higher ground (topographically speaking), but also of referring someone to a higher authority. In the papyri **anapempō** conveys the sense, "to send up to a higher authority." It is also used in the more literal sense of "sending back (someone or something)." The expression does not occur in the Septuagint.

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**Spurgeon** on Paul's handling of Onesimus - Let us cultivate a large-hearted spirit, and sympathise with the people of God, especially with new converts, if we find them in trouble through past wrong-doing. If anything needs setting right, do not let us condemn them off-hand, and say, "You have been stealing from your master, have you? You profess to be converted, but we do not believe it." Such suspicious and severe treatment may be deserved, but it is not such as the love of Christ would suggest. Try and set the fallen ones right, and give them again, as we say, "a fair start in the world." If God has forgiven them, surely we may, and if Jesus Christ has received them, they cannot be too bad for us to receive. Let us do for them what Jesus would have done had he been here, so shall we truly be the disciples of Jesus. (For the full sermon click [The Story of a Runaway Slave](#))

**Spurgeon** on slavery - Public sentiment was not enlightened, although the gospel has always struck at the very root of slavery. The essence of the gospel is that we are to do to others as we would that others should do to us, and nobody would wish to be another man's slave, and therefore he has no right to have another man as his slave. (For the full sermon click [The Story of a Runaway Slave](#))

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#### **Walter Kaiser - Did Paul Approve of Slavery? - comments based on Ephesians 6:5-8**

When addressing slaves in Ephesians, Paul tells them to obey their masters. There is not a hint of a suggestion that slavery is wrong. Does this mean that Paul approved of slavery? Does the Bible teach that slavery is morally acceptable?

We could add to this passage the parallel passage in Colossians 3:22–25, the whole book of Philemon, and 1 Peter 2:18–25, for in none of them is there any criticism of the institution of slavery, and in two of the three there is an exhortation to the slave to obey his or her master. In other words, in the New Testament there is no clear critique of slavery. This passage is a good example of a

general New Testament attitude.

Having said the above, we see in this passage the general strategy that Paul took toward social reform. In Ephesians 5–6 there are three pairs of social relationships mentioned (wives and husbands; children and fathers; slaves and masters). In each of the three Paul addresses the subordinate first. He calls them to the traditional virtue of submission (which any pagan moralist would also have called for). Yet Paul adds a new twist in that in one form or another he reframes the traditional duty in terms of a relationship to Christ. In other words, he takes it out of the earthly context and puts it in the context of something that the Lord will reward. In doing this he qualifies the absoluteness of the duty, for obviously one cannot do something “as unto the Lord” or “like slaves of Christ” if it is something that the Lord has made it perfectly clear that he hates. This may seem like a small point to us, but in that world the obedience of wives to husbands, children to parents and slaves to masters was understood to be absolute. These three classes of people were thought to have no right (or even in some cases no ability) of moral decision beyond simple obedience. But Paul addresses them as full moral beings and puts their obedience, demanded by their culture, into a wider theological context. Obedience now has a higher meaning, and they must make decisions regarding it and set limits to it (although in setting limits they will probably face suffering). Paul has raised the status of the subordinate to that of a full human being before God, yet he has done this without calling for rebellion. Paul teaches this partially because Christ also gave up his rights and suffered, so rebellion does not express the spirit of Christ, but even more because social status does not matter to him. The important issue is that one is serving Christ. Social status is simply the context for that service (compare 1 Cor 7:17–24).

Yet in each pair of relationships Paul also addresses the social superior and points out that he (in all cases he is addressing males) has responsibilities toward his subordinate. The husband is to lay down his life for his wife; the father is not to exasperate his child. The father also has a duty of moral instruction. The master is to treat slaves appropriately in the light of knowing that in reality both he and they are slaves of the same heavenly Master (Eph 6:9). After all, even Paul calls himself a slave of Jesus Christ. This part of Paul’s teaching is revolutionary. It was unheard of to call a social superior to respect and respond to a call to duty toward social inferiors. In fact, one could say that Paul brings the masters down to the level of their slaves and makes them treat their slave as a brother or sister. This implication in Ephesians becomes quite explicit in Philemon. Paul’s strategy, then, is to elevate the inferior and to abase the superior by pointing to their relationship to Jesus Christ as the context for all other relationships in their lives.

Having looked at Paul’s general strategy, let us look at slavery in particular. In the social world of Paul’s day slavery was an accepted institution. There was also a genuine fear of slaves. In Rome slaves were prohibited from wearing distinctive clothing for fear that they would discover how numerous they were and start a revolt. Slaves all over the Roman world were under the total control of their masters. If a master wished, he could have a slave executed (or kill the slave himself). While this was frowned on if there was no reason for it, it was not outside of the master’s rights. It was just as today a person can demolish their house if they wish, even though their neighbors may think it a stupid and wasteful act. A slave in the first century was property.

Given this context, what would it look like if Christianity were believed to be calling slaves to disobedience? Christianity was already viewed as a subversive form of thought. It rejected the traditional gods (which made it seem treasonous to city and country, for worship of the traditional gods was a major expression of patriotism) and did not allow any compromises in this matter. It rejected many of the “normal” forms of recreation (drinking bouts, use of prostitutes and the like). It formed its members into “secret societies” (at least in the eyes of pagan observers), and in those societies it was rumored master and slave ate the same food at the same table and that wives were present along with their husbands. In other words, first-century social decorum was not observed in the church. Notice that in the New Testament there is no separation of religious duty according to social status. Every member is spiritually gifted, whatever their social status. Any person can become an elder, not just freeborn males. Every member of the church is called to the same obedience to Christ, slave or free, male or female.

So Paul (and other New Testament writers) calls the social inferiors, including slaves, to obedience. This both reassured the Roman society and made the real reason for persecution clear. Christian slaves should be more obedient slaves than other slaves, for they knew that the “pay” in heaven would be good. If their masters persecuted them, it should be for their faith and nothing else. Christianity was not subversive in the sense of stirring up rebellion. At the same time, it raised the slave to a new status of an equal human being before Christ. After all, in the eyes of the church slavery was just a job, and what job or social status one had on earth did not matter (Jesus did not have a great social status at any time in his life either, and he died a most shameful death, an executed slave’s death). If the job was done “as a slave of Christ” the reward was equal, whether one was a human slave or a human master. Paul’s strategy was thus that of producing an expression of the kingdom of God in the church, not that of trying to change society.

What was the result of this strategy? The church never adopted a rule that converts had to give up their slaves. Christians were not under law but under grace. Yet we read in the literature of the second century and later of many masters who upon their conversion freed their slaves. The reality stands that it is difficult to call a person a slave during the week and treat them like a brother or sister in the church. Sooner or later the implications of the kingdom they experienced in church seeped into the behavior of the masters during the week. Paul did in the end create a revolution, not one from without, but one from within, in which a changed heart produced changed behavior and through that in the end brought about social change. This change happened wherever the kingdom

of God was expressed through the church, so the world could see that faith in Christ really was a transformation of the whole person.

Did Paul believe in slavery? Yes, indeed. He believed that all Christians are all equally slaves of Jesus Christ and that that is the one social relationship that has permanent value. (SEE [HARD SAYINGS IN THE BIBLE](#))

See also [Slavery in Bible Dictionaries](#)

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#### **QUESTION - [Does the Bible condone slavery? WATCH VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - There is a tendency to look at slavery as something of the past. But it is estimated that there are today over 27 million people in the world who are subject to slavery: forced labor, sex trade, inheritable property, etc. As those who have been redeemed from the slavery of sin, followers of Jesus Christ should be the foremost champions of ending human slavery in the world today. The question arises, though, why does the Bible not speak out strongly against slavery? Why does the Bible, in fact, seem to support the practice of human slavery?

#### **Slavery in the Old Testament Law**

Slave ownership was a common practice long before the time the [Mosaic Law](#) was given. So, the law neither instituted slavery nor ended it; rather, the law regulated it. It gave instructions on how slaves should be treated but did not outlaw slavery altogether.

*Hebrews with Hebrew slaves.* The law allowed for Hebrew men and women to sell themselves into slavery to another Hebrew. They could only serve for six years, however. In the seventh year, they were to be set free (Exodus 21:2). This arrangement amounted to what we might call indentured servanthood. And the slaves were to be treated well: "Do not make them work as slaves. They are to be treated as hired workers or temporary residents among you" (Leviticus 25:39–40). The law also specified that, "when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed. Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you" (Deuteronomy 15:13–14). The freed slave had the option of staying with his master and becoming a "servant for life" (Exodus 21:5–6).

*Hebrews with Gentile slaves.* When the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan, they were to drive out or destroy all the former inhabitants. However, that order was not fully obeyed, and many Gentiles remained in the land. God allowed the Hebrews to take slaves from among that population: "Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. You can bequeath them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly" (Leviticus 25:44–46). So, the law did allow for slavery.

Several laws regulating slavery appear in Exodus 21. These laws gave some basic rights to slaves and curtailed the actions of masters in a historically unprecedented way. In the ancient world outside of Israel, slaves had no rights. But God's Law extended to slaves the right to keep a wife (verse 3), the right not to be sold to foreigners (verse 8), the right to be adopted into a family by marriage (verse 9), and the right to food and clothing (verse 10). The law also limited masters in their use of corporeal punishment (verses 20, 26–27).

*Gentiles with Hebrew slaves.* Under the Mosaic Law, and if economic circumstances demanded it, a Hebrew had the option of selling himself as a slave to a Gentile living in Israel (Leviticus 25:47). The law also provided for the slave's redemption at any time (verses 48–52). And the treatment of the Hebrew slave was to be considerate: slaves were "to be treated as workers hired from year to year; you must see to it that those to whom they owe service do not rule over them ruthlessly" (verse 53). If no redemption came, the slaves were still released, with their families, on the Year of Jubilee (verse 54).

#### **New Testament Instruction on Slavery**

Even in the New Testament era, the Bible did not demand that every slave owner immediately emancipate his slaves. Rather, the apostles gave instructions to slaves and their owners on godly behavior within that social system. Masters were admonished on the proper treatment of their slaves. For example, in Ephesians 6:9 masters are told, "Treat your slaves in the same way [with goodwill]. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him." Elsewhere, the command is, "Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven" (Colossians 4:1).

Jesus and the apostles did not outright condemn slavery. They didn't need to. The effect of the gospel is that lives are changed, one by one, and those changed lives in turn bring transformation to entire families, clans, and cultures. Christianity was never designed to be a political movement, but, over time, it naturally affected political policy. Alexander MacLaren wrote that the gospel "meddles directly with no political or social arrangements, but lays down principles which will profoundly affect these, and leaves them to soak into the general mind" (*The Expositor's Bible*, vol. VI, Eerdmans, 1940, p. 301). In nations where Christianity spread and took firm hold, slavery was brought to an end through the efforts of born-again individuals.

The seeds of the emancipation of slaves are in the Bible, which teaches that all men are created by God and made in His image (Genesis 1:27), which condemns those who kidnap and sell a person (Exodus 21:16; cf. 1 Timothy 1:8–10), and which shows that a slave can truly be “a brother in the Lord” (Philemon 1:16).

Some criticize the Bible because it did not demand an immediate overthrow of every ingrained, centuries-old sinful custom of the day. But, as Warren Wiersbe pointed out, “The Lord chooses to change people and society gradually, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the truth of the Word of God” (*The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, David C. Cook, 2007, p. 245).

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### **F B Meyer - My very heart. (R.V.)**

This fragment of ancient letter-writing gives us a model of the way in which our commonest or most prosaic dealings, and our letters, even on business matters, may breathe the spirit of Christ. It also illustrates the relation in which we stand to Jesus Christ. What Onesimus was to Paul and Philemon combined, that we are to our Lord.

**What was Onesimus to Paul?** — His child, whom he had begotten in his bonds. He had probably been discovered by some of his companions in the purlieu of Rome, where criminals concealed themselves from justice, and abandoned characters gave vent to the wildest passions. Or, having heard that the apostle, whom he had so often met in his master’s house, was residing in his own hired house in Rome, the runaway slave had found him out, when in the extremity of hunger. In either case he had now become dear as the apostle’s heart; had learnt to minister to him in his bonds; had proved more than a servant — a brother beloved. O Thou who hast redeemed us from our sins, may we be all this to Thee!

**What was Onesimus to Philemon?** — He had been unprofitable; and we have been. He was sent back; and we have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. He had been a servant, henceforth he should be a beloved brother; and we are no longer servants, but friends. He had grievously wronged his master; but his sin had been forgiven, and so covered by over-abounding grace, that it would bring him into a position of greater privilege and blessing than ever before. In this man’s sin and restoration we see ourselves. Where our sin abounded, grace has much more abounded, through the tender pity of Him who had put our defalcations to his own account.

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### **James Smith - RECEIVE.**

This may be taken as the key-word of the Epistle, and forms both its heart and radiating center. Observe the gathering emphasis in his repetition of this word, how he strikes each time a louder note and a higher key.

#### **I. The Act. What was he to do?**

Receive (Philemon 1:12).

#### **II. The Manner.—How was he to receive Onesimus?**

1. As Philemon would Receive Paul Himself (Philemon 1:12, 17). "As my own flesh and blood" (C. & H.). "As a piece of my very heart" (Way). "I send part of myself" (W.). As Dr. Scofield has pointed out, "Receive him as myself"—reckon to him my merit. "If he has wronged you or owes you ought, put that to my account" —reckon to me his demerit. Striking illustration of the Divine reckoning in our justification.

2. As a Beloved Brother in the Lord (16). In the flesh, Philemon has his brother-man for his slave; in the Lord Jesus he has the slave for his brother. By conversion, one sinner becomes son to Paul and brother to Philemon, his owner and master.

#### **III. The Period.**

"Receive him forever" (Philemon 1:15).

"For perhaps he therefore departed for an hour (lit.), that you should receive him forever."

What a contrast we have here. Paul suggests a loving Providence over-ruling.

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**Philemon 1:13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;**

**Arthur Way** - And I gladly would I have kept him by my side, to render to me the service which you would



render, if you could, here in the prison where I lie for God's glad tidings sake.

KJV Philemon 1:13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

BGT Philemon 1:13 ν γ βουλ μην πρ ς μου ν κατ χειν, να πρ σο μοι διακον ν το ς δεσμο ς το ε αγγελ ου,

NET Philemon 1:13 I wanted to keep him so that he could serve me in your place during my imprisonment for the sake of the gospel.

CSB Philemon 1:13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that in my imprisonment for the gospel he might serve me in your place.

ESV Philemon 1:13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel,

NIV Philemon 1:13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.

NLT Philemon 1:13 I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf.

NRS Philemon 1:13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel;

NJB Philemon 1:13 I should have liked to keep him with me; he could have been a substitute for you, to help me while I am in the chains that the gospel has brought me.

NAB Philemon 1:13 I should have liked to retain him for myself, so that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel,

YLT Philemon 1:13 whom I did wish to retain to myself, that in thy behalf he might minister to me in the bonds of the good news,

MIT Philemon 1:13 I was deliberating on holding on to him for myself in order that in your stead he might be of service to me as a prisoner of the gospel.

- **on your behalf:** 1Co 16:17 Php 2:30
- **in my imprisonment for the gospel:** Philemon 1:1 Eph 3:1 4:1

#### Related Passages:

2 Timothy 2:9 for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God (INCLUDING THE GOSPEL) is not imprisoned.

### PAUL'S DESIRE WAS TO RETAIN ONESIMUS

**Whom I wished ([boulomai](#)) to keep ([katecho](#)) with me - Wished ([boulomai](#))** indicates a rational, planned desire as opposed to [thelo](#) which suggests a more impulsive wish. The verb **keep** ([katecho](#)) conveys the idea of to hold fast. In his heart he wants Philemon to know that he really wants to retain the services of Onesimus, but as he continues in the letter, he is willing to die to self for the greater good.

**Scroggie** - The Desire (v13-14). 1. "I WOULD HAVE KEPT . . . BUT " (13). "*Whom I would fain have kept with me, that In thy behalf he might -minister unto me in the bonds of the gospel.*" Having definitely requested Philemon to receive back Onesimus, Paul now tells his friend of the conflict which had been going on in his own heart. He is not sending Onesimus back because he was anxious to get rid of him. Far, far from it! How gladly would he have kept him. Why, then, did he not keep him? That is the subject of these verses. The text is worth studying at close quarters; for the words have been selected with great care. In the verse before us (v13), there is a declaration, followed by an explanation; a desire, followed by a reason. Look first at 1. **THE DESTRE**, "*Whom I would have retained with me.*" A.V'. "*Whom I would fain have kept with me*" R.V. The Apostle had come to love the slave. As Philemon was dear to Paul, so was Onesimus, and for the same reason, both were his converts. What Paul saw was not the difference between them socially, educationally, materially, but the sovereign fact that they, with him, were one in Christ Jesus. No doubt Onesimus had become very attached to Paul. Even slaves have hearts, and their love and loyalty are secured by kindness

and trust, and not by suspicion and cruelty. This is not to say that Philemon had been cruel to Onesimus, but he was his master, and the relationship did not allow of his doing what a stranger might do. We are not necessarily the best people to deal, in spiritual things, with the members of our own household. Here, then, Paul tells Philemon of the longing he had to keep by him the man whom he has sent away. The order of the words is striking, "*Whom I was desiring with myself to keep*" The verb "to keep" is worthy of notice in connection with another verb in verse fifteen, "*thou shouldst receive*" (A.V.); "thou shouldst have" (R.V.). The significance of this conjunction of words is observable, not so much in the translation, as in the original. Both are the verb *echo* to hold; with a preposition prefixed. In verse 13, the preposition is *kata-*, and in verse 15, it is *apo*. *Echo* with *kata* ([katecho](#)), means, to hold down, i.e. to detain, or retain; and *echo* with *apo*, ([apecho](#)) means, to have in full what is due. Without doubt, Paul intentionally sets these words over against one another. It is as though he had said, "*Him I would fain detain : but I know he is yours to retain.*" "*Much did I desire to hold Onesimus, but I had not the right to do so as he was your property.*"

**So that ([hina](#)) on your behalf ([huper](#)) he might minister ([douleuo](#)) to me** - **So that ([hina](#))** introduces the purpose Paul really wanted to keep Onesimus with him. **On your behalf** conveys the idea that it would be like Philemon serving Paul. Onesimus provided valuable aid to Paul, serving him in menial ([diakoneo](#) ~ waiting on tables) but necessary tasks. This would have been no small task, for Onesimus would clearly incur some risk of being discovered as a runaway slave.

**Scroggie** Another striking word in this sentence we shall notice in a moment. This expression of desire is immediately followed by **2. THE REASON.** "*That in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the Gospel!*" A.V. "*That in thy behalf he might minister*" etc. R.V. How pregnant a sentence is this! In these ten words (Greek) three things are said. (i). That Onesimus would have been useful to Paul. "*That he might serve me.*" Paul had a choice of words here, expressive of service, and he deliberately refuses the lowest [douleuo](#) which means, to serve as a slave; and chooses the highest [douleuo](#) from which our word "deacon" comes, and which refers to ministry in every form. It is as though the Apostle had said, "*Fain would I have made your slave my deacon.*" We can readily understand how useful Onesimus could have been to Paul. It had been his business to wait upon his master, to anticipate his every wish, and to be swift to perform it. These qualifications under the control of grace would make a man very useful to such an one as Paul, especially in the circumstances.

**NET NOTE** on "**on your behalf**" - This is one of the clearest texts in the NT in which [huper](#) is used for substitution.

**in my imprisonment ([desmos](#)) for the gospel ([euaggelion](#))** - Paul states his "crime" is that he preached the good news to lost sinners! What a badge of honor!

**Scroggie** And this leads to the second thought here, namely, (ii). That Paul was in especial need of a faithful servant. "*In the bonds of the Gospel!*" He was a sufferer, a captive; he was among' strangers, people not predisposed towards him; he was old and worn, and in need of loving attention. A faithful dog would be a great comfort to a man so placed; but a Christian servant, passionately devoted, would be a priceless treasure. He would attend to Paul's food; he would ease his chain; he would assist with his ablutions, and in every way attend to his wants. In many ways the Phrygian slave would be better qualified to minister to the prisoner's wants than would his friends around him. And Onesimus would do this the more readily and gladly on account of Paul's bonds being occasioned by his faithfulness to that gospel which had reached and rescued even such as he.

**Scroggie** "Bui there, is yet another thought here, (iii). That Paul would have accepted Onesimus as Philemon's substitute "*In thy stead: in thy behalf ; for thee.*" This is a bold and confident word, and would greatly impress Philemon. Paul virtually says, "*Philemon, I know that if you were here, you would gladly minister to my need. That, of course, is impossible; but fain was I to keep your servant that he might do for me what I know you would have done.*" And does Paul here hint at what is more plainly said in Philemon 1:9, namely, that Philemon was under some obligation to him, and, no doubt, would be quite willing to help discharge it in this way? **In all this Paul was winding Onesimus around Philemon's heart, as he had wound him around his own.** The threads were of delicate silk, and any one of them might easily have been snapped, but, together, they made a web which fast bound the slave to his master in a new relationship. These words, so courteous and persuasive were certain to procure a cordial reception for the returning fugitive. **In the preceding clause, Onesimus was spoken of as, in some sense, part of the Apostle's very self. In this, he is regarded as, in some sense part of Philemon. So he is a link between them.** Paul would have taken his service as if it had been his master's. Can the master fail to take him as if he were Paul? The Apostle has now told Philemon plainly what he would have done, and why he would have done it. Why then, did he not do it? This question is answered in the next verse, which is connected with this one by the word "**But.**"

**Spurgeon** - "I would have kept him," says Paul, "for I need someone to be my companion, to comfort me in my distress; but I would not do it without asking your leave, lest I should seem to take advantage of you. Though I know that you would willingly consent to it, yet, nevertheless, that it might be perfectly voluntary on your part, I have sent him back to you, that you may do as you will with him." Though he felt sure that Philemon would have been glad to spare his servant to care for his aged friend, yet Paul would not take the liberty of using his services, but gave Philemon the opportunity to do it of his own accord if he thought fit.

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**Philemon 1:14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.**

**Arthur Way** - Without your sanction, however, I shrank from even wishing to do any such thing: I cannot desire any kindness of yours to seem wrung from you: it shall be wholly of your own free will.

KJV Philemon 1:14 But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

BGT Philemon 1:14 χωρ ς δ τ ς σ ς γν μη ς ο δ ν θ λησα ποι σαι, να μ ς κατ ν γκην τ γαθ ν σου λλ κατ κο σιον.

NET Philemon 1:14 However, without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your good deed would not be out of compulsion, but from your own willingness.

CSB Philemon 1:14 But I didn't want to do anything without your consent, so that your good deed might not be out of obligation, but of your own free will.

ESV Philemon 1:14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.

NIV Philemon 1:14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.

NLT Philemon 1:14 But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced.

NRS Philemon 1:14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.

NJB Philemon 1:14 However, I did not want to do anything without your consent; it would have been forcing your act of kindness, which should be spontaneous.

NAB Philemon 1:14 but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary.

YLT Philemon 1:14 and apart from thy mind I willed to do nothing, that as of necessity thy good deed may not be, but of willingness,

MIT Philemon 1:14 But apart from your consent I did not want to do anything, that the good you would minister to me might not be compulsory, but voluntary.

- **but without your consent I did not want to do anything** Philemon 1:8,9 2Co 1:24 1Pe 5:3
- **so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will** 1Ch 29:17 Ps 110:3 1Co 9:7,17 2Co 8:12 9:5,7 1Pe 5:2

## **PAUL WILL NOT FORCE PHILEMON**

**but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness([agathos](#)) would not be, in effect, by compulsion ([anagke](#)) but of your own free will ([hekousios](#))** - Paul's desire is that Philemon's decision regarding Onesimus be without compulsion (from Paul) and thus of his own free will (as opposed to legal compulsion from Paul).

*When friendship is presumed upon,  
we are to that extent untrue to its highest ideal.*

**Scroggie** II. "**BUT YOU HAD NOT GIVEN**" (14). "*But without thy mind I would do nothing; that thy goodness should not be as of necessity, but of free will.*" R.V. Here we see how perfect a Christian gentleman Paul was. He had an inborn sense of the fitness of things, which had been enriched and made more sensitive by the operations of grace. In the previous verse Paul stated his desire and reason. Here he makes known his resolve and motive. Look first of all at, **1.THE RESOLVE**. "*Without thy mind I would do nothing.*" Though Paul was eager to keep Onesimus, he would not do so without Philemon's knowledge and consent, spoken of here as his "*mind*." We have no right to extort benefits from our friends against their will. When friendship is presumed upon, we are to that extent untrue to its highest ideal. The whole point of this utterance must be found in the verb translated "*I would*," brought into

conjunction with the verb in the previous verse also translated "*I would.*" These are not the same verbs in the original, neither are they in the same tense, and only by observing these facts can we rightly apprehend the apostle's meaning. What he really says is, "*I could have wished to keep Onesimus with me, but I had scruples, and so definitely willed to send him back to you.*" The transition is here from the inner sphere of undecided inclinations to the definite act of determination which conducts to the sphere of fact." (i). Mark the difference between Paul's *wishing*, and his *willing*. The one tells of *desire*; the other of *determination*; the former points to his *reflection*; the latter, to his *resolve*. **If we are true to God and to ourselves, we may often will what we do not wish ; and we may often wish what it would not be right to. will.** The former was the apostle's case. Paul *wished* one thing, and *willed* another. He *wished* to keep Onesimus; but he *willed* to send him back to his master. **The best of Christians sometimes have a struggle between *desire* and *resolve*. Blessed are they who surrender their wish to God's will** (ii). But a further point of interest and importance is found in the tenses of these verbs. Lightfoot says, "The imperfect implies a tentative, [inchoate](#) process; while the aorist describes a definite and complete act. **The will stepped in and put an end to the inclinations of the mind Paul's wishing covered a period of time, but his willing occupied but the moment of his decision. His preference never crystallised into a definite purpose. He laid aside personal considerations and convenience in the interests of what was right** Why did he will to do nothing without Philemon's consent? Several reasons have been given. (a). Because grave penalties were denounced by Roman law upon those who received, or retained fugitive slaves. (b). That he might not seem to keep back something which was due to Philemon, perhaps to his injury; of which, perhaps, Philemon might have complained. (c). Because Onesimus himself chose to go back, in order that he might show conclusively that he had not embraced the Christian religion that he might withdraw himself from the power of his lawful lord. (d). That the gospel might not be by this means slandered, as if under the pretext of it slaves might withdraw themselves with impunity from their masters. All these were powerful reasons why Onesimus should go back to Colossae; why Paul should *will* something other than he *wished*; but a less sensitive and conscientious person might easily have made a wrong decision for lack of wisdom or courage. **Do you think through to your decisions, putting mere preference and convenience on the one side, and justice and wisdom on the other, yielding always to the greater claim?**

**J Vernon McGee** - Paul is saying, "I wouldn't keep Onesimus because that wouldn't be right -- although I thought of it. If you willingly want to send him back to me, that will be all right." Did Philemon send Onesimus back to Paul? Again, that is something we do not know. I think he did. I would imagine that on the next boat going to Rome, there was Onesimus with a lot of things to add to Paul's comfort. ([BORROW Thru the Bible Commentary](#))

**MacArthur** adds "Paul wanted Onesimus to minister alongside him, but only if Philemon openly and gladly agreed to release him." ([BORROW MacArthur Study Bible](#))

[Guzik](#) explains that "If Paul demanded it, then Philemon's good deed would come by compulsion, and not be voluntary. This would make the whole affair unpleasant and rob Philemon of any reward he otherwise might have had. Essentially, Paul gave Philemon the freedom to do what was right in love before the Lord, and he gave the freedom to do it on his own choice and not out of Paul's compulsion.

**William Barclay** - Paul would have liked to keep Onesimus; but he sends him back to Philemon, for he will do nothing without his consent. Here again is a significant thing. Christianity is not trying to help people escape from their past and run away from it; it is aiming to enable them to face the past and rise above it. Onesimus had run away. Well, then, he must go back, face up to the consequences of what he did, accept them and rise above them. Christianity is never escape; it is always conquest.

[Brian Bell](#) - A slave was not a person; he was a living tool. A master had absolute power over his slaves. William Barclay said, "He can box their ears or condemn them to hard labor – making them, for instance, work in chains upon his lands in the country, or in a sort of prison-factory. Or, he may punish them w/blows of the rod, the lash or knot; he can brand them upon the forehead, if they are thieves or runaways, or, in the end if they prove irreclaimable, he can crucify them." (*William Barclay; pg.270*) But now, he was free! – In this big city he would simply lose himself in this faceless sea of people! So, he was free!...But are you really free when you are constantly looking over your shoulder? He was a fugitive & a thief...2 shackles that would hinder his every move! Fortunate for him God has true freedom waiting in the wings! Interesting, liberty in Christ, however, doesn't mean being absolved from all earthly debts & responsibilities. (imp message for guys in jail)Yes Onesimus you made things right w/God, but now you need to make things right with Philemon. [this was risky business!] Christ forgave him, but would Philemon?

[Scroggie](#) - **So that your goodness ([agathos](#)) would not be, in effect, by compulsion ([anagke](#)) but of your own free will ([hekousios](#))** - Paul, having made known his resolve, now discloses 2. THE MOTIVE. which led him to this decision. Two great words are here brought together, "necessity," and " free-will." The power of the one is law, and of the other, love. There is the whole distance here between compulsion and spontaneity; between the dictates of duty and the desire which is delight. There were three courses open to Paul in this matter,

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**Compulsion** (constraint) ([318](#)) [anagke](#) from **ana** = up, again, back, renewal, repetition, intensity, reversal + **agkale** = arm when bent) refers to any necessity or compulsion, outer or inner, brought on by a variety of circumstances. It can mean necessity imposed

either by external conditions or by the law of duty. **Anagke** refers to constraint (which is the act of being checked, restricted or compelled either to avoid or to perform some action) which is either a result of external pressures (compelling forces) or moral sense of duty.

**Free will** (1595) (hekousios from **hekon** = of one's own free will, voluntary) is found only in Philemon 1:14 (but 13x in Septuagint) and means willingly, uncompelled, gladly. It speaks of what is done without compulsion, but is done based on one's own volition (will, choice). In the Septuagint hekousios often describes a freewill offering (Lev 23:38, Ezra 8:28, Ps 119:108)

**Hekousios** in the Septuagint - Lev. 7:16; Lev. 23:38; Num. 15:3; Num. 29:39; Deut. 12:6; Ezr. 1:4; Ezr. 1:6; Ezr. 3:5; Ezr. 8:28; Neh. 5:8; Ps. 68:9; Ps. 119:108; Prov. 27:6;

**Philemon 1:15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,**

**Arthur Way** - It may be, you know, that he was just for a time parted from you, in order that you might possess him unalienably, for ever after.

KJV Philemon 1:15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

BGT Philemon 1:15 Τ ἄ γ ρ ὅ τι το ἄ ρ σθη πρ ς ραν, να α νιον α τ ν π χ ς,

NET Philemon 1:15 For perhaps it was for this reason that he was separated from you for a little while, so that you would have him back eternally,

CSB Philemon 1:15 For perhaps this is why he was separated from you for a brief time, so that you might get him back permanently,

ESV Philemon 1:15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever,

NIV Philemon 1:15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good--

NLT Philemon 1:15 It seems Onesimus ran away for a little while so that you could have him back forever.

NRS Philemon 1:15 Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever,

NJB Philemon 1:15 I suppose you have been deprived of Onesimus for a time, merely so that you could have him back for ever,

NAB Philemon 1:15 Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever,

YLT Philemon 1:15 for perhaps because of this he did depart for an hour, that age-duringly thou mayest have him,

MIT Philemon 1:15 Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a short time that you might have him back forever.

- Ge 45:5-8 50:20 Ps 76:10 Isa 20:6 Ac 4:28

**Scroggie** - The Situation (Philemon 1:15-17). The Apostle has plainly made request that Onesimus be taken back (Philemon 1:10-12), and has also disclosed the desire that for a time had possession of him (Philemon 1:13-14). He now, in repeating the request, bids Philemon acknowledge and accept the situation. What then exactly is the situation? In these three verses Paul says three things, and so says them as to render them applicable in fields and to circumstances far removed from those which gave them rise. The first of these verses (Philemon 1:15), bids us contemplate I. THE WAY OF PROVIDENCE.

**For** - Term of explanation (see Scroggie below)

**Scroggie** - Here are but eleven words (Greek), and it is amazing how much truth and tenderness are communicated by them. Let us take in order the several thoughts as they come. **1. "FOR."** This connects the verse with what precedes, and makes what Paul is about to say another reason why he had set aside his wish, and had willed to send Onesimus back. That reason is, that, God in permitting the flight of Onesimus may have had Philemon's own interests in view. Each word in this verse has a force of its own, which we must briefly notice. The Apostle says: **2. HE WAS THEREFORE PARTED FROM THEE'** Commentators, following

Chrysostom, observe that Paul does not say, "*for this cause he fled,*" but "*for this cause he was parted.*" The other statement would have been true, but it would also have been ugly; moreover, it was not Paul's object to emphasise Onesimus' offence, now that he had repented and was willing to return, so he uses this euphemism in the interests alike of tact and grace. But there is more than that. Paul does not say, "*He parted from thee,*" but "*he was parted.*" The verb is passive not active. Of course the slave voluntarily went away, but the Apostle sees much more in it than that, and it is what he sees which gives this verse its chief value. Tennyson says : "*Oh yet we trust--/That not a worm is cloven in vain;/ That not a moth with vain desire/ Is shrivell'd in a fruitless fire/ Or but subserves another's gain.*" Back of those words lies a great truth, **the truth of providence**. Onesimus had robbed his master and had run away. There was, probably, no extenuating circumstance. The lot of this youth was infinitely better than that of his kind, seeing he had had a Christian for a master; but, instead of displaying gratitude, he presumed upon Philemon's goodness, robbed him, and absconded. Verily he was guilty, and richly deserved punishment. Paul would have been the first to admit all this; yet, it is not that point of view that he here takes, but quite another, startling and arresting. He virtually says, "*The sin of that youth of yours is not to be in vain. Behind it is a power which will harness it to Divine purpose; a chemistry by means of which the vile and worthless will be transmuted into beauty and use.*" When Onesimus ran away, nothing was less likely than that he should ever make good ; and at first sight, it would seem morally impossible that his evil should be made to serve any worthy end. Yet so it was, as Paul here affirms. And what is true in this instance, is true all the time and everywhere. One of the greatest utterances in the Bible is the riddle which Samson propounded. "*Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness*" (Judges 14:14). That is not only the key to the Book of the Judges, but to the whole of Divine revelation and all history. For example : The relation of believers to Christ is now more intimate than it could ever have been had Adam and Eve not fallen. Yet how damnable was their sin! Think of the incalculable good that came out of the selling of Joseph by his brethren! He himself said, "*As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*" (Ge 50,20). Yet these brethren stand branded for all time. We shall not forget what were the historical consequences of Moses slaving the Egyptian. He fled from death into the desert, where he was disciplined, instructed, and equipped for the great deliverance of his people from Egyptian bondage. Without that training it would appear that he could never have wrought that work; and yet what likelihood was there of his ever having left the Court for the desert, except under some such compulsion as this? How contemptibly wicked was the sin of David, a sin which has for thirty centuries caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Yet, out of that, utterance was given to the remorse and repentance of his broken heart, which has become, ever since, the language of the penitent. Psalm 51. "*Create in me a clean heart oh God, and renew a right spirit within me.*" No one will be disposed to make any excuse for Judas which his conscience would not allow him to make for himself yet, think of the inestimable blessings which have flowed from his cursed crime! The Jews must bear full responsibility for having stoned Stephen, and thus, for having instituted the Martyr's Roll. But the providential end served by their cruelty is patent on every succeeding page of the record. It was the beginning of the great outspreading which shall not cease until all the world has learned of Christ. It would be easy to add to these Bible illustrations numberless others from the history of the Church. But enough. This great truth stands demonstrated, that God is ever making the wrath of men to praise Him; that, Divine purposes may be discerned shining through questionable human acts, and that Divine ends are accomplished by means of, as well as in spite of, the sins of men. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the sinner will be held accountable for his sin; and that he can take no credit to himself for any good that, in the providence of God, may come of it. Yet the fact remains, writ large on the page of history, that God makes all things serve His ends. **The greatest crime that is laid to the door of man, has become the greatest blessing to mankind. The Cross of Calvary is at once our doom and our hope.** Out of that darkness has come universal light. Out of that bondage has come glorious liberty. Out of that death has come eternal life. It would be but vain speculation, to inquire what would have happened if these evils had not been perpetrated. Two facts stand outside all speculation, and beyond all question, namely, that sin is inexcusable, and will be judged, and that God, in addition to ruling over all, over-rules all. So much then, is in this simple phrase. Yet, we have by no means exhausted the fulness of this verse.

**Perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever**- Separated from you for a while is a euphemistic way to say Onesimus had run away from Philemon, thus Paul avoided calling him an "escaped slave." The use of the word **forever** in hints at the extension of earthly friendships throughout eternity. Even though as a Christian Onesimus was now truly free, still Paul was careful to send him back directly to his former life. The miracle of salvation is not designed to produce a revolution, but a complete regeneration of the heart.

**Scroggie** - "**FOR PERHAPS.**" He does not question for a moment the general truth above stated, but he would be cautious in the application of it. We certainly cannot always trace the ways of God; these are often "past finding out" ; but we must not therefore deny that He is in the affairs of men fulfilling eternal designs. It is well, however, for us to be cautious in our interpretation of events, and applications of the great principle. Maclaren says : "**Perhaps**" is one of the hardest words for minds of a certain class to say, but in regard to all such subjects and to many more, it is the motto of the wise man, and the shibboleth which sifts out the patient modest lovers of truth from rash theorists and precipitate dogmatizers. Impatience of uncertainty is a moral fault which mars many an intellectual process."

**Guzik** explains that "The phrase, "**for perhaps**" is important. It showed that Paul did not come to Philemon in this manner: "*Philemon, God has shown me His hidden hand at work, and you must accept what I see also*" Instead, for perhaps means Paul's

heart is like this: "*Philemon, it seems to me that God is working in unusual ways here. Let me tell you what I see, and perhaps it will make sense to you.*" **That you may receive him forever:** This was one aspect of the purpose Paul saw God working in the escape of Onesimus. Philemon the master lost a slave; but Philemon the Christian gained a brother, and he gained that brother forever.

**Scroggie** - A further word of much significance is, 4. **"THAT THOU SHOULDEST HAVE HIM."** We have already observed the conjunction of this verb *apecho* with that other in verse 13, *katechein* the one the remeaning to retain, and the one here, to restore. "He who was parted should now be restored." Paul suggests that the underlying purpose of the sinful departure was a return which would mean that Philemon would possess Onesimus more fully than otherwise he could possibly have done. This thought stands unmistakable in the accompanying words, **"FOR AN HOUR . . . ETERNALLY."** The eternal consequence was in that "hour." How much happened in so short a time! The passing moment determined the future millenniums. The temporary loss was everlasting gain. We must not limit the sense of "eternally" here. It does not mean that Philemon may now reckon upon his slave remaining with him, upon his having him in permanent servitude (Lev. 25,46; Exodus 21,6), but that, Onesimus and Philemon, both having eternal life, were eternally related to one another. The expression connects this life with the next, and intimates that spiritual bonds are indissoluble. This man was "parted for a season to be possessed for ever" Has this not been the story of many a one? Augustine ran away to this same Rome, from Monica, and nearly broke her heart, but as a result of his waywardness and wickedness, she ere long received him again forever in the bonds of new birth. It is the story of every prodigal who returns. Death does not dissolve our relations "in Christ Jesus." When we return to God, we return to one another in all relations that are true and abiding. The "*little while*" of Onesimus' absence had secured for him a share in the eternal communion of saints, because it secured for him a place in the heart of the Eternal. "We should not rest content with recognising the general truth, but ever make conscious effort to feel that this passing instant has something to do with our eternal character and with our eternal destiny."

**Swindoll** - Paul floats the idea that maybe it had all been part of God's sovereign plan that Onesimus ran away for a short time—now Philemon could "have him back forever" as a brother in Christ who would be a co-heir of eternal life. (See [Insights on Philipians, Colossians, Philemon](#) Scroll up and down to see pages)

**MacArthur** on meaning of **perhaps** - Paul was suggesting that God providentially ordered the overturning of the evil of Onesimus' running away to produce eventual good (cf. Ge 50:20; Ro 8:28)" (BORROW [MacArthur Study Bible](#))

*Nature is selfish, but grace is loving.*

-- C H Spurgeon

**NET NOTE - have him back forever** - So that you would have him back eternally. The notion here is not that Onesimus was to be the slave of Philemon eternally, but that their new relationship as brothers in Christ would transcend the societal structures of this age. The occasion of Onesimus' flight to Rome would ultimately be a catalyst in the formation of a new and stronger bond between these two men.

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C H Spurgeon - (For the full sermon click [The Story of a Runaway Slave](#))

I. Look at Onesimus as AN INSTANCE OF DIVINE GRACE.

**1. In his election.** Were there no free men, that God must elect a slave? Were there no faithful servants, that He must choose one who had embezzled his master's money? Were there none of the educated and polite, that He must needs look upon a barbarian? Were there none among the moral and the excellent, that infinite love should fix itself upon this degraded being, who was now mixed up with the very scum of society? "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion," rolls like thunder alike from the cross of Calvary and from the mount of Sinai. The Lord is a Sovereign, and doeth as He pleases. Let us admire that marvellous electing love which selected such a one as Onesimus!

**2. In his conversion.** Look at him! How unlikely he appears to become convert. He is an Asiatic slave of about the same grade as an ordinary Lascar, or heathen Chinee. He was, however, worse than the ordinary Lascar, who is certainly free, and probably an honest man, if he is nothing else. This man had been dishonest, and he was daring withal, for after taking his master's property he was bold enough to make a long journey, from Colosse to Rome. Some of us, I have no doubt, are quite as wonderful instances of Divine election and effectual calling as Onesimus was. Let us, therefore, record the lovingkindness of the Lord, and let us say to ourselves, "Christ shall have the glory of it. The Lord hath done it; and unto the Lord be honour, world without end."

**3. The grace of God was conspicuous in the character which it wrought in Onesimus upon his conversion,** for he appears to have been helpful, useful, and profitable. So Paul says. What wonders the grace of God can do! Many plans are employed in the world for the reformation of the wicked and the reclaiming of the fallen, and to every one of these, as far as they are rightly bottomed, we wish good success; for whatever things are lovely and pure, and of good report, we wish them God speed. But mark this word — the true reforming of the drunkard lies in giving him a new heart; the true reclaiming of the harlot is to be found in a

renewed nature. The lowest strata of society will never be brought into the light of virtue, sobriety, and purity, except by Jesus Christ and His gospel; and we must stick to that. Let all others do what they like, but God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**II. A very interesting INSTANCE OF SIN OVERRULED.** The Lord must have Onesimus in Rome to hear Paul, and the sin of Onesimus, though perfectly voluntary on his part, so that God had no hand in it, is yet overruled by a mysterious providence to bring him where the gospel shall be blest to his soul. Now, I want to speak to some of you Christian people about this matter. Have you a son who has left home? Is he a wilful, wayward young man, who has gone away because he could not bear the restraints of a Christian family? It is a sad thing it should be so, but do not despond. You do not know where he is, but God does; and you cannot follow him, but the Spirit of God can. Many a sailor boy has been wild, reckless, Godless, Christless, and at last has got into a foreign hospital. Ah, if his mother knew that he was down with the yellow fever, how sad her mind would be, for she would conclude that her dear son will die away at Havannah or somewhere, and never come home again. But it is just in that hospital that God means to meet with him. A sailor writes to me something like that. He says, "My mother asked me to read a chapter every day, but I never did. I got into the hospital at Havannah, and, when I lay there, there was a man near to me who was dying, and he died one night; but before he died he said to me, 'Mate, could you come here? I want to speak to you. I have got something that is very precious to me here. I was a wild fellow, but reading this packet of sermons has brought me to the Saviour, and I am dying with a good hope through grace. Now, when I am dead and gone, will you take these sermons and read them, and may God bless them to you. And will you write a letter to the man that preached and printed those sermons, to tell him that God blessed them to my conversion, and that I hope He will bless them to yourself?'" It was a packet of my sermons, and God did bless them to that young man who, I have no doubt whatever, went to that hospital because there a man who had been brought to Christ would hand to him the words which God had blessed to himself and would bless to his friend. You do not know, dear mother, you do not know. The worst thing that can happen to a young man is sometimes the best thing that can happen to him.

**III. Our text may be viewed as AN EXAMPLE OF RELATIONS IMPROVED.** "He therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever; not now as a servant, but a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee?" You know we are a long while learning great truths. Perhaps Philemon had not quite found out that it was wrong for him to have a slave. Some men who were very good in their time did not know it. John Newton did not know that he was doing wrong in the slave trade, and George Whitfield, when he left slaves to the orphanage at Savannah, which had been willed to him, did not think for a moment that he was doing anything more than if he had been dealing with horses, or gold and silver. Public sentiment was not enlightened, although the gospel has always struck at the very root of slavery. The essence of the gospel is that we are to do to others as we would that others should do to us, and nobody would wish to be another man's slave, and therefore he has no right to have another man as his slave. Perhaps, when Onesimus ran away and came back again, this letter of Paul may have opened Philemon's eyes a little as to his own position. No doubt he may have been an excellent master, and have trusted his servant, and not treated him as a slave at all, but perhaps he had not regarded him as a brother; and now Onesimus has come back he will be a better servant, but Philemon will be a better master, and a slave holder no longer. He will regard his former servant as a brother in Christ. Now, this is what the grace of God does when it comes into a family. It does not alter the relations; it does not give the child a right to be pert, and forget that he is to be obedient to his parents; it does not give the father a right to lord it over his children without wisdom and love, for it tells him that he is not to provoke his children to anger, lest they be discouraged; it does not give the servant the right to be a master, neither does it take away from the master his position, or allow him to exaggerate his authority, but all round it softens and sweetens. **Rowland Hill used to say that he would not give a halfpenny for a man's piety if his dog and his cat were not better off after he was converted.** There was much weight in that remark. **Everything in the house goes better when grace oils the wheels.** The mistress is, perhaps, rather sharp, quick, tart; well, she gets a little sugar into her constitution when she receives the grace of God. The servant may be apt to loiter, be late up of a morning, very slovenly, fond of a gossip at the door; but, if she is truly converted, all that kind of thing ends. She is conscientious, and attends to her duty as she ought. The master, perhaps — well, he is the master, and you know it. But when he is a truly Christian man — he has a gentleness, a suavity, a considerateness about him. The husband is the head of the wife, but when renewed by grace he is not at all the head of the wife as some husbands are. The wife also keeps her place, and seeks, by all gentleness and wisdom to make the house as happy as she can. **I do not believe in your religion, dear friend, if it belongs to the Tabernacle and the prayer-meeting, but not to your home.** The best religion in the world is that which smiles at the table, works at the sewing-machine, and is amiable in the drawing-room. Give me the religion which blacks boots and does them well, which cooks the food and cooks it so that it can be eaten, which measures out yards of cloth and does not make them half-an-inch short, and which sells a hundred yards of an article and does not label ninety a hundred, as many tradespeople do. That is the true Christianity which affects the whole of life. If we are truly Christians we shall be changed in all our relationships to our fellow men. (For the full sermon click [The Story of a Runaway Slave](#))



When troubles come, they often come for our profit. We do not see the profit at the time of the trouble but eventually we will see the profit. Paul is writing his friend, Philemon, about this truth in regards to the run-away servant/slave Onesimus. He suggests in this text that the problem of having a servant run away would be more than compensated by the fact of the change in Onesimus.

### FIRST—THE PROBLEM OF ONESIMUS

“Departed for a season.”

Onesimus was a slave/servant of Philemon, and ran away. This would be very disconcerting to Philemon who doubtless treated Philemon well (Paul spoke so highly of Philemon, it is hard to believe he treated his servants poorly). Onesimus ran into Paul after he had run away and the Apostle Paul led him to the Lord and then sent him back to Philemon. In eternity Onesimus would thank God for running into Paul and he would have a favorable perspective on his running away. He obviously did not listen to anything Philemon had to say to him about the Gospel, but Paul got through to him. Being saved Onesimus helped Paul a lot (Philemon 1:13) then Paul sent him back to Philemon. Paul would not profit at the expense of another's great loss. It appears from Paul comments that Onesimus was not a good slave when he ran away (Philemon 1:11) which is the character of those who do things like that. It is generally the poor (in character) employee who performs the worst, which is why they never do well in their jobs.

### SECOND—THE PROFIT IN ONESIMUS

“That thou shouldest receive him forever.”

This tells Philemon the profit from his problem. Two obvious things are mentioned here.

1. The salvation of Onesimus. Onesimus ran into Paul and was converted. This does not justify his fleeing his duty, but it shows that in spite of problems profit will come. It also shows that “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee” (Psalm 76:10). Onesimus was going to flee his responsibility to Philemon but all it did was result in his conversion. God will not be thwarted in his purposes by the sin of man. God will make the sin of man accomplish His purpose if He has to. So one of the blessings (profit) from this running away was the conversion of Onesimus.
2. The service of Onesimus. “Receive him forever.” Reading between the lines one perceives that Onesimus, who was not a good servant/slave of Philemon, would after his conversion change. Going back to Philemon was proof that Onesimus had changed and further proof would be in his service and the season (“forever”) of his service. So the trouble/trial that Philemon went through because of Onesimus would result in a blessing for Philemon and not the curse that it appeared to be. Our troubles can be the same.

**Philemon 1:16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.**

**Arthur Way** - But you will not look upon him as a slave any more -- will you? -- but as something above a slave, a brother, a dear brother -- dear above all to me!-- then how much more so to you, since he will be yours both in human relations and divine?

KJV Philemon 1:16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

BGT Philemon 1:16 ο κ τ ι ς ὄ λ ο ν λ λ π ρ ὄ λ ο ν, δ ε λ φ ν γ α π η τ ν, μ λ ι σ τ α μ ο , π σ ὀ μ λ λ ο ν σ ο κ α ν σ α ρ κ κ α ν κ υ ρ .

NET Philemon 1:16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a dear brother. He is especially so to me, and even more so to you now, both humanly speaking and in the Lord.

CSB Philemon 1:16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave-- as a dearly loved brother. He is especially so to me, but even more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

ESV Philemon 1:16 no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother-- especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

NIV Philemon 1:16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

NLT Philemon 1:16 He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

NRS Philemon 1:16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother-- especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

NJB Philemon 1:16 no longer as a slave, but something much better than a slave, a dear brother; especially dear to me, but how much more to you, both on the natural plane and in the Lord.

NAB Philemon 1:16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord.

YLT Philemon 1:16 no more as a servant, but above a servant -- a brother beloved, especially to me, and how much more to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord!

MIT Philemon 1:16 He returns no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me. How much more should he be to you, both in the ordinary situation and in the Lord!

- **a beloved brother:** Mt 23:8 Ac 9:17 Ga 4:28,29 1Ti 6:2 Heb 3:1 1Pe 1:22,23 1Jn 5:1
- **both in the flesh and in the Lord** Eph 6:5-7 Col 3:22

#### Related Passages:

2 Corinthians 5:17+ (ONESIMUS WAS A NEW CREATURE) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

### ONESIMUS NO LONGER JUST A SLAVE BUT NOW A BROTHER

**No longer as a slave (doulos), but more than a slave (doulos), a beloved (agapetos) brother (adelphos** - "from same womb"), **especially to me, but how much more to you** - The barrier of master-slave was bridged by the Gospel which now made Onesimus and Philemon brothers in Christ Jesus. Note that Paul did not call for Philemon to grant Onesimus his freedom, but that he receive him as a fellow believer in Jesus Christ.

**Scroggie** - Paul now goes on to define the new relationship. **THE SLAVE AND BROTHER.** (16). "*No longer as a bondsman, but more than a bondservant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much rather to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord.*" The relation between the slave and the master is new not only in its duration (Philemon 1:15), but in its quality (Philemon 1:16). Paul says, not only that they are forever related, but how, 1. "A BOND-SLAVE." ([doulos](#)). Observe that now for the first time he is plainly referred to as a "slave." Paul had spoken of him as his "child," and, as his "very heart" (Philemon 1:10,12), avoiding any reference to his servitude, because, until now, it did not suit his purpose. But now it does; and he uses the word only to bring it into relation with another, the "brother" of this same verse. **"NO LONGER AS A BOND-SLAVE."** Paul does not say "*No longer a bond-slave.*" He was not sending Onesimus back to Philemon with request that he be [manumitted](#). Oh no. Onesimus is returning to his place and duties as afore, yet, with a difference; and so, Paul says, "*no longer as a slave.*" In matter of fact and outwardly he is still to be a **slave**, yet no longer is he to be regarded as that, for he is "*no longer*" merely that. The objective negative here employed *ouketi*, not *meketi*, means that whatever Philemon, or anyone else may think about it, it is a matter of positive fact that Onesimus is a freeman of Christ, and therefore is "*no longer as a slave.*" What, virtually, Paul said to his friend was, "*Onesimus' condition does not depend upon your conception of it, only I would have you recognise what that condition is, and act accordingly.*" Here then, are two great truths, first that conversion to God does not release men from their civil, social and commercial bonds. We still have offices to fill, and duties to perform according to our calling and ability. And second, that conversion to God will enable us to accomplish these tasks from a new motive and in a better manner; and that, where Christians are concerned, all our relations will be adjusted and adorned in the light of the fact that we are "one in Christ Jesus." Paul makes this quite plain in the next clause. **MORE THAN A BOND-SLAVE, A BROTHER BELOVED.**" When it says "**more than,**" it means that he was still a slave, but "**no longer**" that only or merely. What then was he "**more?**" "**A brother beloved.**" Slave and brother! What a juxtaposition! the slave-brother! That is a revolutionary and revolutionizing idea, an idea which eighteen hundred years have scarcely served to get into our hearts and minds. It is the Glad News of Christ's Redeeming Sacrifice, and that alone, which can make slaves and masters "*brothers,*" which can overleap all racial and social distinctions and bring men together in a common fellowship. Paul goes on to say, "*Onesimus is a 'brother beloved most of all to me, but more than most of all to thee, (if that be possible).*" By this, the fact that Onesimus is Philemon's slave is not a drawback but an advantage, now that he is a Christian, binding him more closely to his master in holy brotherhood than he can be bound to anyone else.

**F F Bruce** writes "What the letter to Philemon does is to bring the institution (OF SLAVERY) into an atmosphere where it could only wilt and die. Where master and slave were united in affection as brothers in Christ, formal emancipation would be but a matter of expediency, the legal confirmation of their new relationship."

**Spurgeon** - Providence suffered him to run away that he might come under Paul's influence and become a Christian: the gracious purpose of God overrules evil for good.

**NET NOTE** on a **slave** ([doulos](#)) - In the Greco-Roman world of the 1st century the **slave** was considered a "living tool" of the master. The **slave** was "property" in every sense of the word. This understanding heightens the tense scenario that is in view here. It is likely that Onesimus may have even feared for his life upon returning to Colossae. Undoubtedly Paul has asked this runaway **slave** to return to what could amount to a potentially severe and life-endangering situation.

**both in the flesh and in the Lord** ([kurios](#)) - In his natural state and his supernatural state, his physical state and his spiritual state. And **in the Lord** Philemon and Onesimus would enjoy spiritual oneness.

**Scroggie** - "**BOTH IN THE FLESH AND IN THE LORD.**" What exactly is meant by this? The most natural thought is that which makes "in the flesh" to mean, in the earthly and personal relations of common life; and regards "in the Lord" as signifying the spiritual and religious relationships of worship and the Church. In this view natural feeling and supernatural communion are harmonised, and the spheres to which they belong are vitally related. This is a great truth, too little practiced. Many professing Christians are quite willing to regard their Christian subordinates "in the Lord" on Sundays, but insist on regarding them "in the flesh" all the rest of the week. It has been said that "some good people seem to keep their brotherly love in the same wardrobe with their Sunday clothes." These things "ought not so to be." Class distinctions and snobbishness among Christians are an abomination unto the Lord; yet there is sadly much of these. It is only "**in the Lord**" that all our social relations can be properly adjusted and regulated, preserved from abuse alike by the master and the servant, the employer and the employee, the sovereign and the subject. But another significance has been given to these words. "Some understand them as implying that Onesimus and Philemon were both Gentiles, and therefore rightly termed "brothers in the flesh," which Paul, who was a Jew, could scarcely say." It has even been suggested that Onesimus was the natural brother of Philemon, the child of the same father, by a different mother, a slave. This is conjectured from the fact that "it was usual with the Phrygians to sell their children, and one might be the slave of the other in the civil relation." This interpretation is possible, but the former one is certain, and is as binding on us today as it was on Philemon long ago. "**In the flesh,**" Philemon had the brother for a slave; and, "**In the Lord,**" he had the slave for a brother.

**Brian Bell** - Imagine a slave entering the Masters family. - But now imagine a guilty sinner entering Gods family! Paul wanted him to receive him back both in the spiritual & physical sense!

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**Slave** (1401) [doulos](#) from [deo](#) = to bind) (**Click** additional notes on [doulos](#)) was an individual bound to another in servitude and conveys the idea of the slave's close, binding ties with his master, belonging to him, obligated to and desiring to do his will and in a permanent relation of servitude. In sum, the will of the **doulos** is consumed in the will of the master. A bondservant is one who surrendered wholly to another's will and thus devoted to another to the disregard of his own interest. In the Greek culture **doulos** usually referred to the involuntary, permanent service of a slave. **Adoulos** was the most abject, servile term used by the Greeks to denote a slave. The word designated one who was born as a slave, one who was bound to his master in chords so strong that only death could break them, one who served his master to the disregard of his own interests, one whose will was swallowed up in the will of his master.

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### **Philemon 1:4-16 Details, Details**

In everything give thanks. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

Details make a difference. Ask the man from Germany who planned to visit his fiancée for Christmas but ended up in snowy Sidney, Montana, instead of sunny Sydney, Australia.

Prepositions in our language seem like insignificant details, but they can make a big difference. The words "in" and "for" are an example.

The apostle Paul wrote, "In everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18). That doesn't mean we have to be thankful for everything. We need not be thankful for the bad choices someone makes, but we can be thankful in the circumstances because the Lord can use the resulting difficulties for good.

The letter to Philemon illustrates this idea. Paul was imprisoned with Onesimus, a runaway slave. He certainly didn't have to give thanks for his bad situation. Yet his letter is full of gratitude because he knew that God was using it for good. Onesimus had become something more than a slave; he was now a beloved brother in the Lord (Philemon 1:16).

Knowing that God can use all things for good is more than enough reason to give thanks in everything. Giving thanks in difficult circumstances is a small detail that makes a big difference. -- Julie Ackerman Link (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Father, thank You that in every trial, challenge, and difficulty, You are behind the scenes working things out for our good. Help us to see Your hand in everything. Amen.

God has not promised to keep us from life's storms, but He will keep us through them.

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### **Philemon 1:12-22 [One Heart At A Time](#)**

... no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother. —Philemon 1:16

Quaker John Woolman was an itinerant preacher who waged his own personal campaign to end slavery in colonial America. Woolman met with slave-holders to speak of the injustice of holding other human beings as property. Although Woolman did not eradicate slavery completely, he did persuade many masters to free their slaves. His success was due to individual, personal persuasion.

The book of Philemon contains a similar one-on-one appeal. Onesimus was a runaway slave who had escaped from his Christian master Philemon. Onesimus had come to faith through Paul's ministry, and now Paul was sending him back to Philemon with these words: "Perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother" (vv.15-16). Although we don't know if Onesimus was set free from slavery, his new faith in Jesus had changed his relationship with his Christian master. He was now also a brother in Christ. Paul was influencing his world one heart at a time.

By the transforming power of the gospel, people and situations can change. Like Woolman and like Paul, let's seek to influence our world one heart at a time. - Dennis Fisher (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

If I can help some wounded heart,  
If I can by my love impart  
Some blessing that will help more now—  
Lord, just show me how.  
—Brandt

The kindest thing you can do for another is to show him the truth.

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### **Norman Geisler - PHILEMON 16—Doesn't Paul approve of the institution of slavery? - See [When Critics Ask](#)**

**PROBLEM:** The Apostle Paul seems to favor the institution of human slavery by sending a runaway slave, Onesimus, back to his owner. But slavery is unethical. It is a violation of the principles of human freedom and dignity.

**SOLUTION:** Slavery is unethical and unbiblical and neither Paul's actions nor his writings approve of this debasing form of treatment. In fact, it was the application of biblical principles that ultimately led to the overthrow of slavery. Several important facts should be noted in this connection.

First, from the very beginning, God declared that all humans participate in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). The apostle reaffirmed this, declaring, "we are the offspring of God" (Acts 17:29), and He "has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

Second, in spite of the fact that slavery was countenanced in the semitic cultures of the day, the law demanded that slaves eventually be set free (Ex. 21:2; Lev. 25:40). Likewise, servants had to be treated with respect (Ex. 21:20, 26).

Third, Israel, itself in slavery in Egypt, was constantly reminded by God of this (Deut. 5:15), and their emancipation became the model for the liberation of all slaves (cf. Lev. 25:40).

Fourth, in the NT, Paul declared that in Christianity "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). All social classes are broken down in Christ; we are all equal before God.

Fifth, the NT explicitly forbids the evil system of this world that traded the "bodies and souls of men" (Rev. 18:13). Slave trade is so

repugnant to God that He pronounces His final judgment on the evil system that perpetrated it (Rev. 17–18).

Sixth, when Paul urges, “Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters” (Eph. 6:5; cf. Col. 3:22), he is not thereby approving of the institution of slavery, but simply alluding to the de facto situation in his day. Rather, he is instructing them to be good employees, just as believers should be today, but he was not thereby commending slavery.

Seventh, a closer look at Philemon reveals that Paul did not perpetuate slavery, but actually undermined it, for he urged Philemon, Onesimus’ owner, to treat him as “a beloved brother” (v. 16). So, by emphasizing the inherent equality of all human beings, both by creation and redemption, the Bible laid down the very moral principles that were used to overthrow slavery and help restore the dignity and freedom of all persons of whatever color or ethnic group.

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### **Norman Geisler - PHILEMON 16—Does the apostle Paul approve of the institution of slavery? - See [When Cultists Ask](#)**

**MISINTERPRETATION:** The apostle Paul seems to favor the institution of human slavery by sending a runaway slave, Onesimus, back to his owner. But slavery is an unethical violation of the principles of human freedom and dignity. This is relevant to cult studies because Identity movements (cultlike groups who hold to white supremacy) cite such verses in support of their racist views.

**CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION:** Slavery is unethical and unbiblical and neither Paul’s actions nor his writings approve of this debasing form of treatment. In fact, it was the application of biblical principles that ultimately led to the overthrow of slavery.

From the very beginning, God declared that all humans have the image of God (Gen. 1:27). The apostle reaffirmed this, declaring, “We are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:29), and he “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26 NKJV).

Despite the fact that slavery was countenanced in the Semitic cultures of the day, the Mosaic law demanded that slaves eventually be set free (Exod. 21:2; Levit. 25:40). Meanwhile, servants had to be treated with respect (Exod. 21:20, 26). Israel, a nation of slaves in Egypt, was constantly reminded by God of this (Deut. 5:15), and their emancipation became the model for the liberation of all slaves (cf. Levit. 25:40).

In the New Testament, Paul declared that in Christianity “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28 NKJV). All social classes are broken down in Christ; we are all equal before God. The New Testament explicitly forbids the evil system of this world that traded in the “bodies and souls of men” (Rev. 18:13). Slave trade is so repugnant to God that he pronounces his final judgment on the evil system that perpetrated it (Rev. 17–18).

When Paul urges, “Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters” (Eph. 6:5 NKJV; cf. Col. 3:22), he is not thereby approving of the institution of slavery, but simply alluding to the de facto situation in his day. He is instructing slaves to be good employees, just as believers should be today, but he was not thereby commending slavery. Paul also instructed all believers to be obedient to existing oppressive governments for the Lord’s sake (Rom. 13:1; cf. Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13). But this in no way condones oppression and tyranny which the Bible repeatedly condemns (Exod. 2:23–25; Isa. 10:1). Law and order are necessary for peace and security (Rom. 13:2–5; 1 Tim. 2:2; 1 Peter 2:13–14).

A closer look at Philemon reveals that Paul did not perpetuate slavery, but actually undermined it. He urged Philemon, Onesimus’s owner, to treat the runaway as “a beloved brother” (v. 16). So, by emphasizing the inherent equality of all human beings, both by creation and redemption, the Bible laid down the very moral principles that overthrew slavery and helped restore the dignity and freedom of all persons, whatever their color or ethnic group

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### **Charles Swindoll on RUNAWAY SLAVES**

Under Roman law, masters had complete control over the lives of their slaves. While many slave owners treated their slaves brutally, others were not cruel at all. Slaves were expensive to purchase and keep, and they also possessed many of the legal rights of free citizens. Slaves in the Roman Empire had access to money, could marry and rear families, and were tried in court according to the same laws as those who were free.[Arthur Rupprecht]

However, for runaway slaves—like Onesimus—the situation was different. Roman law made running away an offense sometimes punishable by death! In those cases, the master could register the runaway’s name and description with local officials who would place them on a wanted list. Usually, a captured runaway was returned to his or her owner, who might fit the slave with an iron collar or tattoo them with a sign that they were a fugitivus—“runaway.”[Christopher Fuhrmann]

Many slaves, however, chose never to run away—not because of possible punishment, but because they often fared better than free people. While many free people slept in the streets of Roman cities or in cheap rooms with their families, slaves usually lived within

the homes of their masters, often in a top-floor room of the master's city house or country villa. Slaves were also provided food and clothing, and in some cases, as much as five denarii a month as spending money. Their free counterparts, who labored for a living, had to live off what they earned without assistance. (See [Insights on Philipians, Colossians, Philemon](#) - scroll up and down to see pages)

#### Related Resource:

- Arthur Rupprecht has an informative article on "**Slave, Slavery**" in the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. 1976 - this resource can be **BORROWED** - click [pages 452-459](#)

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#### [Removing the Barriers](#)

Read: Philemon 1:8–16

He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. Philemon 1:16

I saw Mary every Tuesday when I visited "the House"—a home that helps former prisoners reintegrate into society. My life looked different from hers: fresh out of jail, fighting addictions, separated from her son. You might say she lived on the edge of society.

Like Mary, Onesimus knew what it meant to live on the edge of society. As a slave, Onesimus had apparently wronged his Christian master, Philemon, and was now in prison. While there, he met Paul and came to faith in Christ (v. 10). Though now a changed man, Onesimus was still a slave. Paul sent him back to Philemon with a letter urging him to receive Onesimus "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother" (Philem. 1:16).

The gospel changes people and relationships.

Philemon had a choice to make: He could treat Onesimus as his slave or welcome him as a brother in Christ. I had a choice to make too. Would I see Mary as an ex-convict and a recovering addict—or as a woman whose life is being changed by the power of Christ? Mary was my sister in the Lord, and we were privileged to walk together in our journey of faith.

It's easy to allow the walls of socio-economic status, class, or cultural differences to separate us. The gospel of Christ removes those barriers, changing our lives and our relationships forever.

Dear God, thank You that the gospel of Jesus Christ changes lives and relationships. Thank You for removing the barriers between us and making us all members of Your family.

The gospel changes people and relationships.

By Karen Wolfe

INSIGHT After reading the book of Philemon, questions sometimes arise such as, "How can I trust a Bible that tolerated slavery?" and "When Paul had the opportunity to condemn slavery outright, why didn't he do it?" One thing to keep in mind is that slavery in ancient times was different than our concept of slavery today. For example, in the Roman Empire slaves could work toward and achieve freedom. Paul is actually suggesting a change that goes far deeper than an institution change. When Paul asks that Onesimus be taken back and viewed as a brother, he is ultimately dismantling the mindset that segregates people. The Scriptures deal with how we think and not simply how we act. J.R. Hudberg ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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#### Philemon - [A New Flax Shirt](#)

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. . --Galatians 6:2

Onesimus was Philemon's slave. According to the law, he could have been executed for running away. But Onesimus had run into Paul and into the arms of Jesus. Paul sent him back to Philemon with the assurance that the apostle would repay anything the runaway slave owed. Paul carried Onesimus' burden.

Booker T. Washington wrote about an experience he had that illustrates the same principle:

"The most trying ordeal that I was forced to endure as a slave boy ... was the wearing of a flax shirt... That part of the flax from which our clothing was made was ... the cheapest and roughest part. I can scarcely imagine any torture ... that is equal to that caused by putting on a new flax shirt for the first time. But I had no choice... My brother, John, who is several years older than I am, performed one of the most generous acts

that I ever heard of one slave relative doing for another. On several occasions when I was being forced to wear a new flax shirt, he generously agreed to ... wear it for several days, till it was 'broken in.'"

Jesus endured the pain of the cross on our behalf. When we bear one another's burdens, we follow His example and fulfill His will for our lives (Gal. 6:2; 1John 3:16). Are you willing to wear someone's new flax shirt today? --H W Robinson ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Bearing people's heavy burdens,  
Shouldering their pain and grief,  
Shows the love of Christ to others,  
Bringing them His sure relief.  
--Sper

Christ bears our burdens  
that we may bear the burdens of others.

### Philemon 1:17 If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.

**Arthur Way** - If then you regard me as a sharer in your life's work, receive him as you would me.

KJV Philemon 1:17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

BGT Philemon 1:17 ε ο ν με χεις κοινων ν, προσλαβο α τ ν ς μ .

NET Philemon 1:17 Therefore if you regard me as a partner, accept him as you would me.

CSB Philemon 1:17 So if you consider me a partner, accept him as you would me.

ESV Philemon 1:17 So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.

NIV Philemon 1:17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

NLT Philemon 1:17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

NRS Philemon 1:17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

NJB Philemon 1:17 So if you grant me any fellowship with yourself, welcome him as you would me;

NAB Philemon 1:17 So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me.

YLT Philemon 1:17 If, then, with me thou hast fellowship, receive him as me,

MIT Philemon 1:17 If then you have a common bond with me, receive him as you would me.

- **If then you regard me a partner:** Ac 16:15 2Co 8:23 Eph 3:6 Php 1:7 1Ti 6:2 Heb 3:1,14 Jas 2:5 1Pe 5:1 1Jn 1:3
- **accept him as you would me:** Philemon 1:10,12 Mt 10:40 12:48-50 18:5 25:40

## PARTNERSHIP CALLS FOR ACCEPTANCE

**If then you regard me a partner** ([koinonos](#)) - **IF** introduces a first class conditional statement expresses Paul's assurance that Philemon did in fact regard Paul as a **partner**. The word **partner** ([koinonos](#)) emphasizes one who takes part in something with someone.

**Swindoll** - Having explained to Philemon the transformation Onesimus had experienced, Paul appeals to Philemon to grant Onesimus not only forgiveness but also freedom. It would be proper for Philemon to extend forgiveness to Onesimus. After all, it is a fundamental principle of brotherly love to "be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). It doesn't appear that Paul expected anything less from Philemon than to extend full and complete forgiveness to his runaway slave. He expected Philemon to accept Onesimus as he would accept Paul—as a "beloved brother" (Philemon 1:16-17). (See [Insights on Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#) scroll up and down to see pages)

**Accept** ([proslambano](#)) **him as you would me** - Since Paul was Philemon's partner, Paul calls for him to treat Onesimus as he would treat Paul. **Accept** ([proslambano](#)) is in the [aorist imperative](#) and would call on Philemon to [depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#) the command. Paul is calling for Philemon to respond supernaturally, not naturally. Paul's command conveys the idea of

Philemon receiving Onesimus into fellowship just as he would receive Paul if he came. The idea is to receive Onesimus as he would welcome Paul into his home, with the implicit idea of doing so with kindness. It is worth noting that **proslambano** is always in the middle voice ("accept to yourself," "take to yourself"), signifying a personal and willing acceptance of something or someone, in this case Onesimus.

**Scroggie** - **THE DEPUTY PARTNER**. (17). All the Apostle's tact and tenderness are again in evidence here. The language he employs is such as to make it impossible for his friend to deny him his request. This request he wished to make in Philemon 1:12, but did not do so. There he said, "*whom I have sent back to thee in his own person*" But here, he says right out, "**receive him**." He does not say, *reinstate*, but *receive*, a much more tender word. Then again, he puts in the personal plea, "*as myself*." Paul is sure Philemon would receive him, he wishes therefore that that welcome should be extended to Onesimus. What more could he have asked for anyone? Yet all this he asks for one who was regarded as the very least. This is what grace does in the hearts of men. There is one other touch in this plea which would carry, and was intended to carry great weight with Philemon. Paul says, "*If thou countest me a partner!*" There is first of all the word **'partner'** that is "comrade." Throughout the letter Paul has carefully avoided any exercise of his apostolic authority; not on that ground does he appeal, but on this, that he is old, that he is a prisoner, and now, that he is a **partner with Philemon**, having common feelings, interests, and hopes, a sharer with him of the faith that is in Christ Jesus. This reference is far-reaching, and, if it be acknowledged by Philemon, commits him to all that Paul has asked, and to much more. If these two are yoked together they will act together. That is the essential idea of partnership. Comrades in conflict, partners in business, sharers in service, have common ideas and aims, they are united in principle and purpose, however they may differ in method, or they are not comrades, partners, sharers at all. Do we not find here the secret of success and the cause of failure in the Christian enterprise? Success, wherever this partnership is acknowledged and acted upon. Failure, wherever it is not. If the churches have exposed themselves to the criticism, not to say to the ridicule too often, of the ungodly, it is because petty jealousy has taken the place of Christian sympathy, and miserable rivalry the place of hearty cooperation. If we are ever to succeed we must beckon to the other ships to come and help us land the cargo. Observe how delicately Paul puts the matter. He does not say, "*I am partner with you, so receive Onesimus as myself*," but, "*If thou holdest me to be a comrade*" He will not assume anything that would be to his own advantage; but he puts it to Philemon. Yet he knows full well how deep and true is Philemon's love for him, and is quite confident of the comradeship, but Paul is too great a man to presume or insist. He so utterly trusts what is true and right, that at the feet of these he lays everything and waits. That should be a rebuke to the rash haste which is responsible for so many of our troubles.

**Spurgeon** - How beautifully this is put all through! It very much reminds me of our Lord Jesus Christ, who seems to say to the Divine Father, "This poor child is in fellowship with me. **Receive** him, therefore, as myself;" and this is just what God does in the case of repenting and believing sinners; he receives them just as if he could see Christ in them.

**Utley** - "**accept him as you would me**" Paul's statement may have derived from Jesus' words in Matt. 25:44-45 or Paul's experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:4). By persecuting Christians, Paul was persecuting Christ. By accepting Onesimus, Philemon was accepting Paul. True love is wonderfully corporate and reciprocal. We show our love for God by how we love one another (cf. 1 John 2:9,11; 4:20).

**William Barclay** - It is going to be hard for Philemon to regard a runaway slave as a brother, but that is exactly what Paul demands. 'If you agree', says Paul, 'that I am your partner in the work of Christ and that Onesimus is my son in the faith, you must receive him as you would receive me.' Here again is something very significant. Christians must always welcome back those who have made a mistake. Too often, we regard with suspicion people who have taken the wrong turning and show that we are never prepared to trust them again. We believe that God can forgive them; but we, ourselves, find it too difficult. It has been said that the most uplifting thing about Jesus Christ is that he trusts us on the very field of our defeat.

**Brian Bell** points out that Paul's request posed a dilemma for Philemon - "Receive him" – (dilemma) If he was too easy, this might influence other slaves to "become Christians" (i.e. for wrong motives) If he was too hard on him, it might affect his testimony & ministry in Colossae.

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**Partner** (partaker, sharer) (2844) [koinonos](#) from **koinos** = common, shared by all) ([Click](#) for study of [koinonia](#)) is one who participates with another in an enterprise or matter of joint concern. It is one who fellowships and shares something in common with another. He or she takes part in something with someone else.

**Accept** (receive, take aside) (4355) [proslambano](#) from **prós** = to, toward, interactively with intensifying + **lambáno** = to take, lay hold of with initiative) means literally to take to or toward, to aggressively receive with strong personal interest. To take in addition to (Acts 17:5). It can mean to take hold of or grasp ( Acts 27.36). It can mean to take aside or lead off to oneself (can imply for privacy) (Mt 16:22, 20:17, Mk 8:32). Proslambano can mean to accept the presence of a person with friendliness, to welcome, to receive hospitably, to receive into one's home or circle of acquaintances, (Ro 14:1, 3, 15:7, Acts 28:2, Philemon 1:17). Proslambano is used idiomatically to mean to take food to oneself (Acts 27:33, 27:36). It has the notion of welcome, of taking to oneself and so taking into



friendship.

Proslambano is used of God's gracious acceptance of men, and also of men welcoming other men to their society. God and Christ are said to have received those whom, formerly estranged from them, having brought them to themselves by the gospel (Ro 14:3, 15:7b) The idea (of proslambano) is not that we scorn anyone, but that we continue to bring people alongside us, that we don't look down on them, that we don't talk down to them, but to bring them alongside, certainly to encourage, certainly to instruct, but never to scorn, never to judge, never to demean in any possible way.

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**Philemon - Warren Wiersbe** - Two statements in Paul's letter to Philemon remind us of what Jesus did for us. "Receive him [Onesimus] as you would me" (Philemon 1:17) reminds us that we are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). "Put that on my account" (Philemon 1:18) reminds us that Jesus paid the price for our redemption (Ro 4:1-8; 2Co 5:21). (**BORROW** [With the Word](#))

See - [Bible Illustrator on Philemon](#)

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**Philemon 1:18 But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account;**

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**Arthur Way** - Whatever wrong he has done you in the past, whatever debt is still unpaid, let it stand in your account against me!

**William Barclay** - If he has done you any damage or owes you anything, put it down to my account.

KJV Philemon 1:18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;

BGT Philemon 1:18 ε δ τι δ κησ υ σε φε λει, το το μο λλ γα.

NET Philemon 1:18 Now if he has defrauded you of anything or owes you anything, charge what he owes to me.

CSB Philemon 1:18 And if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

ESV Philemon 1:18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

NIV Philemon 1:18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.

NLT Philemon 1:18 If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me.

NRS Philemon 1:18 If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

NJB Philemon 1:18 if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, put it down to my account.

NAB Philemon 1:18 And if he has done you any injustice or owes you anything, charge it to me.

YLT Philemon 1:18 and if he did hurt to thee, or doth owe anything, this to me be reckoning;

MIT Philemon 1:18 If he has wronged you in any way, or if he owes you anything, charge it to me.

- **charge that to my account:** Isa 53:4-7

## **PAUL'S WILLINGNESS TO PAY ANY DEBT**

**But** - Term of contrast. Paul quickly pivots in his appeal to Philemon.

**Scroggie** - The Promise (Philemon 1:18-19). One wonders what more there is that Paul can say. Yet, in drawing his letter to a close he has one more word to write on behalf of Onesimus. He has made the request, disclosed his once founddesire, explained the situation; and now, having kept it to the last, he names Onesimus' sin, and takes, as far as one man can take for another, responsibility for it in its human ethical aspect. And so, we now have the promise "*But If he hath wronged thee at all, or oweth thee ought put that to mine account. I Paul write it with mine own hand, I will repay, it : that I say not unto thee that thou owest to my: even thine own self besides.*" Paul's playfulness comes here into evidence again. In somewhat formal fashion he presents to Philemon a credit and debit account.

**If he has wronged** ([adikeo](#)) **you in any way or owes** ([opheilo](#)) **you anything** - This **IF** introduces the second of two first class conditional statements (Philemon 1:17 "*IF then you regard me as a partner*") which **are** both assumed to be true. Paul assumes

Onesimus had wronged Philemon, first by running away and possibly by stealing, as implied by the gist of this verse.

*Christianity never entitled anyone to default on debts.*

-- William Barclay

**Charge** ([ellogeo](#) - [present imperative](#) - "impute") **that to my account** - Paul is saying if the wrong done by Onesimus involves money, he would pick up the tab and pay his debt. This would call on Philemon to trust Paul, for after all this is a promise from a man who is imprisoned. It does seem to imply Paul knew this imprisonment was not final and this is substantiated by his request to Philemon to "prepare me a lodging" (Philemon 1:22).

*Christianity is nothing if it is not ethical.*

*Yet there are many who look to their religion for sanction for most unethical conduct.*

**Scroggie** - **I OWE YOU**" (Philemon 1:18,19a) Observe that now, for the first time, and quite plainly, (1). PAUL ACKNOWLEDGES ONESIMUS' SIN. "*But . . . aught.*" The offence is first admitted, and then described. "*Philemon, I know that Onesimus has wronged you, I know that he is in your debt.*" How did Paul know? Of course Onesimus had confessed all; under the action of the Spirit of God he had come to see his sin in its true light, and to own up to the injury which he had done his master. If he had not done this, what evidence would there have been of repentance at all. There is no conversion where there is no confession, and where sin has been specific, confession must be also. Behind Paul's acknowledgment to Philemon, is Onesimus' to him. It is an acknowledgment of "wrong" and of wrong in the form of robbery. Yet Paul will not use that ugly word, for that would tend to irritate Philemon, but he speaks of a debt, and yet does not define the nature or extent of it. The terms of this letter are perfectly magical, and the wonder of them consists quite as much in what Paul does not say as in what he does say. When Paul says "if," he is not implying any doubt; the case is stated hypothetically. That this youth had wronged his master was beyond question; yet there was no need to make the fact more bold than necessary. But we must not forget that all sin is wrong, that is, it is a violation of law, an unjust act, an injury done to someone; it is negation of right. Under cover of that word "wrong" are the countless forms which sin may take. It may be killing, or stealing, or lying, or anything else, but all is wrong. Here, then, are two great words, wrong and right, under one or other of which everything may be classified. Right is the only true standard of conduct, and wrong is departure from it. All our action should be governed by the principle "*Whether it be right in the sight of God.*" (Acts 4:19). Paul's association of Onesimus with himself (Philemon 1:10,12,16,17) was not for one moment intended to minimize his former guilt, nor in any way or measure to excuse his offence. That is the force of "**but**" in Philemon 1:18. "*Receive him as myself . . . but*" Paul would ever act in the light; he would have before him all the facts, and then he would judge righteous judgment. And so we are prepared for this further, that **PAUL ACKNOWLEDGES ONESIMUS' OBLIGATION, AND TAKES IT UPON HIMSELF.** "Put that to mine account." This is his I.O.U. voucher to Philemon. Paul clearly recognised, what we sometimes fail to admit, that new life does not cancel old debt. The fact that Onesimus had become a Christian in no wise set him free from his moral obligations; neither does it set us free. The profession of conversion is no reason why you should not pay your debts, keep your promises, be diligent at your occupation, or make amends for previous wrongdoing. Such profession is an additional reason why you should do all these things. Christianity is nothing if it is not ethical. Yet there are many who look to their religion for sanction for most unethical conduct. Paul goes beyond the legal requirement in this case. A slave had no standing in the eyes of the law; in the secular court he could neither be debtor nor creditor, properly speaking, as against his master. But we all know that what is legally right may be morally wrong, and that what is legally wrong may be morally right. Conscience is greater than constitution, and the ethical sense, than legal enactments. And so, in the Christian light Onesimus was given to see that he was under moral obligation to right the wrong, to make good to his master, in some way, the injury he had done him. But how was he to do this? The money he had stolen he had spent, he was a penniless slave; like the man in the parable, he had "nothing to pay." Now Paul, having brought Onesimus to think and will as he should in relation to the whole matter, steps in and makes himself bond. He says to Philemon, "*I will repay the sum; see, I put my name, PAUL, to this undertaking; it shall be done.*" What a wonderful heart Paul had, and what a faith in God. Both qualities are now exhibited. Here is a prisoner, dependent upon the gifts of others, undertaking to pay the debts of a runaway slave. Where was the money to come from? Was he allowed and able to earn some by the work of his hands; or, was he going to pray it in? Not for one moment are we to suppose that he made this promise in the belief that Philemon would not allow him to fulfil it. While Paul would expect that his friend would treat the whole matter with the generosity for which he was so well known (4-7), he nevertheless, did not presume upon that; but quite seriously and purposefully took upon himself to clear this account. In doing this does he not remind us of another, Who, when we were in hopeless debt to God, and had nothing to pay, undertook our case, paid our debt with His blood, and set us free? "*Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe/ Sin had left a crimson stain/ He washed it white as snow!*" We all are God's Onesimuses, and but for our Great Friend, what would have become of us?

**Spurgeon** - How generously this is put by this poor prisoner at Rome, and how gloriously, in this, he is like our Master, Who stands as Surety for us!

**Brian Bell** - points out that Verse 17 "was the doctrine of Identification. - Verse 18 is the doctrine of Imputation. Adam's sin was imputed to the whole world; Man's sin was imputed to Jesus Christ. God's righteousness is imputed to believing man. Psalm 32:3

"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity."

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**Charge** (impute) (1677) **ellogeo** from **en** = in + **logos** = something said in the sense of account) was a technical Greek commercial term (technical term of **mercantile** language) meaning to charge something to one's account. Here in **Romans 5:13** speaks metaphorically of sin as not being "imputed when there is no law." This principle is applied to the fact that between Adam's transgression and the giving of the Law at Sinai, sin, though it was in the world, did not partake of the character of transgression; for there was no law. The law of conscience existed, but that is not in view in the passage, which deals with the external commandments given by God.

**W E Vine** on **ellogeo** - denotes "to charge to one's account, to lay to one's charge," and is translated "imputed" in **Rom. 5:13**, of sin as not being "imputed when there is no law." This principle is there applied to the fact that between Adam's transgression and the giving of the Law at Sinai, sin, though it was in the world, did not partake of the character of transgression; for there was no law. The law of conscience existed, but that is not in view in the passage, which deals with the fact of external commandments given by God."

H. Preisker on **ellogeo** - The term **ellogéō** has a commercial sense in **Philemon 1:18**: Paul will meet any loss suffered through Onesimus. Its use is figurative in the only other NT instance in **Ro 5:13**. The argument here is that all are sinners prior to the giving of the law, and death reigns as a destiny posited in Adam, but until God's will is declared in the law sin is not transgression of the law and hence it is not counted or charged in the same way as it is after Moses. (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume)

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## **James Smith - Philemon - AN ANALOGY OF OUR SALVATION.**

### **I. Original Position.**

God created man perfect, and thus man was His property. But in sinning he not only departed from God, as Onesimus had done, but also robbed Him of His rights and just dues.

### **II. Sad Plight.**

As Onesimus fled to Rome, and was in a parlous position, so with man. As Roman law gave a slave no right to asylum, so the Law of God affords man no right of asylum, no resting place, no way of escape. The Law says, "The soul that sins, it shall die."

### **III. God has a Partner (Philemon 1:17).**

It is thought by some that Philemon and the Apostle had been partners in some business concern. In Jesus, God has a Partner utterly and entirely one with Him. He interposes on our behalf. Knowing to the full how much we have wronged God, and how much we owe Him, Jesus says, "Put that on Mine account." All our debt is put to Christ's account.

### **IV. Grace Intervenes.**

Roman law permitted a slave to flee to his master's friend, who could plead for him. Onesimus sought out his master's friend, Paul the Apostle, and he was born again—"whom I have begotten in my bonds" (10). Sinners fly to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, and through Him, they receive pardon, are begotten anew as sons, and find both a Savior, an Intercessor, and a Father. The sinner returns to God, and is received, not as a runaway slave, but as Christ Himself (Philemon 1:16).

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## **Philemon 1:18 [A Good Account](#)**

If he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. —Philemon 1:18

As a young boy I watched my dad write checks and wished that I could do it. What I didn't realize was that there had to be money in an account to back them up.

The apostle Paul never wrote a check, but he did have an account good enough to pay an unusual debt if necessary. He referred to this in his letter to Philemon, a wealthy Christian whose slave Onesimus had run away and may have stolen some money from his master.

In the providence of God, Onesimus met Paul in Rome and became a follower of Christ. They agreed that it was right for him to return to his master. Paul wrote a letter to Philemon (the letter that bears his name), asking him to receive Onesimus as a brother,

and assuring him that he himself would pay any debt Onesimus owed.

That's a picture of what happens in salvation. As sinners, we owed an enormous debt, but Jesus took care of it for us. Because of His sinless life, He has a limitless resource of righteousness. And by dying in our place, He paid the penalty for our sin. Now we can draw on this payment by faith. As Martin Luther said, "We are all His Onesimi." If we put our trust in Christ as our Savior, our sins are put to His account and we are free for all eternity. Praise God! —Dennis De Haan (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Rejoice, rejoice, the debt is paid!  
For all our sins on Christ were laid;  
Estrangement once was all we knew,  
But now we know a love that's true.  
—D. De Haan

Christ paid a debt He didn't owe  
to satisfy a debt we couldn't pay.

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### **Robert Morgan - Put Them on My Account - BORROW [From This Verse](#)**

I remember sitting in church as a child, listening as our pastor waxed vividly from this text. He described the slave Onesimus, how he transgressed, how he confessed, and how he was reconciled to his master through Paul's entreaty.

Is not this a picture of the gospel? I think I see Him as He brings the needy sinner into God's presence, saying, "Father, he has wronged Thee; he owes Thee much, but all has been charged to My account. Let him go free."

Only years later did I discover that my pastor had preached one of Harry Ironside's most memorable sermons virtually word for word: Charge that to My Account.

Well, nothing is original. Ironside himself may have gotten the idea from the Methodist circuit rider, Daniel Curry. One night on the Nebraska prairie, Curry made himself a little campfire and fell asleep, using his saddle for a pillow. That night he dreamed of dying and going to heaven, where he was met by an angel who asked his reason for being there.

"My name is Daniel Curry," answered the preacher, "and I have come to claim the mansion Jesus promised me long ago." But the angel wouldn't let him in, and they got into a quarrel. Finally Curry was taken to argue his case before Almighty God Himself. But arriving at the throne, he was dumbstruck. It was ablaze with blinding light equal to a thousand suns, and Curry fell prostrate before the Lord, his eyes tightly shut. A stern voice cried, "Who art thou? What seekest thou?" Curry tried to rise, but he was too terrified to utter a sound.

Suddenly he heard sandaled feet drawing near. A hand touched him and pulled him to his feet. Daniel recognized the scars on the man's palms, and he heard Him speak these words: "Father, this is Daniel Curry. He confessed Me before men, and I am now confessing him before Thee. Whatever sins he has committed, whatever transgressions may blot his record, whatever iniquities may stain his past—charge them all to Me. Put them on My account."

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### **Steven Cole - BE WILLING TO BEAR THE COST OF A RELATIONSHIP.**

Paul's cost was twofold: First, he was willing to part with Onesimus in spite of his own needs. Second, he was willing to pay for any costs that Onesimus had incurred towards Philemon. Some have said, in light of Paul's rather humorous reminder (v. 19) that Philemon owes him his very self and from the fact that Paul was poor and in prison, that he didn't really expect to pay. But I think Paul was sincere in wanting Philemon to view Onesimus' debt as Paul's debt. As Onesimus' father in the faith, he wanted to provide for his child.

Philemon also incurred some costs. He lost a slave and his labor for a while, along with whatever cash and property that Onesimus had stolen. He had to bear these costs in order to forgive Onesimus. Also, there was the cost of his reputation in town when he forgave Onesimus. Other slave owners would have criticized him for setting a dangerous precedent.

And, of course, Onesimus had to bear a cost to return to Philemon. He had to part from his dear mentor, Paul. He had to be willing to give up his freedom and perhaps work to make restitution. Godly relationships always come with a price tag!

That price tag is usually called "forgiveness." Forgiveness means that you bear the hurt and the one who wronged you goes free. I was once counseling with a couple that had a long history of one hurting the other and then the other retaliating. Then they got saved, but they were still bitter. We were getting nowhere. Finally, I said, "Look, each of you keeps bringing up all of these hurts from

the past. We could keep dredging up the past for years to come. Or, you could choose to forgive one another.” I asked the husband if he would forgive his wife for all of these wrongs. He thought about it a moment and said that he would. I asked her the same question. She stewed about it for a while and then blurted, “If I forgive him, he goes free!”

I said, “Yes, that is what Jesus did for you. He bore the penalty you deserved and you went free.” But, she wouldn’t do it. At that point, I couldn’t help them.

But when we bear the cost, whether monetary or the cost of forgiveness, we always get more in return than we gave. Philemon received back this now useful slave, not just as a slave, but also as a brother. Onesimus now was able to serve out of joy in the Lord. The church welcomed a valuable member. [Godly Relationships](#).

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### Philemon - [Relationship Under Repair](#)

Are you easy to get along with? Do you have a good relationship with your spouse or your friends? Then you probably aren't guilty of the following behaviors:

- criticizing instead of praising
- using insensitive words
- neglecting others
- making jokes at another's expense
- not listening
- refusing to admit wrong
- being rude
- belittling others' opinions

These kinds of behavior will wreck relationships and hinder the healing of past hurts.

For a good example of the way to strengthen relationships, read the apostle Paul's short letter to Philemon, a wealthy resident of Colosse. The subject is Onesimus, Philemon's slave, who had stolen from him and fled to Rome. There Onesimus met Paul, who led him to a saving knowledge of Jesus. The letter is Paul's kind, compassionate appeal to Philemon to accept Onesimus back--now as a brother. It's a great example of love in action.

Although Onesimus deserved Philemon's punishment, Paul called him a "son" (Philemon 1:10) and a "beloved brother" (Philemon 16). He said he would repay what Onesimus had stolen.

Paul knew how to restore a relationship. Do we? -- J D Brannon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God of grace and God of goodness,  
Teach me to be ever kind,  
Always gentle and forgiving  
With the Savior first in mind.  
--Brandt

Forgiveness is the glue that repairs broken relationships.

**Philemon 1:19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).**

**Arthur Way** - I write this with my own hand -- I will repay it: Paul. I might say that it is you that are in my debt that to me you owe all you are-- but no, I will not say it

**William Barclay** - I, Paul, write with my own hand—I will repay it, not to mention to you that you owe your very self to me.

KJV Philemon 1:19 I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

BGT Philemon 1:19 γ Παλος γραψα τ μ χειρ , γ ποτ σω· να μ λγω σοι τι κα σεαυτ ν μοι προσοφε λεις.

NET Philemon 1:19 I, Paul, have written this letter with my own hand: I will repay it. I could also mention that you owe me your very self.

CSB Philemon 1:19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it-- not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self.

ESV Philemon 1:19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it-- to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.

NIV Philemon 1:19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back--not to mention that you owe me your very self.

NLT Philemon 1:19 I, PAUL, WRITE THIS WITH MY OWN HAND: I WILL REPAY IT. AND I WON't mention that you owe me your very soul!

NRS Philemon 1:19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self.

NJB Philemon 1:19 I am writing this in my own hand: I, Paul, shall pay it back -- I make no mention of a further debt, that you owe your very self to me!

NAB Philemon 1:19 I, Paul, write this in my own hand: I will pay. May I not tell you that you owe me your very self.

YLT Philemon 1:19 I, Paul did write with my hand, I -- I will repay; that I may not say that also thyself, besides, to me thou dost owe.

MIT Philemon 1:19 I Paul, wrote this with my own handwriting—I will repay. Of course, I do not mention to you that also you owe yourself to me.

- **I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand:** 1Co 16:21,22 Ga 5:2 6:11
- **not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well** 1Co 4:15 9:1,2 2Co 3:2 1Ti 1:2 Tit 1:4 Jas 5:19,20

#### Related Passages:

Colossians 4:18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

### A FIRST CENTURY "I.O.U." WITH AN "ASTERISK"

The "asterisk" is Paul's reminder that he had led Philemon to the Lord, which was debt that Philemon could never repay Paul.

**I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand** - This is almost like an oath as Paul emphasizes the offer he makes is from himself.

**Barclay** - It is interesting to note that this is an exact instance of a [cheirographon](#), the kind of acknowledgment met in Colossians 2:14. This is a *handwriting against Paul*, an obligation voluntarily accepted and signed. It is of interest to note that Paul was able to pay Onesimus' debts. Every now and again, we get glimpses which show that he was not without financial resources. Felix kept him prisoner, for he had hopes of a bribe to let him go (Acts 24:26); Paul was able to rent a house during his imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30). ([Philemon Commentary](#))

**NET NOTE** on **writing** - Greek = "I wrote" Here γραψα (egrapsa) is functioning as an epistolary aorist. Paul puts it in the past tense because from Philemon's perspective when he reads the letter it will, of course, already have been written. **With my own hand.** Paul may have considered this letter so delicate that he wrote the letter himself as opposed to using an amanuensis or secretary.

**I will repay it** - **Repay** (apotino) is found only here in the NT and was a legal technical term, of damages to be paid off, to make compensation.

**Brian Bell** points out that "True reconciliation is not cheap; there is a price to pay. Paul knew this & was willing to pay the price himself. QUESTION: Can God use you as a reconciler? QUESTION: Are you willing to pay the price? Sometimes it costs your friendship.

**Martin Luther** - "Here we see how Paul lays himself out for poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleads his cause with his master, and so sets himself as if he were Onesimus, and had himself done wrong to Philemon. Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also does Paul for Onesimus with Philemon. We are all his Onesimi, to my thinking."

**(not to mention to you that you owe**[prosopheilo = owe in return] **to me even your own self as well)** -Paul throws in a parenthetical statement about debts owed! He reminds Philemon that he owes Paul a debt which alludes to the fact that he had received the Gospel through the efforts of Paul, which had paid his sin debt. It is very probably that Philemon was saved through Paul's two years at Ephesus for "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" and "the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing." (Acts 19:10,20).

**Scroggie** - Having- undertaken to pay, Paul then reverses the matter and says: **"YOU OWE ME"** (19b). "That I say unto thee that thou owest to me even thine own self besides." Paul is still thinking of a debt, but now of Philemon's to him, and not of Onesimus' to Philemon. The word "to owe" in this verse is not the recurrence of the one in the previous verse. There it is but here, prosopheilo which means "to owe besides, or in addition." We naturally ask besides what? In addition to what? For answer we go to the first part of the sentence "that I say not to thee." Lightfoot says that there is a suppressed thought here, which expressed, would have read, "*I will repay it though indeed you cannot fairly claim repayment, for you owe me much more than Onesimus owes you, and, over-and-above that, your own self.*" All that had made life to Philemon gloriously worthwhile he owed, instrumentally to Paul, who had led him to Christ. That debt Philemon could never pay, and was not asked to pay, but it is suggested that he see in his own case his slave's case, and that as he had "freely received" he should "freely give" and forgive. And this is the standard for us all. In a parable our Lord has solemnly warned us against refusing to forgive, we who have been forgiven; especially as anything which may be due to us is as nothing in comparison to what we owed God and were forgiven for Jesus' sake. Well may we pray "FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS."

**Spurgeon** - Paul had been the means of Philemon's conversion, so he was immeasurably in debt to the apostle; but Paul only gently reminds him of the fact as a reason why he should deal kindly with Onesimus for his sake.

**Guzik** - While "accounts" were being studied, Paul mentioned one more thing. "Philemon, remember that I have a lot of credit on your account, because you owe me even your own self besides." Paul could afford to pay Onesimus' expenses because there was a sense in which Philemon owed Paul his salvation!

**NET NOTE** on **your own self** - The statement you owe me your very self means that Paul was responsible for some sort of blessing in the life of Philemon; though a monetary idea may be in mind, it is perhaps better to understand Paul as referring to the spiritual truth (i.e., the gospel) he had taught Philemon.

**Philemon 1:20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.**

**Arthur Way** - Ah, yes, brother mine, it is for myself I plead -- render me this one loving service, for the love of our Lord ! Give to my heart restful comfort, for the love of Christ !

**William Barclay** - Yes, my brother, let me make some Christian profit out of you! Refresh my heart in Christ.

KJV Philemon 1:20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

BGT Philemon 1:20 να δελφ , γ σου να μην ν κυρ · ν παυσ ν μου τ σπλ γχνα ν Χριστ .

NET Philemon 1:20 Yes, brother, let me have some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

CSB Philemon 1:20 Yes, brother, may I have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

ESV Philemon 1:20 Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

NIV Philemon 1:20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

NLT Philemon 1:20 Yes, my brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ.

NRS Philemon 1:20 Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ.

NJB Philemon 1:20 Well then, brother, I am counting on you, in the Lord; set my heart at rest, in Christ.

NAB Philemon 1:20 Yes, brother, may I profit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

YLT Philemon 1:20 Yes, brother, may I have profit of thee in the Lord; refresh my bowels in the Lord;

MIT Philemon 1:20 Yes, brother, may I be favored to benefit from you in the Lord in this. Refresh my deep emotions in Christ.

- **Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord:** 2Co 2:2 7:4-7,13 Php 2:2 4:1 1Th 2:19,20 3:7-9 Heb 13:17 3Jn 1:4
- **refresh my heart in Christ:** Philemon 1:7,12 Php 1:8 2:1 1Jn 3:17

## PAUL IS ASKING PHILEMON TO REFRESH HIS HEART

**Scroggie** - You will observe that as there was an Approach to the Object of this letter (Philemon 1:8-9), so there is a Retreat from it (Philemon 1:20-21); the heart of the letter, the Disclosure of the Object, being in Philemon 1:10-19. Observe also, that in neither the Prologue, Philemon 1:1-9, nor the Epilogue, Philemon 1:20-25, is there any mention of Onesimus. The Apostle's tender request in Philemon 1:10-19, is encircled by considerations human and divine, personal and relative, natural and spiritual, which were bound to go a long way towards securing the reinstatement of this runaway slave. In several important respects the Apostle's closing thoughts return to those with which he opened, as a comparison of Philemon 1:20-21, with Philemon 1:8-9; Philemon 1:22 with Philemon 1:4-7, and Philemon 1:23-25 with Philemon 1:1-3, will show. The first verse now before us makes a personal claim (Philemon 1:20) ; and the second gives expression to an inspiring confidence (Philemon 1:21); and both are in the embrace of love.

**Yes, brother** ([adelphos](#) - "from same womb"), **let me benefit** (oninemi) **from you in the Lord** - **Let me benefit** (oninemi in optative mood = expresses a wish/desire for an action to occur) is only used here in the NT and as a formula means '*may I be favored by you*' or '*may I have (some) benefit from you.*' This may well be another play on Onesimus' name for some think *oninemi* is the root of his name.

**Scroggie** - THE CLAIM OF LOVE (20). "*Yea, brother let me have help of thee in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ*" Here we shall notice, first, the Favours Requested, and then, the Sphere of Fulfilment. **THE FAVOURS REQUESTED.** In introducing these requests the Apostle says "yea, brother." The words are designed to be affectionate and appealing. He here calls Philemon, what he wished Philemon to regard Onesimus to be, a brother (Philemon 1:16). There are only two brotherhoods of which we know anything; the brotherhood of race, which is all inclusive; and the brotherhood of grace which embraces only the children of God. It is to the latter that Paul here points. Just because Philemon was a Christian, he was Paul's brother; and just because Onesimus was a Christian, he was Philemon's brother; and just because Paul was a Christian he was Onesimus' brother, and so the circle is complete. "This is the entreaty of a brother to a brother on behalf of a brother." Paul does not ask Philemon to make it so, but only to recognise that it is so (Philemon 1:16-20). We are all so willing to recognise it as an idea, but so slow to act upon it as a fact. Not more sure is the brotherhood of man in sin, than is the brotherhood of all believers in Christ, of whatever colour, tongue, clime, or social status. It is well that, in drawing this letter to a close, Paul should again strike this note, for if this be recognised, all that it implies is carried. Paul now requests two favours; he wishes help and refreshing.

**Scroggie** - The Request for Help, "Let me have help of thee." This word (oninemi) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and almost certainly it is now used in a playful way, reminding Philemon of the meaning of his slave's name Onesimus means helpful, or profitable; and the verb is derived from oninemi meaning, to help, to profit. Onesimus had not been true to his name; but Paul is quite sure that he is going to be. He has already said of him, "Who once was unprofitable to thee, but now is profitable to thee and to me" (Philemon 1:11). To this thought the Apostle now gives quite a new turn and says in effect, "*Philemon my brother, what Onesimus has been to me, and is going to be to you, I want that you should be to me. He is your Onesimus ; will you be mine?*" We cannot all figure in some great role, but we can all help. You will remember that in the enumeration, in 1 Corinthians, of the gifts bestowed upon the Church, is "helps" (1Co 12:28, not the same word in the Greek as in our text). How much this covers, and how indispensable it is! It is both a gift and a grace. The Church that has most Onesimuses in it is doing the most. We have a right to expect "help" not only from God (Heb. 4:16, still another word in the Greek), but from one another, and this is something that we can all give. Paul does not specify the kind of help he wants, so we may assume that what he is asking is satisfaction with reference to the subject of this letter. What he means, no doubt, is that, if Philemon restores Onesimus it will be helping him, his aged friend far away, and in prison. Would Philemon, could Philemon refuse such a request ? We see, therefore, that although Paul does not again directly refer to Onesimus, he is still in his thoughts and desires.

**Refresh** ([anapauo](#) in [aorist imperative](#)) **my heart in Christ** - Paul appeals to Philemon's heart as a man known for refreshing the saints. Here Paul is in prison and Philemon acquiescing to his request will bring refreshment even in his prison cell. If he allowed Onesimus to remain with Paul, this would refresh Paul's heart.

This passage recalls Paul's words to the saints at Rome writing the he might "be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine." (Ro 1:12)

**Spurgeon** - You have refreshed others, then, surely, you will not let me be without refreshment now You have been very kind to all



sorts of saints; then you cannot be unkind to the man who is your own spiritual father.”

**Brian Bell** points out that here we have "Another play on words. Joy/benefit = root of Onesimus. (i.e. “now let me receive from you a touch of Onesimus through your willingness to forgive him!”) So what was Philemon’s response to this Postcard? Did he forgive him? (we don’t know) Ignatius (early church father) writing 50 yrs later in a letter to the Ephesians, addressed their wonderful minister, their bishop, named Onesimus. Ignatius makes exactly the same pun as Paul made – he is **Onesimus by name** (NAME MEANS “profitable or useful”) and **Onesimus by nature**, the profitable one to Christ. It may well be that the runaway slave had become with the passing years the great bishop of Ephesus! (Ibid; pg.275)

**NET NOTE - Refresh my heart in Christ.** Paul desired that Philemon refresh his heart in the same way that he [Philemon] had refreshed the hearts of other believers (cf. Philemon 1:7), that is, by forgiving and accepting Onesimus. In this way the presence and character of Jesus Christ would be vividly seen in Philemon’s attitude toward his runaway slave.

*Help and refreshing which are not in and by Christ are, at best, poor and temporary.*

**Scroggie** - there is, (ii). The Request for Refreshing. "Refresh my heart." This takes us back to Philemon 1:7, where we read that Philemon had oft "refreshed" the hearts of the saints. Paul thinks that if Philemon had done this for others, he would not be slow to do it for him. Lightfoot points out that this is a compound anapauein ([anapauo](#)), and expresses a temporary relief, the simple verb ([pauo](#)) expressing a final cessation. It has, therefore, the force of relaxation, or refreshment, "as a preparation for the renewal of labour or suffering." For Philemon to grant Paul his request would be a great encouragement to the latter ; it would stimulate him to further service, in prison though he was. To know that Onesimus had been reinstated would be to the aged captive what a draught from a crystal spring would be to a thirsty traveller ; what a meal would be to a hungry pilgrim. We have said that it is in the power of us all to help, and so it is to refresh ; we 'help by refreshing, and were fresh by helping. A kindly word spoken in season, how good it is ! The look or hand-shake of sympathy or appreciation, how heartening it is! In the strength of such tokens of love the soldier will go forth to the fight, the workman to his task, and the pilgrim to the climb; such refreshing will make the lot of the captive easier, and the bed of the sufferer softer, and surely this is well worthwhile doing! But how may it best be done? Our attention is here called to THE SPHERE or FULFILMENT. "*In the Lord . . . In Christ*" Two interpretations may be given to these words in their present connection, and perhaps both were in the Apostle's mind. (i). That Christ is the sphere (LOCATIVE OF SPHERE) in which Philemon may help and refresh Paul, or in which the Apostle may be helped and refreshed. (ii). That Christ is the Source from which the help and refreshing get their strength. Both interpretations are true, and we cannot afford to forget either. Help and refreshing which are not in and by Christ are, at best, poor and temporary. " **'IN CHRIST'** carries in it the secret of all sweet humanities and beneficences, it is the spell which calls out fairest charity, and is the only victorious antagonist of harshness and selfishness." Taking the verse as a whole, we should observe the ground on which the final plea is made for Onesimus. It is not now because to receive him is right; but because to do so will please Paul. Secondary motives must never be allowed to take the place of primary ones, but, on the other hand, the secondary must not be despised. Sometimes the latter succeed where the former fail, and any motives that are worthy at all should be employed to secure ends that are at all worthy. Pleasing men may be mere [obsequiousness](#), but to please Christ is the highest form of devotion. His ruling motive should be ours. "*I do always those things which please Thee.*" To coldly obey a mere law of duty is one thing; and to joyfully gratify a living loving Lord is quite another. We must obey, of course; but we must do more. Of whom is it said that they receive whatsoever they ask of God? Of those who "keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." (1 John 3:22). Paul, therefore, in this simple verse before us, sets forth a great truth, and enunciates a great principle; and in passing from this, let us not forget that it is given to us to help and refresh Christ.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - The story is told of Zachary a three year who was eating ice cream with his parents. He began shivering, and placed his hand over his heart, saying "Mommy, it's cold in my Jesus!"

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**Brian Bell** Now let’s go down to the Murrieta Post Office!

We’d find a present-day postmark on it, with our names on the forwarding address! We clearly see this letter is also a picture of Christ as the Redeemer of lost sinners. Christ found us as runaway slaves, law-breakers, rebels, but He forgave us & identified us with Himself. “All of us are Onesimus!” Look how a useless runaway became useful though the transforming power of the Cross! As Paul was willing to pay the price to save a disobedient slave, so Christ paid the price on the cross for His wayward children. “Receive Him as you would me” – reminding us that we are “accepted in the beloved!” (Eph 1:6KJV+). The Christian will never enter heaven on his/her own merits. When the believer stands before the Father, Christ will have to say, “Receive them as you would Me”. (cf Mt 10:32+) This speaks of our **Identification with Christ** ([See resource below](#)). That’s what we mean by **Justification** – We are in Christ & therefore accepted before God.

The Christian needs to keep in mind the distinction between “accepted in Christ” & “acceptable to Christ”. Those who have trusted in

Christ for salvation are forever accepted in Christ and can never be rejected by the Father! When believers sin, they are accepted, but their actions are not acceptable! Because we are accepted in Him, we have sonship; as we live lives acceptable to Him, we have fellowship!

It wasn't easy for Paul in letting Onesimus go. It wasn't easy for Philemon to take Onesimus back. (stole from him). It wasn't easy for Onesimus to face his former master. But...these men were Christians! And that made all the difference. An unforgettable picture of "Christianity in action!" It sounds like they put Col.3:12-16a+ into play!

Wrap up: Are you a presently a runaway?

1. You've made(or are planning) your mad dash for freedom!
2. The adulterous spouse runs from a dying marriage into a lover's waiting arms.
3. The depressed executive flees to a world of privacy & silence.
4. The alcoholic drinks till all pain is left far behind. (Swindoll; NT Postcards; pg.8)

If you've been running, this Postcards for you! -

Running may receive the pressure for awhile but it doesn't solve the problem!

Maybe you've already made your escape, & now you think that the Lord won't want you back. But that's not true!

1. Onesimus teaches us a repentant runaway can always return home
2. The Lord is always ready to forgive! Ps.86:5 (Wait! Let me check & see if that's still there...Yep!)
3. Question: If you're running are you ready to come home this morning?

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#### Related Resource:

- Wonderful Sermon by Dr Adrian Rogers - [Our Identification with Christ](#) - 1 John 4:17 (Scroll down to page 293) - [Here is the audio message.](#)

#### Philemon 1:21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.

**Arthur Way** - It is because I feel quite sure that you will yield to my appeal that I have written thus. I know, oh, I know that you will do what I ask -- ay, and more.

**William Barclay** - It is with complete confidence in your willingness to listen that I write to you, for I know well that you will do more than I ask.

KJV Philemon 1:21 Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

BGT Philemon 1:21 Πεποιθς τ πακο σου γραψ σοι, εδς τι κα πρ λγω ποι σεις.

NET Philemon 1:21 Since I was confident that you would obey, I wrote to you, because I knew that you would do even more than what I am asking you to do.

CSB Philemon 1:21 Since I am confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

ESV Philemon 1:21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

NIV Philemon 1:21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

NLT Philemon 1:21 I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more!

NRS Philemon 1:21 Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

NJB Philemon 1:21 I am writing with complete confidence in your compliance, sure that you will do even more than I ask.

NAB Philemon 1:21 With trust in your compliance I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

YLT Philemon 1:21 having been confident in thy obedience I did write to thee, having known that also above what I may say thou wilt do;

MIT Philemon 1:21 Being confident of your compliance, I wrote to you, knowing that in what you do, you also will exceed what I suggest.

- 2Co 2:3 7:16 8:22 Ga 5:10 2Th 3:4

## PAUL WAS FULL OF HOPE IN HIS APPEAL TO PHILEMON

**Having confidence** ([peitho](#)) **in your obedience** ([hupakoe](#)), **I write to you** - **Way** renders it "It is because I feel quite sure that you will yield to my appeal that I have written thus." **NJB** - "I am writing with complete confidence in your compliance." Notice Paul's tactful way of encouraging Philemon's compliance.

**Scroggie** - THE CONFIDENCE OF LOVE. This confidence, you will observe, is twofold. It is in Philemon's obedience, and in his generosity. 1. **CONFIDENCE IN PHILEMON'S OBEDIENCE.** We observed, when considering Philemon 1:8-9, that throughout this note to Philemon, Paul deliberately sets aside, as a ground of appeal, his apostolic authority, and would move his friend to action by other motives. Only for one moment is that attitude departed from, and it is here in his employment of the word "**obedience**"; and it is now so used as to be devoid of harshness. Paul's command is not that of duty, but of love; it is not that of a master but of a friend. Paul has "confidence" in Philemon's obedience; he trusts him. No other word would have been so suitable here as this, for it kept the appeal up to the level on which it had moved all the time, and it would make an appeal to Philemon to which he, and all of us ever feel we must respond, the appeal of trust, of loving expectation. Obedience becomes easy and delightful when it is in response to trust and love, and if there were more of these latter, there would be less of disobedience.

**Since I know** ([eido](#)) **that you will do even more than what I say** - **I know** ([eido](#)) means Paul knows beyond a shadow of a doubt. What does Paul mean by **do even more**? Some think he is alluding to Philemon giving Onesimus his freedom from enslavement. Others feel Paul is alluding to unconditionally loving Onesimus, which is far more difficult than just setting him free.

**Scroggie** - Paul goes further. He has, 2. **CONFIDENCE IN PHILEMON'S GENEROSITY.** "*Knowing that thou wilt do even beyond what I say.*" What is the Apostle thinking of in this remark? Is it a veiled request that Philemon release Onesimus from slavery? It may be so, for that everywhere is the undertone of this music; yet, he does not definitely make such a request. The time had not come for the abolition of slavery, nor did it come on any considerable scale for long centuries after Paul's time; and in some lands it has not come yet. For Paul to have made such a request would, at that time, have raised a very great question; and had there been any concerted movement in that direction, it could only have issued in titter disaster for the slaves. But perhaps Paul, by these words, does not intend more than to express his confidence that his friend will not barely accede to the request which he has made, but will do so gladly and generously. "Men will do much to fulfil generous expectations." "Trust will act like a magnet to draw reluctant feet into the path of duty. A will which mere authority could not bend, like iron when cold, may be made flexible when warmed by this gentle heat." Where love commands, it is most likely that love will respond. The human heart will not rise to anything very heroic at the instigation of the law. **Like attracts like; and so if we wish the most from anyone we must appeal to the highest in them out of the highest in ourselves.** In all of us there are slumbering heroisms only awaiting such a call. It is difficult to say which is the more gladsome part, to appeal or to respond. "A heart truly touched by the love of Jesus Christ will not seek to know the lowest limit of duty, but the highest possibility of service." "Give what thou canst; high heaven rejects the lore/Of nicely calculated less or more." The ground on which Paul appealed to Philemon is the same on which Christ appeals to us. Where Sinai failed, Calvary triumphs. There is nothing like the love of Christ to move to noble life and service; that is the note which goes down to our depths and calls up the worthiest response. (2Cor 5:14) If it does that in us when others sound it, it will do that in others when we sound it. If when making a true appeal we can add, "knowing that thou wilt do even beyond what I say" we may be confident that our confidence will not be in vain.

**Spurgeon** - This is delicately yet forcibly put, and we feel certain that Philemon must have done as Paul wished, even though we have no record of the fact. Is not this a graceful way of putting it? Who could have the heart to resist such pleading? Yet every word is gentle and quiet. Mild language is mighty.

Our Father in heaven, we hallow thy name,  
O'er earth may thy kingdom establish its claim!  
Oh, give to us daily our portion of bread;  
It is from thy bounty that all must be fed.

Forgive our transgressions, and teach us to know  
The humble compassion that pardons each foe;

Keep us from temptation, from weakness, and sin,  
And thine be the glory for ever. Amen.

**Philemon 1:22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.**

**Arthur Way** - One thing beside --prepare to receive me as your guest; for I am now in hopes of being restored to you-- it will be in answer to your prayers.

**William Barclay** - At the same time get ready a lodging place for me; for I hope that through your prayers it will be granted to you that I should come to you.

KJV Philemon 1:22 But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

BGT Philemon 1:22 μα ὁ κα το μαζ μοι ξεν αν· λπ ζω γ ρ τι δι τ ν προσευχ ν μ ν χαρισθ σομαι μ ν.

NET Philemon 1:22 At the same time also, prepare a place for me to stay, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given back to you.

CSB Philemon 1:22 But meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I hope that through your prayers I will be restored to you.

ESV Philemon 1:22 At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

NIV Philemon 1:22 And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

NLT Philemon 1:22 One more thing-- please prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that God will answer your prayers and let me return to you soon.

NRS Philemon 1:22 One thing more-- prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

NJB Philemon 1:22 There is another thing: will you get a place ready for me to stay in? I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

NAB Philemon 1:22 At the same time prepare a guest room for me, for I hope to be granted to you through your prayers.

YLT Philemon 1:22 and at the same time also prepare for me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

MIT Philemon 1:22 So then prepare for me guest lodging, because I hope that through your prayers I shall be given to you.

- **At the same time also prepare me a lodging:** Ac 28:23
- **for I hope:** Ro 15:24 Php 1:25,26 2:24 Heb 13:23 2Jn 1:12 3Jn 1:14
- **through your prayers I will be given to you:** Ro 15:30-32 2Co 1:11 Php 1:19 Jas 5:16

#### Related Passages:

Philippians 2:24 (WRITTEN FROM PRISON) and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.  
(PAUL EXPECTED TO BE RELEASED)

### PAUL'S CONFIDENCE HE WILL BE RELEASED

**At the same time also prepare ([hetoimazo](#)) me a lodging (xenia) for I hope ([elpizo](#)) that through your (plural, not singular) prayers ([proseuche](#)) I will be given ([charizomai](#)) to you - A lodging (xenia) refers to hospitality or a guest room. I hope ([elpizo](#)) indicates Paul looks forward to this, even with the implication of confidence. As discussed more below in light of the fact that Paul is also addressing the church that is in your (Philemon's) house (Philemon 1:2), the allusion to "your prayers" is a call to the entire church to lift up Paul's prison predicament in their corporate time of prayer. As discussed below "Paul's language envisages the**

house-church in Philemon's home praying as a whole and together for his release." As John Gill said "the prayer of a righteous man availeth much with God, and is very prevalent with him, and **much more the prayers of a whole church.**"

**THOUGHT** - I don't know about you, but I am convicted. When I was younger, I was more excited about corporate prayer. As I have grown older, I fear I have become a bit calloused to the truth that there is power in corporate prayer. If we are to see a revival in America (it is now May, 2024), we must see a stoking of the revival fires, by corporate prayers for revival.

**Utley** - Paul believed in the power of prayer (cf. Eph. 6:18-19). He also practiced what he preached (note the different Greek terms used: (1) **deomai**, 2 Cor. 5:20; 8:4; 1 Thess. 3:10; (2) **proseuchomai** Acts 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:3,9; 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:17,25; 2 Thess. 1:11; 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:8; (3) **proseuche**, Acts 16:13,16; Rom. 1:9; 12:12; 15:30; 1 Cor. 7:5; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2,12; 1 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 2:1; 5:5; Philemon 4,22)

**Scroggie** - EXPECTATION. (22). Philemon's Prayers for Paul. You will observe that Philemon 1:22, and Philemon 1:4-7 go together. In the latter we have commendation, and here expectation. In the one the reference is to Paul's prayers for Philemon, but here it is to Philemon's prayers (and those of his household) for Paul. Though these lines were written quite artlessly, there is, nevertheless, a most striking correspondence between the various parts. The Apostle is now drawing his letter to a close, but up to the last he has Onesimus in view. He is resolved that no line of appeal shall be unemployed that would help to secure a welcome back to the runaway slave; and though at the end as at the beginning, he speaks of matters quite personal, yet all is made contributory to the one end. So consider this closing appeal. "*But withal prepare me also a lodging; for I hope that through your prayers I shall be granted unto you.*" We shall examine the second part of the verse first as the former part is entirely dependent upon it. I. PAUL'S HOPE OF LIBERATION. 1. THE GROUND OF His HOPE. "I hope that through your prayers" brief as that sentiment is, how much it contains! Observe one or two points : (i). **Paul believed in praying.** Some of the richest passages in his Writings would be lost if his prayers and references to prayer were extracted. One has but to think of the prayers preserved in his Prison Epistles as proof of this; in Philippians the prayer for discerning love; in Colossians, written at the same time as this note to Philemon, the prayer for enlightened behaviour; in Ephesians, those two great prayers, the one for spiritual illumination, and the other for divine plenitude. The man who offered these, believed in prayer, and knew how to pray. He believed in prayer not only as subjectively beneficial, but as objectively effectual; not only as emotional, but as impetrative. He believed in prayer as a practical power. How much Paul prayed for others we shall never know, nor how much he accomplished by his prayers. When Paul says, "my prayers," he is referring to something that was central and dynamic in his life, (ii). **Paul depended on prayer.** He tells Philemon that he is hoping to be set free from Rome because the household at Colossae were praying for him. No doubt he had been praying for himself, but he does not refer to that, for he wishes to impress Philemon and his circle with the importance of their intercessions; he would have them know how much he depended upon them. I say "**them**" because the "**you**" of the text is plural, not singular; Paul is not referring to the prayers of Philemon only, but of all those whom he named in verses one and two. Are we at all awake to the importance of the prayers of other people for us? Do we sufficiently realise our debt, in this matter, to others? Times without number we have been blessed because others have prayed for us, and often when we were not praying for ourselves. **We may suppose that at least as many souls have been saved as the result of praying as have been turned to God by preaching; and, I doubt not, many a preacher has received credit for conversions which really were the result of private prayers.** We can ask no greater service of any than that they pray for us; and we can do no greater service to any than to pray for them. If you would be a real blessing to anyone today, take his case to the Throne of Grace. If Paul depended on the prayers of others, well may we. There is one other point of importance here (iii). Paul was cautious in speaking of answers to prayers. He does not say, "I know," but "I hope that through your prayers I shall be granted unto you." He did not know that he would be released from Rome, even though he had been prayed for. **Such deliverance was not dependent upon the wish of his friends, but upon the will of God Paul did not believe that prayer is a means whereby we get God to do what we want, but whereby we get to know, and are moved to do what God wills.** The will of God is the ground of prayer, and whether or not our actual requests are answered, if we have at all understood the nature and purpose of prayer, the exercise of it can never be in vain. If, back of all our petitions is, "*not my will but Thine be done,*" then our every prayer is answered. Had Paul not been released from Rome he would not have supposed that the Colossian prayers had been unheeded, but only that they had been answered in a way other than was expected. The prayer of faith can only be offered where the will of God is definitely known. Peter's friends prayed that he might be released from prison, and he was. Do you suppose that the Church did not pray for Stephen? Yet he was martyred. In both instances the will of God was done, and in each instance there was surprise. Paul says " **I hope.**" **This word as commonly used may point to either aspiration or assurance. The Christian hope is always assurance; the hope of which we are not to be ashamed is not a fond desire, but a glad certainty.** Its use in our text does not imply certainty, but only expresses desire ; and in so speaking, Paul unwittingly reveals how perfectly submissive he was to the will of God. The ground therefore, of his hope was the prayers of his friends.

**Scroggie** - THE SOURCE OF His HOPE. This is disclosed in the words "*I shall be granted unto you.*" There are only two words in the original, a verb (**charizomai**) and a pronoun, and they are very impressive. What Paul really says is, "I hope that through the prayers of you all, I shall be given to you all as a most gracious gift of God." (i). Here, and habitually, Paul goes behind all events to

the sovereign and determining will of God. He could not, of course, be released from Rome except by Caesar's permission; but it is not Caesar who is in view here. Forces were operating for and against the Apostle, and had he regarded them alone, he might well have been distracted even to despair; but in the midst of all he was kept in perfect peace because his mind was stayed upon Jehovah; the activities alike of his friends at Colossae and his foes at Rome were looked at by the Apostle in the light of the will of God for him. But notice further : (ii.). The significance of the word which the Apostle here employs. The verb [charizomai](#) is used in some striking connections; for example, "*The things freely-given to us of God*" (1Co 2:12). "*How shall He not with Him also freely - give us all things?*" (Ro 8:32) "*Ye desired a murderer to be granted unto you*" (Acts 3:14). "*No man has the power to deliver me unto them.*" (Acts 25:11). The word has the force of "given as a favour from supreme authority," either for destruction (Acts 25:11), or for preservation (Acts 3:14). Now read the text again : "*I hope that through the prayers of you all, I shall be given to you all as a most gracious gift of God.*" Paul would not think of his release from prison with reference to the pleasure that it would bring to him personally, but rather because of the profit that it would bring to the Churches which he would visit. He wished to-be-given unto them for their service, comfort, and edification in Christ. We have, therefore, in this word, not only the source of the Apostle's hope, which is God, but the object of it, which is the Churches enrichment. Nor must we overlook (iii). The content of the pronoun which Paul uses. It is not, to "*thee*" Philemon, that he would be granted, but to "*you*" plural, "*you all*," already referred to at the beginning, but surely now including the man whom he is sending back with this very letter in his hand. This is a delicate touch, and perhaps was not discerned, yet the influence of it must have been felt. As Paul thought of his possible release, and formed the purpose to visit his dear friend in the Lycus valley, not the least attractive element in the prospect was the hope that in that circle he would see Onesimus again, "*no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a brother beloved*" (Philemon 1:16). The idea of "*you all*" would not have been complete were that member of the circle to be absent. So Paul hopes, and in his simple yet expressive language tells what are the ground and source of that hope; the one, the prayers of the people, and the other, the gracious will of God. Arising out of this hope is : **PAUL'S REQUEST FOR ACCOMMODATION.** "*But withal prepare me also a lodging; for I hope* We cannot fail, surely, to mark here, THE APOSTLE'S MODESTY. What do you suppose it was that he wanted You have a dear friend in affluent circumstances, from whom through trouble you have been separated for years. You see your way out of your difficulties, and, anxious, to pay your friend a visit, you write and say : "*I am hoping to lie in the dear old; town soon, will you do me the kindness to look me out a room. I do not want anything elaborate, but would like the quarters to be as near you as possible, for I am yearning to see you all again.*" So writing, what really would be in your mind, and what would your friend be likely to reply to such a request. Your thought almost certainly would be Paul's, the wish to be Philemon's guest under his own roof, and your friend's reply would be Philemon's: "*Overjoyed to think you are coming; my home and self are at your disposal.*" Paul had been in a "lodging" for the last two years (Acts 28:23; *xenia* as here; only two occurrences in N.T. a "hired house" it is called in Acts 28:30. That is all he is asking now, and perhaps in the request is the wish that it may be a place where, as in Rome, he might receive all who would wish to come to him for conversation and instruction "concerning Jesus." The "lodgings" Jerome says, "were for the Apostle rather than for Paul. He anticipated a large concourse of hearers. This would involve a situation convenient of access; large enough to hold a number of people; in a locality of good report, and undisturbed by a troublesome neighbourhood." Certainly all these requirements would obtain in Philemon's own house, but Paul will not ask so much as that. Here again he would say, "Not as of necessity, but willingly" (Philemon 1:14).

This request brings to notice the whole matter of hospitality. To afford this is a signal service, and a great opportunity for those who are in a position to entertain. We cannot all help our fellow Christians in the same way, but we can all help in some way. What an unspeakable blessing a "spare bedroom" has been in some homes! How many of God's saints, tired ministers, homeless missionaries, and others have slept there, until the very walls are fragrant with their prayers, and the home is full of benediction which their grateful hearts have prayed down. Could not more of God's people exercise this grace of entertainment? It is the testimony of many that in doing so they have received more than they gave. What more worthy record could one desire than that which Paul has given of a friend of his, "*Gains mine host, and of the whole Church.*" Who, do you suppose was the more greatly blessed, the Apostle who was entertained, or the man who entertained him? And who, do you suppose, was the more blessed in that humble home at Bethany, Jesus, Who resorted thither in days of sorrow, or the three who received Him?" A whole world of Christian service lies open here to people who are in comfortable circumstances, and whose hearts are "at leisure from themselves to soothe and sympathise." Paul's modesty was Philemon's opportunity, and I am confident he did not miss it.

Notice next : **THE APOSTLE'S MOTIVE.** Lightfoot says, "There is a gentle compulsion in this mention of a personal visit to Colossae. The Apostle would thus be able to see for himself that Philemon had not disappointed his expectations." And Matthew Henry quaintly observes, passing from verse 21, and what precedes : "Paul comes to another thing, yet, as may seem, not without some eye to the matter which he had been upon, that might be furthered by his intimation that he hoped he should himself soon follow, and know the effect of his epistle, which Philemon would therefore be the more stirred up to see might be to his satisfaction." Almost certainly these writers are correct in supposing that this final word of the Apostle's was intended also to supply Philemon with a final motive for receiving Onesimus back again. The prospect of meeting would enhance the force of the Apostle's wish. Did Philemon decline to grant his friend's request, or did he grant it only partially and grudgingly, how could he look Paul in the face when the liberated prisoner returned to Colossae? Almost certainly Philemon, by this time, would not require the inspiration of this

prospect to move him to what was a Christian duty, and more, but it would tend, nevertheless, to increase his diligence, and would encourage him to do more than Paul had said. We also are furnished with such a motive. Our absent Lord has intimated that He is coming again, and there is no uncertainty attached to it. The prospect is sure, and, so far from striking terror to our hearts, it should inspire us to lofty service, and move us to generous deeds. To have failed in our duty, or to have only barely clone it will not help us to anticipate our Lord's . Return; but where hearts are gladly obedient, and joyfully well pleasing, the thought of His coming-again will be an abiding inspiration. If we give Him now a lodging in our hearts, He will one day give us mansions in the sky.

## THE POWER OF CORPORATE PRAYER

[Michael Haykin](#) has an interesting observation on this verse writing that "The significance of the shift to the second person plural in Philemon 1:22 has often been ignored. The entire house church should, it is assumed, be engaged in prayer for Paul and not just Philemon himself."

In his article entitled [Praying Together, a Note on Philemon 22](#) he writes the following...

Now, at the conclusion of the letter, Paul informs Philemon of his intention to visit him and his assurance that the believers who comprise the house-church which meets in Philemon's home are regularly remembering him in prayer [verse 22]. Paul links these two items of information together by making his intended visit to Philemon dependent on God hearing the prayers of Philemon and his house-church. It is noteworthy that Paul does not assume that he knows God's mind in this matter. By using the verb in the passive voice (**ED**: divine passive) at this point-pray that **1 shall be granted (charizomai) to you'**-Paul recognizes that ultimately his release is in the hands of a sovereign God. The Apostle knew from experience that those who engage in genuine prayer are ever-conscious of their limitations and lack of insight, and that all too often they do not know what to pray for [Ro 8:26]. Thus, mature prayers never leave God's sovereignty out of the picture. Nevertheless, this deep sense of God's sovereign control over the events of his life does not issue in an attitude of fatalism, in which prayer is regarded as next to useless. On the contrary, Paul knows that God's sovereign purposes are regularly accomplished through the prayers of his people. Thomas Blundel (ca. 1752--1824), an eighteenth-century British Baptist and friend of William Carey, well expresses Paul's conviction when he states that *'it is chiefly in answer to prayer that God has carried on his cause in the world: he could work without any such means; but he does not, neither will he.*

Moreover, it is as God's people engage in corporate prayer that God accomplishes his purposes for the advance of his kingdom. The communal context of this letter, reflected in verses 1 and 2, now suddenly re-emerges. As Paul thinks of Philemon praying for his release from prison and his forthcoming visit to his home, he cannot isolate Philemon's prayers from those of his fellow believers. Paul's reliance on other believers in his ministry is again evident as he mentions his assurance that not only Philemon, but also his entire house-church is remembering him in prayer. Furthermore, the context for these prayers should not be regarded as limited to these believers' personal times of prayer. Paul's language envisages the house-church in Philemon's home praying as a whole and together for his release. (see Radford's [The Epistle to the Colossians and the Epistle to Philemon](#))

Further support for this conclusion comes from the fact noted above that this letter, despite its personal nature, has a communal tone right from its start. It should also be recognized that Paul's release from prison is not simply a matter affecting his own personal welfare. His release is of deep importance for his ongoing apostolic ministry in the Lycus Valley, where Philemon's house church was located. (See [Paul's intercessory prayers: the significance of the intercessory prayer passages in the letters of St Paul](#))

The mention of Onesimus and Archippus in Col. 4:9 and Col 4:17 respectively implies that Paul's letter to the Colossians was written on the same occasion as his letter to Philemon. If so, then Paul was writing to Philemon at a critical juncture when the latter's church was being threatened with the false teaching which Paul seeks to · refute in his letter to the Colossians. Praying for his release from imprisonment was therefore a matter of concern for the entire house-church, and something which he naturally expected all of them to be engaged in as a congregation of believers.

Finally, this request for prayer at the conclusion of Paul's letter to Philemon needs to be read in conjunction with **other references to corporate prayer in Paul's letters**, in particular, 2 Cor. 1:9-11 and Phil. 1:19. In both of these texts and, as we have hopefully shown, Phm. 22, the Apostle displays his conviction that, as the

eighteenth century Baptist commentator John Gill (1697-1771) puts it: 'the prayer of a righteous man availeth much with God, and is very prevalent with him, and much more the prayers of a whole church.'

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## Preparing a Lodging- "But withal prepare me a lodging." Philemon 1:22 - Ian Paisley

I want to take this text in the sense of preparing a lodging on earth for God. God says to us "but withal prepare me a lodging".

### The Tabernacle

God said to Moses, "Prepare me a lodging" and the Tabernacle was set up.

It was a wonderful, divinely planned lodging for God, a replica of God's dwelling place in the heavens.

At its centre in the Holiest of All was the expression of the Divine Glory.

### The Temple

It was in the heart of David to prepare a lodging place for God, a house of cedar for the Most High God.

God forbade him, directing that Solomon would be its builder.

But in the same way as God gave the plan and dimensions of the Tabernacle to Moses so He gave the plan and dimensions of the Temple to David (I Chronicles 28:19). Like the Tabernacle, the Temple had its expression of the Divine Glory with the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat.

### The Body of Our Lord

The Tabernacle was superseded by the Temple; the Temple by the body of our Lord. There came the appointed time when God the Son said to His Father, "Prepare for me a lodging," and a body God prepared Him. (see Hebrews 10:5).

The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us and the display of the divine glory was seen on earth. We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth (see John 1:14).

### The Body of Believers

Christ in His Body, now glorified, is in heaven. He has sent His other Self, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to this earth. The bodies of the believers have become His lodging place on earth. Through these lodgings places the expression of the divine glory appears on earth today. We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us (see II Corinthians 4:8).

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## Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

**Arthur Way** - Epaphras, who lies in prison with me in Christ Jesus' keeping, greets you by me,

KJV Philemon 1:23 There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

BGT Philemon 1:23 σπ ζετα σε παφρ ς συναιχμ λωτ ς μου ν Χριστ ησο ,

NET Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you.

CSB Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, and so do

ESV Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,

NIV Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.

NLT Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings.

NRS Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,

NJB Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, a prisoner with me in Christ Jesus, sends his greetings;

NAB Philemon 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

YLT Philemon 1:23 Salute thee doth Epaphras, (my fellow-captive in Christ Jesus,)

MIT Philemon 1:23 Those who send along their greetings to you are: Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus,

- **Epaphras:** Col 1:7 4:12
- **my fellow prisoner:** Ro 16:7 Col 4:10



## Related Passages:

Colossians 4:10+ [Aristarchus](#), my fellow prisoner ([sunaichmalotos](#)), sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him);

## PAUL'S COMPANIONS IN PRISON

[Epaphras](#), my fellow prisoner ([sunaichmalotos](#)) in Christ Jesus, greets you - Note he is not a "fellow prisoner" in a Roman dungeon, but like Paul in the glorious Christ.

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**Fellow prisoner** (4869) [sunaichmalotos](#) from [sun](#) = with, together with + [aichmalotos](#) = literally taken captive by sword, a prisoner of war). Note that [aichmalotos](#) referred to prisoners of war. In a sense Paul is a prisoner in Rome as the result of "spiritual war".

**Friberg** - [sunaichmalotos](#) from [sun](#), [aichme](#) and [alotos](#) = literally taken with the spear, i.e. fellow prisoner (of war), fellow captive; in Pauline usage probably used figuratively to describe certain fellow workers who shared his hardships (Ro 16.7; Col 4.10; Phile 23); Paul always uses [desmios](#) (prisoner) of himself as a prisoner (Eph 3.1 ; Phile 1:1) BORROW [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#)

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### QUESTION - [Who was Epaphras in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - Epaphras is mentioned three times in the New Testament, twice in [Colossians](#) and once in [Philemon](#). He was a believer in Christ who served with the apostle Paul, who referred to him as a "fellow servant," "faithful minister," and "servant of Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:7; 4:12).

His name and Paul's comment in Colossians 4:11 indicates that Epaphras was a Gentile. We also surmise that he was from Colossae in Asia Minor, since his name appears in the letter to the church there and Paul says that he "is one of you" (Colossians 4:12). According to Paul, writing during his [first Roman imprisonment](#), Epaphras was the one who shared the gospel with the Colossians and possibly started the church there: Paul speaks of "the day you heard [the gospel]" and reminds them that "you learned it from Epaphras" (Colossians 1:6–7). Epaphras traveled to Rome to visit Paul, informing Paul about the Colossians' "love in the Spirit" (Colossians 1:8).

In his letter, Paul told the Colossians about how Epaphras cared deeply for their spiritual growth and maturity. Epaphras had committed to praying for the Colossians, "always wrestling in prayer for [them]" (Colossians 4:12). Epaphras desired for the Colossian Christians to stand firm in their faith and become mature. Paul gave testimony that Epaphras was working hard for the church in Colossae, just as he was for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13).

Aside from the letter to the Colossians, Epaphras' name shows up in Paul's personal letter to Philemon. Like Colossians, Paul wrote Philemon during his first imprisonment in Rome. Epaphras had apparently been imprisoned while in Rome visiting Paul: "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings" (Philemon 1:23). Tradition teaches that Epaphras eventually returned to Colossae where he remained a faithful servant of Christ and was later martyred. But those details are not found in the Bible.

The descriptions of Epaphras are significant: "our dear fellow servant," "a faithful minister of Christ," "a servant of Christ Jesus," "always wrestling in prayer," and "working hard." The brief sketch Paul provides shows that the apostle thought highly of this follower of Christ and fellow laborer. Epaphras demonstrated a strong faith, a rich prayer life, a boldness in sharing the gospel even at the risk of suffering, and deep care for those in whom he had invested spiritually. Epaphras is probably not the first name that comes to mind when we think of Bible characters, but he faithfully served Jesus, and his reward is sure (see Hebrews 6:10).

## Graham Scoggie's concluding comments Philemon 1:23-25

A. CONCLUSION. (23-25). This little letter ends as it began, with salutations. Now, the Pauline salutations are not empty forms. Old Matthew Henry well says, "Christianity is no enemy to courtesy, but enjoins it." Salutations are universal, and are expressions of good-will and feeling among men, but the Apostolic salutations are more than this. May we never think it beneath our attention or dignity to exchange both by word and letter these friendly courtesies. Let us look at this a little in detail.

I. SALUTATIONS (23,24). You will observe that five names are mentioned, and they are divided into two categories, one being in the

first, and four in the second, the one being a fellow prisoner, and the four being fellow-workers.

## 1. ONE FELLOW-PRISONER.

" Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus sainteth thee." Epaphras was a Colossian (Col. 4:12), and the spiritual guide of the Church there, and in all likelihood also of the assemblies in Laodicea and Hierapolis. No doubt he had heard Paul preach at Ephesus, and being blessed, had returned to his own town to found a Church there. In the Colossian salutations very much is said of him in few words. " Epaphras, who is one of you, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, saluteth you, always agonising for you in his prayers, that ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness, that he hath much labour for you, and for them in Laodicea, and for them in Hierapolis" (Col. 4:12-13).

Errors both doctrinal and practical were threatening the Colossian Church, and Epaphras felt the need of taking counsel with his spiritual father and personal friend concerning them. For this purpose he had come to Rome ; and it was the report which he had made to Paul which occasioned the letter to Colossae, and furnished the opportunity also, of sending back Onesimus with this little note.

The Apostle here refers to Epaphras as his " fellow- prisoner." In the Colossian letter it is Aristarchus who is so spoken of. This variation has led to the conjecture that the Apostle's friends in Rome " took it in turn to keep him company, and were allowed to live with him, on condition of submitting to the same restrictions, military guardianship, and so on."

This suggestion is eminently probable, and if true, would throw an interesting light upon Paul's prison life, and reflect the devotion with which he was regarded by his manly friends. Whether in this, or in any other way Epaphras became a " prisoner," the captivity in this case, as in Paul's, was " in Christ Jesus." Two important differences should be noted between this verse, and verse one. There Paul speaks of himself as a " prisoner/ 3 Seo^io\*. Here he speaks of Epaphras as a " prisoner," aichmalotos , with the prepositional prefix, sun,

The former word means simply, "one bound," but the latter means "taken captive by the sword." In its simple form the latter substantive occurs but once in the New Testament in Luke 4:18 : where Christ says that He was sent "to preach deliverance to the captives." And the verb occurs in but three passages which serve well to show its true force.

Luke 21:24. "They shall be led away captive into all nations."

Rom. 7:23. "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin."

2 Cor. 10:5. "Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

In the compound form it occurs only in Rom. 16:7 : Col. 4:10; and here; and the verb does not occur at all.

Paul uses both words of himself. In verse one, he is bound, and in this verse (23,) he considers himself a captive of war, yet, in neither instance, is he the captive of Nero, or of Rome.

Epaphras is honoured to be associated with him in this captivity, for, in both cases, it is on account of their faith in and loyalty to Jesus Christ. The other difference between these verses is that, in one, Paul is a prisoner of Christ Jesus, but in this verse, he and Epaphras are captives "in Christ Jesus." In the first expression reference is made to the author of his captivity, but, in the second, to the sphere of it.

How sublimely Paul ignores all secondary agencies and all material surroundings. It is Christ who has made him a prisoner, not Nero ; and it is in Christ that he is held as a war captive, not in the Roman prison, nor as a war trophy of Rome.

What unspeakable peace to the soul such a view of our afflictions would bring, and what motive and power for endurance !

Well then, Epaphras is Paul's " fellow-prisoner." It would be difficult to say which of them derived the greater benefit from such an association; whether Epaphras, by receiving Paul's counsel, or Paul, by receiving Epaphras' comfort. Certain it is that each would be greatly enriched, and would spend together prolonged and blessed seasons of prayer, for in this they both were giants (Col. 4:12).

There is very much of truth in the saying that, "joys shared are doubled; sorrows shared are halved."

The double experience resulted from this companionship in the Roman prison, and Paul is not slow to acknowledge it.

"Go(d sometimes lightens the sufferings of His servants by the communion of saints, the sweet fellowship they have one with another in their bonds. Never more enjoyment of God have they found than when suffering together for God. So Paul and Silas, when they had their feet fast in the stocks, had their tongues set at liberty, and their hearts tuned for the praises of God."

Paul's mention of the Colossian in this relation and connection was designed, like all that has gone before, to help Philemon to the

generous fulfilment of his request on the behalf of Onesimus.

After this reference to Epaphras, follow salutations from

## 2. FOUR FELLOW-LABOURERS.

"Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow-labourers."

The first two of these are Jews, and the other two are Gentiles. They are all mentioned in the Colossian Letter, though not in this order, or with this brevity.

To each of these men a very real, though not an equal interest attaches, and the mention of their names should be to us encouragement or warning. What is there more interesting than people! Let us briefly recall what is known of these four,

### (i). Mark.

This young man was the son of Mary, who was so hospitable to the saints at Jerusalem, and whose house was the place of meeting for prayer and the worship of God (Acts 12:12). He was also the cousin of Barnabas who accompanied Paul on his First Missionary Journey (Col. 4:10).

He appears to have been the convert of Peter (1 Peter 5:13), whose influence dominated his outlook, and gave shape and colour to the Gospel Record which he wrote, the earliest of the Four.

When Paul and Barnabas set out on their First Journey, Mark accompanied them as far as to Perga in Pamphylia, and then returned home. This led later to a difference between Paul and Barnabas which, so far as we know, was never made good, though a reconciliation took place between Paul and Mark, as this passage and 2 Tim. 4:11, show.

Tradition says he became the bishop of Alexandria. These particulars summarise what we know of John Mark, who at this time was evidently residing in Rome (Col. 4:10; Philemon 1:24), and was contemplating a visit to proconsular Asia.

His name in our Letter conveys this message of hope among others, that differences between friends can be made good, and regrettable estrangements can and should end in enduring reconciliation.

### (ii). Aristarchus.

Little is said of this brother in the New Testament, but from the glimpse or two we get of him, we learn that he was devoted to Paul and the Gospel, and suffered for both.

He is first mentioned as having been seized, together with Gaius, during the great riot at Ephesus, and rushed into the theatre, where, certainly, his life was in danger (Acts 19:29).

In the next reference he is seen accompanying Paul from Troas on his last journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4), and thereafter on his passage to Rome (Acts 27:2). At the time that Paul writes the Colossian Letter, and this note to Philemon, Aristarchus is with him, both a "fellow-prisoner" (Col. 4:10), and "fellow-worker."

It has been thought that as in "Colossians" Aristarchus is the "fellow-prisoner and Epaphras, in "Philemon," these participated in the Apostle's bonds alternately, and that therefore their imprisonment was voluntary.

What is sure is that Aristarchus was a devoted friend, and by sharing in Paul's sufferings and service brought him both comfort and help. It is not likely that much will be said about any of us after we are dead, but it is most important that what is said be to our credit and the glory of God.

With his two Jewish friends Paul now associates two Gentiles

### (iii). Demas.

Demas! What does that name suggest to you. We read of this man only three times ; in Colossians 4:14 , in our text, and in 2 Timothy 4:10-11; and in each instant he is mentioned with Luke.

In "Colossians" he is just mentioned as associated with the salutation. In our text, beyond that, he is spoken of as Paul's "fellow-worker." And in the final passage Paul says to Timothy, "Give diligence to come shortly unto me; for Demas forsook me, having loved this present world, and went to Thessalonica."

Between the writing of the first two of these Letters and the third, some four years elapsed, and in that time Demas ceased to be a fellow-worker and became a deserter.

We naturally ask, why? and how? The only help we have towards an answer to these questions is in the phrase "having loved this present world." But what does that mean ?

Was it that he "followed the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the hire of wrong-doing" (2 Peter 2:15)? Did he become a lucre-cankered soul? Or, is it that, as others, in his time, he apostatised from the Christian faith? Or, did he, when he saw the clouds gathering in Paul's sky, and heard the ominous rumbling of opposition, prove a coward and play for safety?

We do not know. But this we know that he fell all the distance that he had risen, and the man had risen high who had become a "fellow-worker" with the Apostle Paul.

Demas proved disloyal to friendship, untrue to himself, and faithless to God. In the light of the last reference to him, the mention of his name with the others in our text brings a shadow across an otherwise sunny page.

Let us all beware of disloyalty to the highest and best we have ever known.

But there is yet another name, the most outstanding of the group.

(iv). Luke.

What Sir Thomas Browne was to Bishop Joseph Hall, that Luke was to Paul.

Of the great men of the New Testament he is one of the greatest. This estimate will not seem exaggerated when we think, on the one hand, of what he did for and meant to the greatest of the Apostles; and, on the other hand, of his contributions to the literature of the New Testament.

What should we do without the third Gospel, and the book of Acts?

"There are few outstanding New Testament characters of whom we know so little, and of whom we would fain know so much, as St. Luke."

Was Luke the man whom Paul saw in his vision, beckoning him to come over to Macedonia? So Sir William Ramsay thinks.

At any rate, we know that he was the Apostle's constant companion and best friend, of whom he wrote at the last, "only Luke is with me."

A man of culture, of medical knowledge and skill, an author, a traveller, and of a cheery temperament as his Gospel and the Acts show; a man true as steel, and withal of Stirling Christian character, he was valuable beyond all price to the great Apostle as he prosecuted his immense task.

Luke would attend to his friend's health, would keep his memoranda, would guide him in his courses, would cheer him in sorrow, would encourage him in his labours, and would have fellowship with him in prayers.

And, at the last, when many of his friends could not be with him, and others had forsaken him, Luke remained true and was at Paul's side, we must suppose, to the last.

Well may the Apostle speak of him as "the beloved physician"; and "my fellow-worker."

Demas might have learned his lesson better, yoked as he was with such a man as Luke. These then are the men whom Paul here associates with himself in the salutation he sends to Philemon and his household, EPAPHRAS, MARK, ARISTARCHUS, DEMAS, LUKE.

You will observe that Paul calls these his "fellow workers," or, "fellow-labourers." He had so spoken of Philemon, in verse one.

This point is an important one, for in directions it is thought that if one wants a soft job he should go into the Christian ministry. But our Lord said, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He send forth labourers (not loiterers) into His harvest" (Matt. 9:38).

And Paul exhorts the Thessalonians "to know those that labour among them."

But all who are engaged in Christian service are fellow-labourers. Both parts of the word being emphatic. We are fellow-laborers if we have at all apprehended the importance and dimensions of the task to which we have been appointed; and we are fellow-labourers if we understand at all the spirit of Christian service, a service which we should never enter for personal or sectarian ends. If Christianity is to win its way in the world it will only be by the hearty, diligent, and loyal cooperation of all who are in this fellowship of faith.

When we understand this aright, we shall better appreciate the truth of 1 Cor. 12 : the diversity of gifts in the unity of the body.

EPAPI-IRAS, MARK, ARISTARCHUS, DEMAS, LUKE.

These are only a few of Paul's very many friends, some of whose names appear in the New Testament.

We naturally think of BARNABAS, and SILAS, and TIMOTHY, and APOLLOS, and TITUS, and EPAPHRODITUS, and ONESIPHORUS, as well as PHILEMON and ONESIMUS, and many another.

Paul had a wonderful genius for friendship, and an examination of the above, names will serve to show how diverse were the men whom he attracted to himself ; men learned and unlearned, well-to-do and poor, Jews and Gentiles, all alike found in him one whom they could trust and love, and just because he loved and trusted them all.

Every kindness they showed him he gratefully acknowledged, and every departure from love and loyalty he greatly mourned.

If Paul by recording the names of the faithful has immortalised them in the hearts of all who love loyalty, by mentioning the names of others, such as DEMAS, HYMENAEUS, and DEMETRIUS, he has made them for all time examples to be avoided. Of these he would say,

"Blot out his name, then record one lost soul more,  
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,  
One more devil's-triumph and sorrow for angels,  
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!"

It is something to fear to be judged a recreant by people of high principle and wide sympathies, as it is something to receive their admiration and gratitude.

True friendships, friendships which stand the test of storm and time are comparatively few, but such are very precious. Yet, perhaps, it is true and well to say that we might all be more friendly, and so enrich ourselves in the effort, to bless others.

If we cannot all be fellow-prisoners, we can at any rate be fellow-soldiers (Philemon 1:2), and fellow-workers (Philemon 1:1,23).

The letter now ends on the note of

## II. BENEDICTION (25).

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

It began with a benediction (Philemon 1:3), and there we marked the blessings and blessers. To these the Apostle again returns.

1. THE BLESSING. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." This simple phrase is very profound, telling as it does what are the nature and source of the blessing sought.

(i). The nature of the blessing. "Grace." We have already seen that this stands for the whole sum of the unmerited blessings which come to men through Jesus Christ. It is the unconditional, undeserved, spontaneous, eternal, stooping, pardoning love of God. If we have this "grace," we have in some sense every blessing, and for this reason Paul begins this and others of his Letters, on this great note.

(ii). The source of the blessing. "The Lord Jesus Christ."

On this title the Letter begins and ends (Philemon 1:3). At the beginning "grace and peace" have a double source ; they are "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"; but here, "grace," peace not being mentioned, is traced to the Son only.

The reason for this is that Christ is the focus of the grace of God. As the rays of the sun may be gathered, focussed, and distributed through a powerful lens, so the fullness of God is concentrated in and distributed from and by the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that Christ is associated with God the Father as He is in Philemon 1:3, and is spoken of in the same connection alone in this verse, is undesigned witness to the Apostle's belief in His full and proper Deity; and in the title given Him there is a fulness reached which is comprehensive, "The Lord" and "Jesus" meeting in "The Christ."

When such an One is the source of blessing, we may be quite sure of the sufficiency and regularity of the supply.

The Apostle next mentions

## 2. THE BLESSED.

Grace be with your spirit."

The pronoun employed leads us to think of

(i). The fellowship of the blessed.

The "your" does not refer only to Philemon, but to his family and the Church in his house (Philemon 1:1-2). It is plural and therefore comprehensive.

As blessing never comes alone, so it never comes only to one. Wherever there is one blessing there is a second ; and whenever one person is blessed, inevitably so are others.

Blessing is social and cannot exist alone. So Paul prays this prayer on behalf of that Colossian company and all Christians.

He further discloses

(ii). The sphere in which we are blessed." Your spirit."

"Grace in the spirit," says Jerome, "spiritualizes the whole man." "Grace has man's spirit for the field of its highest operation. Thither it can enter, and there it can abide, in union more close and communion more real and blessed than aught else can attain. The spirit which has the grace of Christ with it can never be utterly solitary or desolate."

At the end of all Paul writes "Amen," a word expressive of desire and confidence. By it he means, not only, "may it be so," but, "surely it shall be so."

!! What is under cover of that? All that this precious Letter has made our glad possession.

Maclaren summarises its teaching in an impressive way when he says,

"In this Letter, the central springs of Christian service are touched, and the motives used to sway Philemon, are the echo of the motives which Christ uses to sway men."

The keynote of all is love.

Love beseeches when it might command. To love we owe our own selves beside. Love will do nothing without the glad consent of Him to whom it speaks, and cares for no service which is of necessity. Its finest wine is not made from juice which is pressed out of grapes, but that which flows from them for very ripeness.

Love identifies itself with those who need its help, and treats with kindness to them as done to itself.

Love finds joy and heart-solace in willing, though it be imperfect service.

Love expects more than it asks.

Love hopes for reunion, and by the hope makes its wish more mighty.

These are the points of Paul's pleading with Philemon. Are they not the elements of Christ's pleading with His friends. To all this Paul adds "Amen" ; and to it all we would say, "Amen," for here we see Christianity at work, here we see the highest principles brought to bear upon the smallest details of every day life, and here, also we see how all-conquering is the love of God, when it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

### **Philemon 1:24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.**

**Arthur Way** - As do Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, all sharers of my toil.

KJV Philemon 1:24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

BGT Philemon 1:24 Μάρκος, Ἀριστάρχος, Δέμας, Λούκας, οὐ συνεργοί μου.

NET Philemon 1:24 Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my colaborers, greet you too.

CSB Philemon 1:24 Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my coworkers.

ESV Philemon 1:24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

NIV Philemon 1:24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

NLT Philemon 1:24 So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my co-workers.

NRS Philemon 1:24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

NJB Philemon 1:24 so do my fellow-workers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke.

NAB Philemon 1:24 as well as Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my co-workers.

YLT Philemon 1:24 Markus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lukas, my fellow-workmen!

MIT Philemon 1:24 Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke—my colleagues.

- **Mark:** Ac 12:12,25 13:13 15:37-39 Col 4:10 2Ti 4:11
- **Aristarchus:** Ac 19:29 27:2
- **Demas:** Col 4:14 2Ti 4:10
- **Luke:** 2Ti 4:11
- **my fellow workers:** Philemon 1:1,2 2Co 8:23 Php 2:25 4:3 3Jn 1:8

as do [Mark](#), [Aristarchus](#), [Demas](#), [Luke](#), **my fellow workers** ([sunergos](#)) - Recalling that **fellow workers** ([sunergos](#)) gives us our English synergy, one can envision quite a powerful synergy with the Christian work of these men (even Demas at this time).

**Demas** is one of those sad, somewhat enigmatic characters in the New Testament who is mentioned 2 other times in

Colossians 4:14+ Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also **Demas**.

2 Timothy 4:10+ for **Demas**, having loved this present world, **has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica**; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

We note that over time the description of Demas changes, from **a fellow worker** in the letter of Philemon and to simply **Demas** in Colossians, to the last letter written by Paul in 2Ti 4:10 where he is described as one who has **loved this present world**. Was Demas a genuine believer who simply backslid? We know from John's writings that "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1Jn 2:15) So this begs the question of whether Demas ever came to repentance? I doubt it, but the "jury is out," and we will have to wait until we are Heaven.

#### **John Butler - FOUR COMPANIONS Philemon 1:24 - [Sermon Starters](#)**

"Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlaborers" (Philemon 1:24).

Paul's epistles are most instructive in the commencement of the epistle and in the conclusion of the epistle as well as in the main contents of the epistle. Here we look at the conclusion of the short epistle to Philemon. Paul mentions in verse 23 his fellow prisoner. And in the next verse, which is our text, he mentions four fellow laborers. We look at the four men who were called fellow laborers.

#### **FIRST—THE WORK**

"My fellow laborers" Two thoughts are in the word "fellow laborer". Both speak well of the four men mentioned here.

- Associates. "Fellow laborers." The word indicates an associate, a companion of Paul. To be identified with Paul adversely affected your reputation in the world. But these men demonstrated they would rather keep company with Paul than have a good reputation in the world.
- Assistants. "Fellow laborers." These men not only kept company with Paul but they assisted him in his ministry. They were devoted helpers. We could use more of that kind in church today.

#### **SECOND—THE WORKERS**

"Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas." Two of these men are given unfamiliar names. We often do not recognize the name of Marcus and Lucas. They refer to Mark and Luke, well-known Bible figures and authors. Some KJV translators transliterated instead of translated the names which is why we have here Marcus instead of Mark, and Lucas instead of Luke.

- The Prodigal. "Marcus" Mark had failed (Acts 13:13) and this had not surprisingly alienated him from Paul (Acts 15:37–39) but he had evidently repented and became a good servant of Jesus Christ and a helper for the Apostle Paul as our text indicates. He even wrote a Gospel that we know by his name. Mark tells us what counts isn't how many times you are knocked down by Satan but how many times you get up. His failure at Perga of Pamphylia was a black mark on his Christian dedication but he got up from the canvas of this failure to later be of help to the Apostle he had justifiably alienated by his failure.
- The Partner. "Aristarchus." This man was a loyal partner with Paul. He was on the ship wreck recorded at the

end of the book of Acts. He was also termed a “fellowprisoner.” (Colossians 4:10) which says he would not compromise his loyalty to Christ or the Gospel.

- The Pauper. “Demas” He will always be known as the deserter of Paul because his strong passion for the world (1 Timothy 4:10). Demas was a fool to desert Paul for the world. But his kind abounds.
- The Physician. “Lucas.” Luke was a doctor and evidently took upon himself the care of Paul. An opposite of Demas in his passions.

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#### QUESTION - [Who was John Mark in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - John Mark, often just called Mark, is the author of the [gospel of Mark](#). He was a believer in the early church mentioned directly only in the book of Acts. John Mark is first mentioned as the son of a woman named Mary (Acts 12:12), whose house was being used as a place for believers to gather and pray. Later, Mark is mentioned as a companion of Barnabas and Paul during their travels together (Acts 12:25). John Mark was also Barnabas’ cousin (Colossians 4:10).

John Mark was a helper on Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey (Acts 13:5). However, he did not stay through the whole trip. John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia and left the work (Acts 15:38). The Bible does not say why Mark deserted, but his departure came right after a mostly fruitless time in Cyprus (Acts 13:4–12). Only one conversion is recorded in Cyprus, but there had been strong demonic opposition. It’s likely that the young John Mark was discouraged at the hardness of the way and decided to return to the comforts of home.

Some time later, after [Paul](#) and [Barnabas](#) had returned from their first journey, Paul expressed a desire to go back to the brothers in the cities they had previously visited to see how everyone was doing (Acts 15:36). Barnabas agreed, apparently upon the provision that they take John Mark with them. Paul refused to have Mark on the trip, however, citing Mark’s previous desertion. Paul thought it best not to have a quitter with them; they needed someone more dependable. Paul and Barnabas had a “sharp disagreement” about John Mark (verse 39) and wound up separating from each other and going on separate journeys. Barnabas took John Mark with him to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas with him through Syria and Cilicia to encourage the believers in the churches in those areas (Acts 15:39–41).

Barnabas, the “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36), desired to forgive John Mark’s failure and to give him another chance. Paul took the more rational view: pioneering missionary work requires dedication, resolve, and endurance. Paul saw John Mark as a risk to their mission. Luke, the writer of Acts, does not take sides or present either Paul or Barnabas as being in the right. He simply records the facts. It’s worth noting that, in the end, two groups of missionaries were sent out—twice as many missionaries were spreading the gospel.

John Mark sails off to Cyprus with his cousin Barnabas, but that is not the end of his story. Years later, he is with Paul, who calls him a “fellow worker” (Philemon 1:24). And near the end of Paul’s life, Paul sends a request to Timothy from a Roman prison: “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11). Obviously, John Mark had matured through the years and had become a faithful servant of the Lord. Paul recognized his progress and considered him a valuable companion.

John Mark wrote the gospel that bears his name sometime between AD 55 and 59. There could be a veiled reference to John Mark in Mark 14:51–52. In that passage a young man, roused from sleep on the night that Jesus was arrested, attempts to follow the Lord, and the mob who had Jesus in custody attempts to seize him. The young man escapes and flees into the night. The fact that this incident is only recorded in Mark’s gospel—and the fact that the young man is anonymous—has led some scholars to surmise that the fleeing young man is actually John Mark.

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#### QUESTION - [Who was Aristarchus in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - Aristarchus, whose name means “best ruler” or “best prince,” was a fellow worker with the [apostle Paul](#). He is first mentioned in the book of Acts during the riot in Ephesus. Both Gaius and Aristarchus, described as “Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia,” were seized by the angry mob (Acts 19:29). Paul’s preaching had upset Demetrius and other metalworkers who made idols of Artemis for a living (Acts 19:21–27). It seems the mob couldn’t find Paul, so they seized Paul’s fellow workers instead. Aristarchus and Gaius were in a precarious position until, two hours later, the city clerk was finally able to persuade the crowd to disperse.

Aristarchus is described as a Macedonian who lived in the capital city of Thessalonica (Acts 27:2). Nothing is known about Aristarchus’ background or how he became a Christian, although some commentators have suggested he could have been a Jewish convert to Christianity. In any case, Aristarchus was a faithful companion to Paul and accompanied the apostle on a few journeys. After the riot in Ephesus, Paul headed for Greece and decided to return through Macedonia after a stay of three months



(Acts 20:1–3). Many men accompanied Paul on this journey back through Macedonia, including “Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica” and others (Acts 20:4).

Later, Aristarchus traveled with Paul on his initial voyage to Rome, although it is unknown whether Aristarchus journeyed all the way to Rome at that time (Acts 27:1–2). Paul later indicated in his letter to the Colossians that Aristarchus was with him at some time during his first Roman imprisonment: “Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you, as does Mark, Barnabas’s cousin” (Colossians 4:10, HCSB).

The last time Aristarchus is mentioned in the Bible is in Paul’s short letter to Philemon. In the greeting section of Paul’s letter, he wrote, “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers” (Philemon 1:23–24). Clearly, the apostle valued Aristarchus’ work as his companion in Christ, as Aristarchus faithfully served the Lord.

Nothing is known of what became of Aristarchus; the Bible is silent about the rest of his life. Tradition places Aristarchus as bishop of Apamea, Syria, although nothing is mentioned in Scripture of this position. Aristarchus’ martyrdom under the [reign of Nero](#) is also part of church tradition.

Although Scripture mentions Aristarchus only a few times, and his background and later life are unknown, we know that Aristarchus was a faithful follower of Christ and served alongside Paul. The few biblical references to Aristarchus remind Christians that a believer does not need to be “high-profile” in order to accomplish great things. We may not be very visible to others in serving Christ, but we are still seen and valued by the Lord (see Colossians 3:23–24).

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#### QUESTION - [Who was Demas in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - Demas had at one time been one of Paul’s “fellow workers” in the gospel ministry along with [Mark](#), [Luke](#), and others (Philemon 1:24). During Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, Demas was also in Rome (Colossians 4:14).

There is also biblical evidence that Demas was with Paul during Paul’s second imprisonment in Rome, at least for a while. Then something happened. Demas forsook Paul, abandoned the ministry, and left town. Paul wrote about the sad situation: “Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica” (2 Timothy 4:10).

The Greek verb used in the original implies that Demas had not merely left Paul but had left him “in the lurch”; that is, Demas had abandoned Paul in a time of need. The apostle was in prison, facing a death sentence, and that’s when Demas chose to set sail. Undoubtedly, Paul was deeply let down by Demas. It’s never easy to see a friend and associate in whom you’ve placed your trust forsake you in the midst of hardship.

The separation caused by Demas’ desertion of Paul was not merely spatial but spiritual. Demas left Rome because he fell in love with the world. In other words, Demas chose the corrupt value system of the unsaved world over what heaven values. As the NLT translates it, Demas “loves the things of this life” (2 Timothy 4:10). We don’t know the details of Demas’ situation, but it is evident that Demas decided that what Satan has to offer in this life is better than what God has to offer in the next.

Much can be said in support of the view that Demas, in love with the present world, was never a born-again believer in Jesus Christ. Paul makes a sharp contrast in 2 Timothy 4:8 and 2 Timothy 4:10. In 2Ti 4:8, Paul speaks of those who **love** the Lord: “There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award . . . to all who have **loved** his appearing” (ESV). Demas, in contrast to those who love Jesus’ return, **loved** the present world (verse 10). 1 John 2:15 is clear about the spiritual state of those who [love the world](#): “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.” Nowhere in the Bible do we read of the restoration of Demas.

**The tragedy of Demas is still being lived out today by those who choose the temporary benefits of this world over the [eternal riches](#) of heaven. Today there are still those who seem to receive the Word but then “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22). Past service is no guarantee of future faithfulness; we must depend on the Lord, our Strength (Psalm 28:8). We must be born again (John 3:3); otherwise, we have no foundation of faith. “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (1 John 2:19; cf. Matthew 7:22–23).**

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**Philemon 1:25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.**

**Arthur Way** - MAY THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH THE SPIRITS OF YOU AND YOURS.

JV Philemon 1:25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. <Written from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a servant.>

BGT Philemon 1:25 χ ρ ι ς τ ο κ υ ρ ο υ η σ ο Χ ρ ι σ τ ο μ ε τ τ ο π ν ε μ α τ ο ς μ υ .

NET Philemon 1:25 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

CSB Philemon 1:25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

ESV Philemon 1:25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

NIV Philemon 1:25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

NLT Philemon 1:25 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

NRS Philemon 1:25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

NJB Philemon 1:25 May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

NAB Philemon 1:25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

YLT Philemon 1:25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with your spirit! Amen.

MIT Philemon 1:25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

- **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ** Ro 16:20,24
- **be with your spirit:** 2Ti 4:22

## PAUL'S CLOSING PRAYER FOR AMAZING GRACE

**The grace** ([charis](#)) of the Lord ([kurios](#)) **Jesus** ([Iesous](#)) **Christ** ([Christos](#)) *be with your spirit* - The source of grace is Christ, as Paul wrote in 2Cor 13:14 describing "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ."

[Steven Cole](#) - God's grace was at the center of Paul's life. It summed up everything about how he related to God and to others. If we have been shown grace, then we need to show grace to others. If we want to be shown more grace, then we've got to give more grace to others. Philemon may have thought, "Onesimus doesn't deserve forgiveness!" Precisely! Grace is always undeserved. Don't ever forget it!

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**Grace** (favor) ([5485](#)) [charis](#) from from **chairō** = to rejoice. English = charity. Beggars need "*charity*" even as sinners need *grace*, for we are all spiritual paupers outside of Christ, but "*God gives where he finds empty hands*"-Augustine [cp Mt 5:3<sub>+</sub>] is a word which defies a simple definition but at its core conveys the sense of favor while the specific nuances of **charis** depend on the [context](#) in which it is used. Someone has written that the word **grace** is probably the greatest word in the Scriptures, even greater even than "love," because **grace** is love in action, and therefore includes it. It is hardly too much to say that God has in no word uttered Himself and all that was in His heart more distinctly than in this word grace ([charis](#))!

Grace is God's unmerited favor and supernatural enablement and empowerment for initial salvation (justification) and for daily sanctification. Grace is everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything.

"He gives more grace when the burdens grow greater.  
He sends more strength when the labors increase,  
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,  
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When our strength has failed 'ere the day is half done;  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

**Adrian Rogers** says the best definition of grace that he has ever heard is that God's grace is "both the **desire** and the **ability** to do the will of God." It is striking that almost the same words occur in Php 2:13NLT<sub>±</sub> "**For** ([term of explanation](#) - explains how it is possible to Work out our salvation - Php 2:12<sub>+</sub>) God is working in you, giving you the **DESIRE** and the **POWER** to do what pleases

Him." When you have a godly desire, that desire is from God, because no good thing can come out of our old vile heart! And only God the Spirit in us can give the supernatural power necessary to accomplish that godly desire! So we could paraphrase Php 2:13, in simple words, by saying that God's Spirit is continually giving us the grace (desire and power) to do what pleases Him! This practical definition of grace ought to free many of us who are "trying to clean ourselves up!" It can't be done! We need His grace to give us the desire to "clean up" and the power to "clean up!" Are you resisting His grace? You can either receive it or resist it! The first way leaves us filled, while the second way leaves us empty, dry, and spiritually barren. O beloved, tell God you desperately need and want Him to pour out His grace on the situation you find yourself entwined. Do you have a root of bitterness? Then confess it (even that act is a reflection of His grace) and cry out for His grace to give you the desire and the ability to eradicate that deadly root and its caustic fruit. And keep crying out until He removes the root, for it is in His will that no child of His should ever have a root of bitterness! And when He removes it, celebrate with a praise and worship service!

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### **J C Philpot - Ears From Harvested Sheaves -**

It is the regenerating breath of the Lord Jesus Christ which makes the soul alive unto Himself. This is manifest from His own language: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

Then for the first time "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit." For you will observe that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is not with our carnal mind: that ever remains the same, a body of sin and death, flesh, corrupt flesh, "in which dwelleth no good thing," and therefore not the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. His grace is with our spirit, that "new man" of which we read that "it is after God, [that is, after the image of God] created in righteousness and true holiness." This is called our "spirit," because it is born of the Spirit, as the Lord Himself unfolded the solemn mystery to Nicodemus: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This is no subtle, wire-drawn distinction, but a very important truth; for unless we see the difference between the two natures, the spirit and the flesh, the law in the members and the law of the mind, we shall always be in bondage, as looking for holiness in the flesh. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ being thus with our spirit, it breathes from time to time upon that spirit, moves and acts in it and upon it; for there is what I may call a gracious or spiritual union between the two.

Thus we can no more live without the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ than the earth can live without the sun. He must shine, or we have no light; He must revive, or we have no warmth; and He must fertilise, or we bring forth no fruit. Then time after time there is an outgoing of the single desire of the soul to the Lord Jesus Christ that His grace would be with our spirit; that this grace may be ever flowing forth into us, so as to make us new creatures, dispel all doubt and fear, break to pieces all binds and fetters, fill us with love and humility, conform us to His suffering image, produce in us every fruit that shall redound to His praise, be with us in life and death, and land us safe in eternity. -- J.C. Philpot, Ears from Harvested Sheaves. Cross References: Jn 3:6; Jn 6:63

## **DEVOTIONALS ON PHILEMON FROM MOODY'S TODAY IN THE WORD**

**Philemon 1:4-5** - Today in the Word - Even though his father had died several decades earlier, every time Samuel Thornton spoke of him, he gave the impression he had just had a conversation with him. In fact, the memory of his father was so vivid that Samuel often referred to him in the present tense, as if he were still alive. What was most apparent, however, was the pleasure it gave Samuel to remember his father's life. A missionary to India and then to Japan, his father had been a godly example to his family. Each story brought to Samuel's mind the valuable spiritual lessons he had learned from his father while growing up.

Paul felt similarly about Philemon. Every time Paul remembered Philemon, he rejoiced. This was true of others also. Paul told the Roman believers that he remembered them constantly in prayer (Ro 1:9). He wrote to the Ephesian church, "I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (Eph. 1:16). He gave thanks to God every time he remembered the Philippian believers (Phil. 1:3). He assured the Thessalonians: "We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Thess. 1:3).

For Paul, remembering and praying were synonymous. The memory of those he loved immediately prompted him to pray for them (2Tim. 1:3). Paul also asked others to remember him (1Cor. 11:2). He asked the Colossians to "remember" his chains (Col. 4:18). He reminded the Thessalonians of his example of effort, endurance of hardship, and diligent work during his time of ministry among them (1Th. 2:9). He expected the churches to remember his teaching (2Thess. 2:5, 8).

Missionaries often use prayer cards with photographs to remind their supporters to pray for them. Why not use the snapshots and school photographs that friends and family members give you as a similar reminder? Use a bulletin board or refrigerator door to create a "wall of remembrance." The pictures and keepsakes you post there will remind you of needs for which you can pray. Or you can simply praise God for the lives of those represented there.

**Philemon 1:6-7** D. L. Moody once said: “If this world is going to be reached, I am convinced that it must be done by men and women of average talent. After all, there are comparatively few people in the world who have great talents.” Yet “average” ability may be one of the things that keeps Christians from sharing their faith. Many are intimidated by the thought that they are ordinary people given the extraordinary task of showing the love of Christ to others.

The good news is that we don’t have to be super heroes or have all the answers in order to share our faith effectively with others. In fact, Paul prayed that Philemon would be active in sharing his faith, so that he would have a greater understanding of all that was his in Christ. In Philemon’s case, however, “sharing” involved more than simply stating the facts of the gospel. It’s possible that the sharing Paul had in mind consisted of acts of hospitality or financial generosity that were prompted by Philemon’s faith in Christ.

In Philemon 1:7 Paul praises Philemon for being an encouragement by “refreshing” the hearts of the saints. Philemon had used his resources to provide relief for other believers, perhaps by opening his home to them as they traveled from one city to another. Some commentators suggest that the “sharing” mentioned in verse 7 might even refer to the faith Philemon had in common with the rest of the church. If this is the sense, then Paul’s prayer would be that Philemon would grow in his understanding of the mutual treasure of faith that was his along with other believers.

How can you share your faith today? It may be by telling someone else the good news of Jesus Christ. Or, God may give you an opportunity to provide momentary relief to someone else. Don’t be discouraged if you feel as if you are just an “average” Christian with little to offer. Most of those who have had extraordinary ministries have been ordinary people who allowed our extraordinary God to use them. All who are active in sharing their faith learn more about the faith that they share.

**Philemon 1:8-9** During the Civil War a woman sent Abraham Lincoln a letter asking for his autograph. She also requested that he include a sentiment with the autograph, perhaps hoping for something like “Best Wishes” or “Your Faithful Servant.” Lincoln was annoyed by the selfish nature of her request and wrote back: “Dear Madam: When you ask from a stranger that which is of interest only to yourself, always enclose a stamp. There’s your sentiment, and here’s my autograph. A. Lincoln.”

Paul wrote to Philemon also to ask him for a favor, but the apostle’s request was not prompted by self-interest. Paul’s motivation was his concern for Onesimus and for the church. Onesimus had come to faith in Christ while Paul was in prison. It’s possible that Onesimus was himself a prisoner at the time. As a fellow Christian, this would have been reason enough for Philemon to rejoice. But the language Paul uses in describing Onesimus’ conversion is designed to remind Philemon of other things he and his former slave had in common. They both had Paul as their spiritual father. Now Paul was asking for a favor.

Yet Paul did not want Philemon to forgive Onesimus merely out of obligation. It’s true that as Philemon’s spiritual father and as an apostle, Paul had spiritual authority. “I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do.” But Paul wanted Philemon to comply with his request willingly, not under compulsion: “I appeal to you on the basis of love.” Still, the apostle did make it clear that Philemon was also obligated to do what Paul asked.

Philips Brooks said,

“Duty makes us do things well; but love makes us do them beautifully.”

What do you have on your agenda today that might qualify as a duty? Do you plan to fulfill it out of a sense of grudging obligation or will you be motivated by your love for Christ and gratitude for all that He has done in your life? Choose at least one task on your “to do” list and consider how being motivated by gratitude will change the way you approach it.

#### **Philemon 1:8-14**

A network television show asks: “What Would You Do?” The show contrives difficult situations and uses hidden cameras to see how people will react. For example, a mother loudly criticizes her overweight daughter (both portrayed by actors) in a crowded restaurant. Many of the patrons are bothered, but most simply shake their heads in disgust. A few, however, do respond. One man chose to confront the mother. When asked why, he responded, “I had to do the right thing.”

In this letter to Philemon, Paul appeals to his colleague to do the right thing in a difficult situation. He is writing to Philemon about Onesimus, who was Philemon’s former slave. Some extra-biblical accounts explain that the slave had robbed Philemon and fled to Rome. There, the slave came in contact with Paul, and Onesimus’s life was forever changed by the gospel.

Onesimus, Paul agrees, was formerly “useless” to Philemon (v. 11). Much has changed, however. Paul not only appeals to Philemon’s forgiving side, but also now describes the former slave as a “son” and as “useful” (vv. 10–11). Even more radically, he states in verse 12 that Onesimus “is my very heart.”

Once a rebellious slave, Onesimus was changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul appeals to Philemon to accept this change and to take his servant back based on two motivations. First of course, is that both Paul and Philemon themselves are prisoners of God

and bound by love (vv. 8–9). They are taken captive by the will of Christ.

The second reason is that Philemon and Onesimus now share a bond in Christ. Paul appeals to Philemon for this favor and wants him to do it of his own accord and not because he felt forced to do it. He wants Philemon to make the choice himself, do not only do the right thing, but to go beyond what is expected because of his love for Paul and his love for Christ.

Note that this is not a small request. Philemon was asked to forgive someone who had wronged him, to welcome him back with honor, and to work alongside him for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

Apply the Word - In this spirit of “lavish love,” consider taking an extra step of love toward someone today. Pray for someone in your church who has hurt you, and also send them an encouraging note. Offer to help in a ministry like the nursery or grounds crew that has a need, even if it isn’t your favorite. Cook or take out the trash so that your spouse or family member doesn’t have to. These actions please God when motivated by love.

**Philemon 1:10-11** When he was young, Dan wasn’t expected to become interested in the Bible, let alone become the pastor of a church. Widely known as the “town drunk,” Dan had a reputation for hard fighting and heavy drinking. Then a local pastor began to pray for Dan and patiently share the gospel with him. When Dan trusted Christ, his life began to change. In time, he felt God calling him to prepare for the ministry. He left the small town where he had grown up and attended a Bible college. When the pastor who had led him to Christ felt called to the mission field, Dan returned to his hometown and replaced him as the church’s minister.

Charles Spurgeon once declared,

“The most useful members of a church are usually those who would be doing harm if they were not doing good.”

This was certainly true of the apostle Paul. Prior to trusting in Christ, he was a persecutor of Christians.

The same was true of Onesimus. In Greek the name Onesimus literally meant “useful.” In an ironic play on words, Paul admits that formerly Onesimus had been “useless” to Philemon. In fact, Paul uses one more word play here. The word translated “useless” is similar to the Greek word Christless. When Onesimus was Christless, he was useless. Once he came to know Christ, his life was changed, and he became useful, both to Philemon and to the Lord Jesus.

Have you become more useful to God and to others since you trusted in Jesus Christ? Has anyone expressed surprise at the change in your life? Think about these questions. Ironically, those who have experienced such a change can sometimes be the most skeptical about the possibility of God’s grace impacting others in the same way. Think of one such “hopeless case” that you know. Pray that by God’s grace they will come to know Christ, become His useful servant, and show God’s love to others.

**Philemon 1:12-14** Hobbits, the fictional inhabitants of Middle Earth created by J. R. R. Tolkien, are fond of giving gifts. Instead of receiving gifts on their birthday, they give gifts to other Hobbits. “Actually in Hobbiton and Bywater every day in the year was somebody’s birthday,” the author explains in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, “so that every hobbit in those parts had a fair chance of at least one present at least once a week.” As they were required to give so many gifts, some Hobbits recycled them. What was received from one Hobbit was passed on to another on one’s birthday. For Hobbits, this habit of gift giving “was not a bad system.” We, however, might get offended if we knew that someone had given us a “recycled gift.”

Paul had a similar concern about the request that he was about to make of Philemon. Onesimus had become so useful to Paul in his ministry that he would have liked to keep him with him. However, he did not feel that he could do so without Philemon’s permission. He decided, instead, to send Onesimus back with his letter and let Philemon decide what must be done.

God is also concerned about the gifts that we give to Him. He commands us to offer ourselves to Him but wants us to do so willingly. We should see the command to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice as “reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Those who serve as leaders in the church are to do so because they are “willing” (1Peter 5:2). This is also to be true of those who offer their finances to God (2Cor. 9:7). How would you rate your willingness to serve Christ today on a scale of 1 to 10, if 1 is grudging and 10 is eager and willing?

**Philemon 1:15-16** One of the most destructive results of slavery has been its tendency to dehumanize its victims. Slaves had monetary value in the eyes of those who bought and sold them, but their value as human beings was diminished. They were viewed as objects and often treated as such. Although some masters treated their slaves with respect (as Philemon seems to have done), others were abusive (1Peter 2:18).

The New Testament did not condemn the practice of slavery outright, but its principles undermined the values that made slavery acceptable. Its assertion that in Christ there is no such thing as slave or free and that every believer is a brother or sister in Christ sowed the seeds that would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery.

Paul wanted Philemon to appreciate Onesimus' true value. As a believer Onesimus was "no longer a slave." Even though society may have regarded him as such, in God's eyes he was a free man (1Cor. 7:22). The believer who was not a slave had no right to look down on the Christian slave because the free man was Christ's servant. Those who owned slaves were to recognize that they also had a master in heaven (Col. 4:1). At the same time, a new position in Christ did not give Christian slaves the right to be disrespectful. Slaves were to obey their masters with a sincere heart, out of reverence for the Lord (Col. 3:22).

We do not own slaves, but we do sometimes undervalue those around us. Although sin and character flaws may have rendered some "unprofitable servants," these same people were so valuable that Christ shed His blood for them. Perhaps God brought these "difficult" people into your life for you to share the love of Christ with them. They have inherent value as people created in the image of God. Ask God for an opportunity to tell them about Christ, so that they can find their true worth in Him.

**Philemon 1:17-21** A woman who had a long-standing grudge against her sister was describing her plan for revenge. "I've kept a list of every mean thing she has ever done to me," the woman explained. "I keep it in my safe deposit box with instructions that it be given to my sister when I die." When someone suggested that she was being bitter, the woman denied it. "I'm not bitter," she declared. "I just want her to know what she has done."

Although we may not be as careful about keeping accounts of what others have done to us, most of us do keep a mental list of the offenses we have suffered. Although we know we should forgive, it's not always easy. We know that the offenses we have suffered are real and we are reluctant to let others "get away with murder."

The feeling that a debt is owed when others hurt us is real. True biblical forgiveness is not saying that the offense another has committed is "nothing." There must be an accurate reckoning of the offense in order to give true forgiveness. Unlock the mental safety deposit box where you keep the accounts of all your offenses. Look at the ledger and honestly calculate the debt. Now compare that to the price paid by Christ to forgive you. Shouldn't you show the same kind of mercy to others as Christ has shown you?

**Philemon 1:22** On one of James Hudson Taylor's journeys, the sailing ship in which the pioneer missionary to China was traveling passed dangerously close to a reef. The ship's anxious captain kept hoping for a favorable evening wind to carry them away from certain disaster. When no wind came, the captain said, "Well, we have done everything that can be done. We can only await the result." "No," Taylor replied, "there is one thing we have not done yet." "What is that?" the captain asked. "Four of us on board are Christians," Taylor continued. "Let us each retire to his own cabin, and in agreed prayer ask the Lord to give us immediately a breeze. He can as easily send it now as at sunset."

After a brief time of prayer, Taylor felt so sure that God would grant his request that he could pray no longer. He went up on deck and asked the first officer to let down the mainsail. An unbeliever, the first officer refused and scornfully said, "What would be the good of that?" "We have been asking God for a wind," Taylor declared. "It is coming immediately and we are so near the reef that there is not a moment to lose!" As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Taylor saw the uppermost sail of the ship begin to stir, moved by a fresh breeze. They lowered the mainsail and within minutes the ship was steering toward safety.

Paul had the same confidence that God would answer his prayers for release from prison. He was so certain, in fact, that he asked Philemon to prepare a guestroom for him. Was this presumptuous? Not in view of the passages of Scripture that urge us to expect answers to our prayers. Jesus taught His disciples to pray with the assurance that God knew what they needed before they asked Him (Matt. 6:8). Jesus also taught His disciples to be persistent in prayer (Luke 18:1).

Examine your prayer list today. How many of your requests do you expect God to answer? Are there reasonable steps you should be taking to prepare for His answer? Remember, however, that God always reserves the right to answer our prayers in His own time and way. An answer of "No" or "Wait" is still an answer. When asked about delayed answer to prayer, Hudson Taylor explained, "If we are kept waiting, the spiritual blessing that is the outcome is far more precious than exemption from the trial."

**Philemon 1:23-25** Jill Briscoe tells of the time she sat at a table with three attractive young women and felt very insecure. "I felt fat, forty, and somewhat futile," she writes. Then she sensed the Lord speaking to her. "Why do you think everyone is so tense?" In a flash, she understood the reason for the unease she had sensed between the women as well as her own insecurity. "Competition," she replied to the Lord. "I distinctly heard his next words," Briscoe writes, "'Jill, you'll never be competition.' For the first time I thanked God for my ordinary good looks. I could be a big sister to women, a friendly mother, an aunt. I could relax, knowing I would never threaten anyone. God had made me just right for my ministry of teaching women, and that was all that mattered."

Briscoe's experience is not unusual. Many Christians, both men and women, feel as if they are in competition with one another. We silently compare our jobs, children, homes, and even our spouses. Worse yet is the competitive spirit one often senses in churches. How happy are we when the church down the street begins to gain more members than our own? Such success is more likely to generate an attitude of jealousy rather than an occasion for rejoicing. If there's a competition between us, we need to remind ourselves of our heavenly Master who looks at us all as fellow workers.

As you pray for your church and its ministries this week, why not also consider praying for the “competition”? Think of another Bible-believing church or Christian ministry and ask God to bless their efforts. Also ask God to make you sensitive to any areas of your life where you may be competing with others. We don’t always need to be the best. Indeed, the basic principle of life in the body of Christ is found in 1 Corinthians 12:26: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

## CHARGE THAT TO MY ACCOUNT

Henry Allan Ironside

Philemon 17-19

If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it; albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides (Philemon 17-19).

Someone has said that this epistle to Philemon is the finest specimen of early private Christian correspondence extant. We should expect this, since it was given by divine inspiration. And yet it all has to do with a thieving runaway slave named Onesimus, who was about to return to his former master.

The history behind the letter, which is deduced from a careful study of the epistle itself, seems to be this: In the city of Colosse dwelt a wealthy Christian man by the name of Philemon, possibly the head of a large household, and like many in that day, he had a number of slaves or bondsmen. Christianity did not immediately overturn the evil custom of slavery, although eventually it was the means of practically driving it out of the whole civilized world. It began by regulating the relation of master and slave, thus bringing untold blessing to those in bondage.

This man Philemon evidently was converted through the ministry of the apostle Paul. Where they met, we are not told; certainly not in the city of Colosse, because in writing the letter to the Colossians, Paul makes it clear that he had never seen the faces of those who formed the Colossian church. You will recall that he labored at Ephesus for a long period. The fame of his preaching and teaching was spread abroad, and we read that “all in Asia heard the word.” Among those who thus heard the Gospel message may have been this man Philemon of Colosse, and so he was brought to know Christ.

Some years had gone by, and this slave, Onesimus, had run away. Evidently before going, he had robbed his master. With his ill-gotten gains he had fled to Rome. How he reached there we do not know, but I have no doubt that upon his arrival he had his fling and enjoyed to the full that which had belonged to his master. He did not take God into account, but nevertheless God's eye was upon him when he left his home, and it followed him along the journey from Colosse to Rome. When he reached that great metropolis he was evidently brought into contact with the very man through whom his master, Philemon, had been converted. Possibly Onesimus was arrested because of some further rascality, and in that way came in contact with Paul in prison, or he may have visited him voluntarily. At any rate God, who knows just how to bring the needy sinner and the messenger of the Cross together, saw to it that Onesimus and Paul met face-to-face.

Sam Hadley Finds Jim

Some years ago there happened a wonderful illustration of this very thing: the divine ability to bring the needy sinner and the messenger of Christ together.

When Sam Hadley was in California, just shortly before he died, Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman, that princely man of God, arranged a midnight meeting using the largest theater in the city of Oakland in order to get the message of Hadley before the very people who needed it most. On that night a great procession, maybe one thousand people, from all the different churches, led by the Salvation Army band, wended their way through the main streets of the city. Beginning at 10:30, they marched for one-half hour and then came to the Metropolitan Theater. In a moment or two it was packed from floor to gallery.

I happened to be sitting in the first balcony, looking right down upon the stage. I noticed that every seat on the stage was filled with Christian workers, but when Sam Hadley stepped forward to deliver the stirring message of the evening, his seat was left vacant. Just as he began to speak, I saw a man who had come in at the rear of the stage slip around from behind the back curtain and stand at one of the wings with his hand up to his ear, listening to the address. Evidently he did not hear very well. In a moment or two he moved to another wing and then on to another one. Finally he came forward to one side of the front part of the stage and stood there listening, but still he could not hear very well. Upon noticing him, Dr. Chapman immediately got up, greeted the poor fellow, brought him to the front, and put him in the very chair that Sam Hadley had occupied. There he listened entranced to the story of Hadley's redemption.

When the speaker had finished, Dr. Chapman arose to close the meeting, and Hadley took Chapman's chair next to this man. Turning to the man he shook hands with him, and they chatted together. When Dr. Chapman was about ready to ask the people to rise and receive the benediction, Hadley suddenly sprang to his feet, and said, "Just a moment, my friends. Before we close, Dr. Chapman, may I say something? When I was on my way from New York to Oakland a couple of weeks ago, I stopped at Detroit. I was traveling in a private car, put at my disposal by a generous Christian manufacturer. While my car was in the yards, I went downtown and addressed a group at a mission. As I finished, an old couple came up and said, 'Mr. Hadley, won't you go home and take supper with us?'"

"I replied, 'You must excuse me; I am not at all well, and it is a great strain for me to go out and visit between meetings. I had better go back to the car and rest.'

"They were so disappointed. The mother faltered. 'Oh, Mr. Hadley, we did want to see you so badly about something.'

"Very well, give me a few moments to lie down and I will go with you."

He then told how they sat together in the old-fashioned parlor on the horsehair furniture and talked. They told him their story: "Mr. Hadley, you know we have a son, Jim. Our son was brought up to go to Sunday school and church, and oh, we had such hopes of him. But he had to work out rather early in life and he got into association with worldly men and went down and down and down. By and by he came under the power of strong drink. We shall never forget the first time he came home drunk. Sometimes he would never get home at all until the early hours of the morning. Our hearts were breaking over him. One time he did not come all night, but early in the morning, after we had waited through a sleepless night for him, he came in hurriedly, with a pale face and said, 'Folks, I cannot stay; I must get out. I did something when I was drunk last night, and if it is found out, it will go hard with me. I am not going to stay here and blot your name.' He kissed us both and left, and until recently we have never seen nor heard of him.

"Mr. Hadley, here is a letter that just came from a friend who lives in California, and he tells us, 'I am quite certain that I saw your son, Jim, in San Francisco. I was coming down on a street car and saw him waiting for a car. I was carried by a block. I hurried back, but he had boarded another car and was gone. I know it was Jim.'

"He is still living, Mr. Hadley, and we are praying that God will save him yet. You are going to California to have meetings out there. Daily we will be kneeling here praying that God will send our boy, Jim, to hear you, and perhaps when he learns how God saved one poor drunkard, he will know there is hope also for him. Will you join us in daily prayer?"

"I said I would, and we prayed together. They made me promise that every day at a given hour, Detroit time, I would lift my heart to God in fellowship with them, knowing that they were kneeling in that room, praying to God that He would reach Jim and give me the opportunity of bringing him to Christ. That was two weeks ago. I have kept my promise every day. My friends, this is my first meeting in California, and here is Jim. Tonight he was drinking in a saloon on Broadway as the great procession passed. He heard the singing, followed us to the theater, and said, 'I believe I will go in.' He hurried up here, but it was too late. Every place was filled, and the police officer said, 'We cannot allow another person to go inside.' Jim thought, 'This is just my luck. Even if I want to go and hear the Gospel, I cannot. I will go back to the saloon.' He started back; then he returned determined to see if there was not some way to get in. He came in the back door and finally sat in my own chair. Friends, Jim wants Christ, and I ask you all to pray for him."

There that night we saw that poor fellow drop on his knees and confess his sin and guilt and accept Christ as his Savior. The last sight we had of Jim was when J. Wilbur Chapman and he were on their way to the Western Union Telegraph office to send the joyful message: "God heard your prayers. My soul is saved." Oh, what a God, lover of sinners that He is! How He delights to reach the lost and needy!

"He Delighteth in Mercy"

This same God was watching over [Onesimus](#). He saw him when he stole that money and as he fled from his master's house. He watched him on his way to Rome and in due time brought him face-to-face with Paul. Through that same precious Gospel that had been blessed to the salvation of Philemon, Onesimus, the thieving runaway slave, was also saved, and another star was added to the Redeemer's crown.

Then I can imagine Onesimus coming to Paul and saying, "Now, Paul, I want your advice. There is a matter that is troubling me. You know my master, Philemon. I must confess that I robbed him and ran away. I feel now that I must go back and try to make things right."

One evidence that people are really born of God is their effort to make restitution for wrong done in the past. They want a good conscience both before God and man.

"Paul, ought I to go back in accordance with the Roman law? I have nothing to pay, and I don't know just what to do. I do not belong to myself, and it is quite impossible to ever earn anything to make up for the loss. Will you advise me what to do?"



Paul might have said, "I know Philemon well. He has a tender, kind, loving heart and a forgiving spirit. I will write him a note and ask him to forgive you, and that will make everything all right."

But he did not do that. Why? I think that he wanted to give us a wonderful picture of the great gospel of vicarious substitution. One of the primary aspects of the work of the Cross is substitution. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself paid the debt that we owe to the infinite God in order that when forgiveness came to us it would be on a perfectly righteous basis. Paul, who had himself been justified through the Cross, now says, "I will write a letter to Philemon and undertake to become your surety. You go back to Philemon and present my letter. You do not need to plead your own case; just give him my letter."

We see Onesimus with that message from Paul safely hidden in his wallet, hurrying back to Colosse. Imagine Philemon standing on the portico of his beautiful residence, looking down the road and suddenly exclaiming, "Why, who is that? It certainly looks like that scoundrel, Onesimus! But surely he would not have the face to come back. Still, it looks very much like him. I will just watch and wait."

A little later, he says, "I declare, it is Onesimus! He seems to be coming to the house. I suppose he has had a hard time in the world. The stolen money is all gone, and now perhaps he is coming to beg for pardon."

As he comes up the pathway, Onesimus calls, "Master, Master!"

"Well, Onesimus, are you home again?"

"Yes, Master, read this, please."

No other word would Onesimus speak for himself; Paul's letter would explain all.

Philemon takes the letter, opens it, and begins to read: Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Phile 1:1).

"Why Onesimus, where did you meet Paul? Did you see him personally?"

"Yes, Master, in the prison in Rome; he led me to Christ."

Unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlaborer (Phile 1:1).

"Little enough I have ever done, but that is just like Paul."

And to our beloved [Apphia](#) (Phile 1:2). (That was Mrs. Philemon.)

"Come here, Apphia. Here is a letter from Paul." When Mrs. Philemon sees Onesimus, she exclaims, "Are you back?"

One can imagine her mingled disgust and indignation as she sees him standing there. But Philemon says: "Yes, my dear, not a word. Here is a letter for us to read—a letter from Paul."

Running on down the letter he comes to this: Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus (Phile 1:9-10).

"Think of that! He must have been putting it over on Paul in some way or another."

Whom I have begotten in my bonds (Phile 1:10). "I wonder if he told him anything about the money he stole from us. I suppose he has been playing the religious game with Paul."

Which in time past was to thee unprofitable (Phile 1:11).

"I should say he was."

But now profitable to thee and to me (Phile 1:12).

"I am not so sure of that."

Whom I have sent again (Phile 1:12).

"Paul must have thought a lot of him. If he didn't serve him any better than he did me, he would not get much out of him." He goes on reading through the letter.

"Well, well, that rascally, thieving liar! Maybe Paul believes that he is saved, but I will never believe it unless I find out that he owned up to the wrong he did me."

What is this? If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will

repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides (Phile 1:18-19).

Oh, I think in a moment Philemon was conquered. “Why,” he says, “it is all out then. He has confessed his sin. He has acknowledged his thieving, owned his guilt, and, just think, Paul, that dear servant of God, suffering in prison for Christ's sake, says: Put that on my account. I will settle everything for him. Paul becomes his surety.” It was just as though Paul should write today: “Charge that to my account!”

#### A Gospel Picture

Is not this a picture of the Gospel? A picture of what the Savior has done for every repentant soul? I think I see Him as he brings the needy, penitent sinner into the presence of God and says, “My Father, he has wronged Thee, he owes Thee much, but all has been charged to My account. Let him go free.” How could the Father turn aside the prayer of His Son after that death of shame and sorrow on Calvary's cross, when He took our blame upon Himself and suffered in our stead?

But now observe it is not only that Paul offered to become Onesimus's surety, it was not merely that he offered to settle everything for Onesimus in regard to the past, but he provided for his future too. He says to Philemon: If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself (Phile 1:17).

Is not that another aspect of our salvation? We are “accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6). The blessed Savior brings the redeemed one into the presence of the Father and says, “My Father, if thou countest Me the partner of Thy throne, receive him as Myself.” Paul says, Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? (Phile 1:16). He is to take the place, not of a bondsman, but of an honored member of the family and a brother in Christ. Think of it—once a poor, thieving, runaway slave and now a recognized servant of Christ, made welcome for Paul's sake. Thus our Father saves the lawless, guilty sinner and makes him welcome for Jesus' sake, treating him as He treats His own beloved Son.

#### [Jesus paid it all,](#)

All to Him I owe;

Sin had left a crimson stain

He washed it white as snow.

(Based on Isaiah 1:18-[note](#))

And now every redeemed one is in Christ before God—yea, “made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Co 5:21[note](#)). Oh, wondrous love! Justice is satisfied. What a picture we have here then of substitution and acceptance. The apostle Paul gave the epitome of it all for us:

“[Jesus our Lord] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Ro 4:25-[note](#)).

We are accepted in the Beloved. The Lord Jesus became our Surety, settled for all our past, and has provided for all our future. In the book of Proverbs 11:15, there is a very striking statement, “He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretyship is sure.” These words were written centuries before the Cross, to warn men of what is still a very common ground for failure and ruin in business life. To go surety for a stranger is a very dangerous thing, as thousands have learned to their sorrow. It is poor policy to take such a risk unless you are prepared to lose.

But there was One who knew to the full what all the consequences of His act would be and yet, in grace, deigned to become “surety for a stranger.” Meditate upon these wonderful words:

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Co 8:9+).

He was the stranger's Surety.

A [surety](#) (see also [Wikipedia](#)) is one who stands good for another. Many a man will do this for a friend long known and trusted, but no wise man will so act for a stranger, unless he is prepared to lose. But it was when we were strangers and foreigners and enemies and alienated in our minds by wicked works that Jesus in grace became our Surety. “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pe 3:18-[note](#)).

All we owed was exacted from Him when He suffered upon the tree for sins not His own. He could then say,

“I restored that which I took not away” (Ps 69:4).

Bishop Lowth's beautiful rendering of Isa 53:7 reads: “It was exacted and He became answerable.” This is the very essence of the Gospel message. He died in my place; He paid my debt.

How fully He proved the truth of the words quoted from Proverbs when He suffered on that cross of shame! How He had to smart for it when God's awful judgment against sin fell upon Him. But He wavered not! In love to God and to the strangers whose Surety He had become,

“He endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2-[note](#)).

His sorrows are now forever past. He has paid the debt, met every claim in perfect righteousness. The believing sinner is cleared of every charge, and God is fully glorified.

He bore on the tree  
The sentence for me,  
And now both the Surety  
And sinner are free.  
(cp 1 Peter 2:24-[note](#))

None other could have met the claims of God's holiness against the sinner and have come out triumphant at last. He alone could atone for sin. Because He has settled every claim, God has raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in highest glory.

Have you trusted the stranger's Surety?  
If not, turn to Him now while grace is free.

## THE MANIFOLD VALUES OF THIS EPISTLE

### Graham Scroggie

Renan has spoken of this little letter as a note, and that is really what it is. It is quite unique in the Pauline group of Writings, and consequently a special interest attaches to it. Short as the letter is, it has manifold values which make it very precious, values at once personal, ethical, providential, practical, evangelical, social, and spiritual.

1. ITS PERSONAL VALUE, consists in the light which it throws upon the character of Paul.
- 2- ITS ETHICAL VALUE, consists in its balanced sensitiveness to what is right.
3. ITS PROVIDENTIAL VALUE, consists in its underlying suggestion that God is behind and above all events.
4. ITS PRACTICAL VALUE,, consists in its application of the highest principles to the commonest affairs.
5. ITS EVANGELICAL VALUE, consists in the encouragement it supplies to seek and to redeem the lowest.
6. ITS SOCIAL VALUE, consists in its presentation of the relation of Christianity to slavery and all unchristian institutions.
7. ITS SPIRITUAL VALUE, consists in the analogy between it and the Gospel Story. From this it will be abundantly evident that this little Note has a value altogether out of proportion to its size.

The primitive Church regarded it as scarcely worthy of a place in the Canon of Sacred Writings, and many concluded, on account of the absence of any approach to"" doctrinal teaching in it, that it was not from the hand of Paul at all. But, happily, this kind of criticism did not prevail against the common acceptance of its authenticity.

At this late date only the "most wanton scepticism" will call into question its- genuineness.

"It is hard to conceive how anyone can read it without feeling that we have in it a picture of the Apostle of the Gentiles, which we could ill afford to lose, but which no hand, except his own would have ventured to paint."

Let us therefore look briefly at the several Values of this little Note. And first

#### 1. ITS PERSONAL VALUE.

This consists in the light which it throws upon the character of Paul. Think first of all, of

### **(1). PAUL'S PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE.**

If "Hebrews" be excluded, we have from this Apostle thirteen Letters. Nine of these are written to seven churches; three are written to two individuals, giving authoritative direction concerning belief and order in the Assemblies, and one only is purely personal, and strictly private.

During the course of his ministry Paul must have written hundreds of letters, both official and personal, but these thirteen only have been preserved, and of the private correspondence, only this little Note to Philemon.

Accordingly the Apostle is here seen in a new light, and so impressive is the view, that we are left longing that more of this kind of correspondence might have been preserved

Letter-writing is a great art, and when it is made the vehicle of spiritual fellowship, the product is a priceless treasure. Classic illustrations of this we have in the Letters of Rutherford, Newton, and McCheyne.

In the Rutherford Collection there is a letter for every day of the year, and if you wish a course of spiritual instruction, you could scarcely do better than read one a day, unless, indeed, you do the same with John Newton's "Cardiphonia."

Let us from this priceless gem of Paul's private correspondence, this "pure pearl of a letter," as Maclaren calls it, learn how to conduct our own letter-writing. One feature of character which this Note strongly throws up,

### **(2). PAUL'S TENDER SOLICITUDE.**

Mark the way in which he speaks of his new slave convert, Onesimus. This wild youth is his "child"; he has "begotten" him ; he is "profitable" to him ; he is his "very heart"; he is a "brother beloved/" and he is, Paul says, "as myself."

Paul has been thought to be severe and forbidding, a man austere and unemotional; but such is far from being the case. He had a womanly-like tenderness, and, as he told the Thessalonians, he was among them "gentle, even as a nurse cherisheth her children."

He could, of course, be stern when occasion required it, and this quality in his character comes out in his Letters to Corinth and Galatia.

Gentleness that is not capable of being severe is a weakness ; and so is severity that cannot be gentle. In a truly great character these will combine, and be displayed under the direction of a wise discrimination.

But, perhaps, what is most distinctive of the little Note, in the personal aspect of it, is

### **(3). PAUL'S CONSUMMATE TACT.**

This, as we have seen in the exposition of the Letter, is exhibited at every turn, in almost every sentence, and in his choice of words. It is displayed also, in what he does not say

Mark the way in which he introduces himself. He is not the Apostle, but a Prisoner, and Aged

Mark also his approach to the matter in hand. He recognises and commends the good that stands to Philemon's credit, and exhorts him to continue in it. And further, observe, the place and way in which he mentions Onesimus. The name does not occur until verse 10, and then at the end of it- "I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds Onesimus." R.V.

And see how he makes himself personally responsible for the discharge of the debt. Not for a moment is the moral tone lowered. Wrong had been done, and it must be righted

In these and many other ways the consummate tact of the Apostle is displayed. One writer has well said, "We seem to know St. Paul better, even as an Apostle, because we are allowed to see him when he chooses not to be an Apostle, but a 'Partner.'" But, even beyond, this, we may fairly draw from this Epistle a priceless lesson, as to the place which true courtesy and delicacy occupy in Christian character. We feel, as we read, how little it accords with the idea that Christian men and Christian ministers "have nothing to do with being gentlemen."

We understand how true courtesy, as distinct from artificial and technical culture of manners, is the natural out-growth of the "lowliness of mind" in which "each esteems other better than himself."

The cultivation by us of this quality would not only make all our work so much easier of accomplishment, but would commend so much more to the world the Gospel which we are called to "adorn."

## 2. Its ETHICAL VALUE.

This consists in its balanced sensitiveness to what is right.

### (1). ONESIMUS IS MADE TO FEEL THE SINFULNESS OF HIS ACT.

Not for one moment does Paul extenuate his offence. Though he does not unnecessarily dwell upon it, or employ terms concerning it which were needlessly harsh, yet, what he does say can leave no one in any doubt as to his view.

He declares that this man had been altogether false to his name; called "profitable," he had been "unprofitable" a good-for-nothing, a bad-for-everything.

He says plainly that Onesimus had "wronged" Philemon, and implies by the use of the word "owe," that he was a thief.

The story was a black one, the record was very bad; and we need not doubt that Paul had rubbed this well into the mind, heart, and conscience of the slave himself at the time that he was pointing him to the way of salvation.

### (2). THIS YOUTH IS FURTHER GIVEN TO UNDERSTAND THAT REPARATION MUST BE MADE.

The new life does not cancel the old debts. The Gospel of Jesus Christ requires that wrongs be righted. Immediately upon the return of a wrong-doer to the path of right, the conscience dictates the adjustment of what has been wrong, dictates that amends be made, as far as that be possible, for the injustices of the past.

So Zacchaeus said :

"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor ; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."

That Paul brought this home to Onesimus is beyond question. But this penniless run-away had no means of making reparation. What, then, is to be done? Paul did not say to him "Well, as you have nothing, you cannot pay." He represented it as so essential that the sin should cost, that he himself undertook to pay the debt, probably by making tents in his prison house, and that, more than anything else, would make Onesimus feel how grievous was his offence, and how imperious were the claims of right and justice. But further

### (3). THE SLAVE IS SENT BACK TO HIS MASTER THOUGH PAUL WOULD FAIN HAVE KEPT HIM

Paul would not allow affectionate desires and personal convenience to interfere with social obligations.

The slave was Philemon's, and if Paul kept him at Rome, he would be doing his Colossian friend an in-justice, or else taking a mean advantage of him. Paul would do neither. The boy must go back, though in doing so he was exposing himself to the punishment which his wrong-doing merited, according to the standard of judgment of that time.

Surely no one was ever more sensitive to what is fit and right than was Paul. His conscience was essentially ethical. To him Christianity was intensely practical. I wonder if this can be said of us !

## 3. ITS PROVIDENTIAL VALUE.

This consists in its underlying suggestion that God is aback of, behind, and above all events.

Paul says, "For perhaps he was therefore parted from thee for a season that thou shouldst have him for ever." (15). This utterance is pregnant with suggestion, the nature and force of which, one or two observations will show.

### (1). ONESIMUS ACTED IN THE FREEDOM OF HIS DEPRAVED WILL.

What he did, he did voluntarily and wickedly, and in this instance without provocation. He, therefore, must take entire responsibility for his conduct, and could have had no ground of complaint had the full consequences of it come upon him.

That that sinful act of his, the final expression of a sinful career, was turned to good account, in no wise mitigates his offence, and for any beneficent result that followed he could take no credit.

We may never do evil that good may come; but in this instance there was no idea or intention that good would come out of his reckless conduct.

Had he suffered the penalty which the times imposed upon such conduct, in all likelihood he would have been crucified.

## **(2). ABACK OF THIS SLAVE'S WILL WAS THE DIVINE WISDOM CONTROLLING THE RESULTS.**

This whole truth is more or less wrapped in mystery, but the facts bear witness to it through all the ages of history.

Out of the eater God has ever been bringing forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness.

He makes the wrath of men to praise Him; all things serve Him. His purposes are fulfilled, if not by means of us, then, in spite of us. God is sovereign in His universe notwithstanding human and angelic free-will. He is the mighty Worker Who can transmute even sin, and make the finished wickedness of men to be their first step to glory.

Let it be said again, with all the emphasis possible, that this in no degree diminishes the sinfulness of sin, and on Divine Providence men must never presume.

Yet, in the infinite mercy of God, not only others, but the sinner himself is often blessed by the exercise of such providence, as witness the case before us.

God can over-rule all, just because He rules over all. This truth is of far-reaching application, and must convey immense comfort to the people of God, especially in our own time. But, as has already been pointed out,

## **(3). PAUL SAFEGUARDS THIS FACT FROM THE APPEARANCE OF MAKING THE SLAVE'S SIN A NECESSITY IN ORDER TO HIS SALVATION.**

He says, "**perhaps**," which, certainly, we may take to mean that God could have reached and rescued Onesimus in some other way.

If any man's salvation depended upon his indulging in some sin or other, then, in order to that end, he would be justified in sinning.

Paul will not allow himself to be chargeable with such an idea, and so, though, in the case before him, salvation actually eventuated, he will not say emphatically that Onesimus was allowed thus to sin in order to be saved. He prefers to be indefinite on that point, lest a wholly false inference be drawn, or an unholy use be made of the circumstance. "**Perhaps**."

Where Paul left it, we may safely leave it.

## **4. ITS PRACTICAL VALUE.**

This consists in its application of the highest principles to the commonest affairs of life.

### **(1). CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES ARE ESSENTIALLY PRACTICAL IN CHARACTER.**

The sphere of their activity is our common life. No further evidence of this is needed than that which these prison Letters supply.

The first half of the Letter to Ephesus is profoundly doctrinal, and the latter half is intensely practical. Nowhere in his Writings does the Apostle take higher flights into the realms of Truth than in the twin Epistles to Ephesus and Colossae; and yet nowhere is there a stronger insistence upon practical Christianity, upon the working out of the Christian revelation in all the relations and circumstances of life.

Paul's doctrine is that we are to believe rightly in order to walk worthily.

The highest truths are designed for practical ends.

### **(2). CHRISTIANITY IN THIS RESPECT DIFFERS FROM ALL THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD.**

While some of these enshrine noble ethical ideals, none of them impart power for holy living. The best of them at their best only point to a far off and unattainable good; they are wholly lacking in spiritual dynamic. They offer theories for acceptance and leave the soul sick unto despair.

Not so Christianity. It lies alongside the life of us all, and not only points to the right road, but places our feet therein, and keeps us walking therein. It tells us what is right, and enables us to do it.

Its highest principles are capable of lowliest applications. Its richest flowers bloom in common soil. Its priceless treasures are poured at the feet of us all.

And further, let it be said that

**(3). THE WAY IN WHICH THESE PRINCIPLES ARE APPLIED SHOULD ALWAYS BE CHARACTERISED BY THE SPIRIT OF THEIR AUTHOR.**

No better example of this can be furnished than the little Note before us. It has been well said that here, "Paul speaks with that peculiar grace of humility and courtesy, which has, under the reign of Christianity, developed the spirit of chivalry, and what is called 'the character of a gentleman' certainly very little known in the old Greek and Roman civilisations while yet in its graceful flexibility and vivacity it stands contrasted with the more impassive oriental stateliness."

The younger Pliny wrote a letter to a friend, on a similar occasion to this, which has often been brought into comparison with Paul's Note ; and the least that can be said is that the Apostle's Letter does not suffer from the comparison.

Pliny wrote :

"Your freedman, with whom you had told me you were vexed, came to me, and throwing himself down before me clung to my feet, as if they had been yours. He was profuse in his tears and his entreaties; he was profuse also in his silence. In short, he convinced me of his penitence. I believe that he is indeed a reformed character, because he feels that he has done wrong. You are angry, I know ; and you have reason to be angry, this also I know ; but mercy wins the highest praise just when there is the most righteous cause for anger. You loved the man, and, I hope, will continue to love him; meanwhile it is enough, that you should allow yourself to yield to his prayers. You may be angry again, if he deserves it; and in this you will be the more readily pardoned if you yield now. Concede something to his youth, something to his tears, something to your own indulgent disposition. Do not torture him, lest you torture yourself at the same time. For it is torture to you, when one of your gentle temper is angry. I am afraid lest I should appear not to ask but to compel, if I should add my prayers to his. Yet I will add them the more fully and unreservedly, because I scolded the man himself with sharpness and severity; for I threatened him straitly that I would never ask you again. This I said to him, for it was necessary to alarm him ; but I do not use the same language to you. For perchance I shall ask again, and shall be successful again; only let my request be such, as it becomes me to prefer and you to grant. Farewell."

Of these two letters Lightfoot says

"The younger Pliny is the noblest type of a true Roman gentleman, and this touching letter needs no words of praise. Yet, if purity of diction be excepted, there will hardly be any difference of opinion in awarding the palm to the Christian Apostle. As an expression of simple dignity, of refined courtesy, of large sympathy, and of warm personal affection, the Epistle to Philemon stands unrivalled. And its pre-eminence is the more remarkable because in style it is exceptionally loose. It owes nothing to the graces of rhetoric; its effect is due solely to the spirit of the writer."

Truly the Apostle's letter is a practical commentary on his own injunction in the Epistle to the Colossians 4:6 ; "Let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt."

## **5. ITS EVANGELICAL VALUE.**

This consists in the encouragement it supplies to seek and redeem the lowest

**(1): THIS INCIDENT SHOWS THAT NONE IS BEYOND RECLAIM.**

We cannot take a too serious view of the depravity of human nature, but we may, and often do, gravely under-estimate the power of God.

No one will deny that sin abounds ; but all are tempted\*, at times, to question whether grace can much more abound.

Let a Christian worker once come to regard anyone as beyond reclaim, and his usefulness in that direction is at an end.

This is a day in which we are exhorted to have faith in human nature. The Bible nowhere puts such a strain upon our faith, but it does exhort us to believe that, "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him; and the truth of this claim has been demonstrated millions of times.

Remember Baedeker among the Russian convicts ; Jerry McAuley, "Down in Water Street"; Paton, among the cannibals of the New

Hebrides; the Salvation Army in the slums of the world, and then say, if there are any who are beyond reclaim.

Charles Darwin pronounced the Patagonians the missing link between man and monkey, and thought that not even the lever of Christian missions could uplift them.

They had low foreheads, but lower minds and morals, wretched hovels, and scant clothing. At times they were like brute beasts ; at others, treacherous robbers.

But Allen Gardiner went among them with the Gospel, and the mighty miracle was wrought.

So astonished was Darwin at the results that he became a regular subscriber of the South American Missionary Society.

Yes, the Gospel that could save Onesimus can save anyone, and with this little letter to Philemon, in heart, and head, and hand, let the Evangelist go to the ends of the earth.

The power to reclaim is not ours, but it is that Spirit's at whose bidding we go, and Who, let us ever remember, has been at work in human hearts before we arrive. We are called, not only to sow, but to reap.

Christ saw Nathanael before the latter saw Christ; and the Spirit of God had begun operations in Onesimus before the slave and Paul met. Let us ever go forward presuming upon a work already commenced. Further,

### **(2). WE SEE HERE THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO BRING OUT THE HIDDEN QUALITIES OF A DOWN-TRODDEN CLASS.**

There are heroisms slumbering in more breasts than we think; there are shrivelled powers in the most of men that but await the kisses of the Sun to bring them to full realisation. No class of the community, in Paul's day, was so entirely degraded and so utterly hopeless as were the slaves. Their masters could think nothing too bad of them, and they lived down to that reputation.

Yet, though all unsuspected, deep down in their hearts, feelings lay buried which grace could restore ; there, was tenderness which only awaited someone to appeal to it, loyalty which required only to be trusted. Undreamed of possibilities lay buried and crushed in the heart of slavery for want of the gospel message and an opportunity to respond to it.

That this was so the case of Onesimus proves.

From what Paul says of him in this Note, he was a youth capable of winning strong affection ; for Paul speaks of him as his "very heart" (Philemon 1:12). He also had the ability to be very useful, to be really true to his name (Philemon 1:11); and Paul would fain have kept him that Onesimus might have served him in many practical ways (Philemon 1:13), but he sent him back to render such service to his master (Philemon 1:10). There were, evidently, not a few admirable qualities in this youth so typical of the worst kind of slave, and the grace of God discovered them, and released them for the service of mankind.

Lightfoot says;

"The great capacity for good which appears in the typical slave of Greek and Roman fiction, notwithstanding all the fraud and profligacy overlying it, was evoked and developed here by the inspiration of a new faith, and the incentive of a new hope. The genial, affectionate, winning disposition, purified and elevated by a higher knowledge, had found its proper scope."

Let us, then, in our service for God, look for things in men that, under the fructifying influence of grace, would make them a power and a blessing to society.

### **(3). THESE FACTS SHOULD LEAD US INTO SYMPATHETIC CONTACT WITH THOSE WHOM WE WOULD WIN.**

We are frequently fatally wrong in our approach to sinners, and we would be well advised to study how Paul approached them, and better still, how his and our Master approached them.

While Paul would not fail to talk to Onesimus about his sin, I am sure that was not the burden of his conversation, but, rather, the grace and power and beauty of the Saviour.

Paul would not first point out to this slave his moral obligation and then bid him take Christ to help him fulfil it.

Rather would he first furnish him with spiritual motive and dynamic, and then show him all his duty. Then, let this great master be our teacher, and we shall more often succeed.



This consists in its disclosure of the relation of Christianity to slavery, and all unchristian institutions,

Throughout the whole Bible story .we are face to face with the slave.

In the Old Testament, slavery was recognised, though not established, by the Mosaic Law, and the hard lot of slaves was, under the Hebrew system, considerably mitigated.

This should occasion no surprise when we remember the essentially imperfect preparatory character of the Jewish covenant.

The Old Testament is not the final Word of God, and therefore cannot be appealed to as a complete and final expression of the mind of God, on this or any other subject.

We must remember the relativity of biblical utterances, and recognise that some laws were adapted to given regrettable circumstances, to be replaced by better, when the ethical temper of society improved.

The recognition of this fact would on the one hand have prevented anyone appealing to the Old Testament in justification of slavery; and on the other hand, would have saved the opponents of slavery from intellectual embarrassment.

In the New Testament also, we are face to face with slavery, though there it nowhere receives endorsement. The slaves were the lowest and most unhappy class of Graeco-Roman Society ; they were just live-chattels.

The present working or wage-earning class was unknown to ancient civilisation; and slaves were regarded as the property of their masters. But with the advent of Christ new conceptions of human duties and relationships entered the world, and "the poor had the Gospel preached unto them."

The letter before us leads us to observe that :

**(1). CHRISTIANITY IS NOT A POLITICAL MOVEMENT, AND THEREFORE DOES NOT ANTAGONISE FORMS OF GOVERNMENT.**

Forms of government are for the nations, but Christianity is for the world. It indeed acts upon individuals which compose the nations, and so in course of time, transforms from within the institutions of the country. But it does not attack them from without; and therefore it is compatible with any form of government.

**(2). CHRISTIANITY IS, IN PRINCIPLE, OPPOSED TO EVERY FORM OF INJUSTICE, AND WHEREVER IT IS OPERATIVE IT ESTABLISHES SOCIAL ORDER ON THE FOUNDATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Social order is not socialism. Christianity does not merely recognise Social Order, but defines and establishes it both in the home, and in the state.

In the HOME. Eph 5:22-6:9: Col. 3:18-4,1: 1 Peter 2:18-3:7.

In the STATE. Rom 13:1-7: 1 Ti 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:17.

But whilst establishing such an Order, Christianity introduces a new doctrine, applicable only to the redeemed, viz., that, in Christ all distinctions are clone away, 1 Cor. 7:21-22: Gal. 3:26-28: Col. 3:10-11.

Let it, however, be remembered that the fact of Social Order, and the truth of differences obliterated, do not conflict.

Both should be recognised by all Christians, and harmonised in a life that is designed and controlled by the Spirit of God. Christian masters and servants, mistresses and maids, employers and employed should recognise their respective, obligations in the fear and grace of God. Only so, can the Christian ideal be realised.

The story before us proves the truth of Bishop Wordsworth's saying, "The Gospel by Christianising the master has enfranchised the slave."

One other point must be observed, namely that,

**(3). CHRISTIANITY IS NOT REVOLUTIONARY BUT TRANSFORMATIVE IN ITS METHOD.**

The object of revolutionary movements is to destroy all forms of government, to overturn all institutions, to annihilate all class distinctions, and to sweep away all traditions; and they leave to future generations the thankless task of reconstructing Society out of the ruins left by their relentless destructive policy.

There is no more tragic proof and illustration of this than Russia at the present time.

Communism is a hand-maid to all such movements; that economic system or theory which upholds the absorption of all rights in a common interest, an equitable division of labour, and the formation of a common fund for the supply of all the wants of the community.

With this doctrine of a community of property, or the negation of individual rights in property, Christianity has nothing to do. It is the poles asunder from Marxianism. Neither is it the ally of either Capital or Labour.

"It meddles directly with no political or social arrangements, but lays down principles which profoundly affect these, and leaves them to soak into the general mind."

Its method is not one of revolution but of transformation. Had an attack been made in Paul's day, on the system of slavery, it would have precipitated a social convulsion; the whole force of imperial Rome would have arisen against Christianity; and a frightful revolution would have resulted from a rising of the slaves against their masters.

But the Christian method was otherwise. "Christians had to show at the very outset that Christianity was not inconsistent with good citizenship, and that the reforms which it hoped to promote in social life, would not be imposed violently from without ; but that they would be the outcome of the development of the national conscience in which the seed of the Gospel was to grow and fructify secretly but surely."

Instead of attacking special abuses, Christianity lays down universal principles which shall undermine the evil.

It is not concerned with the fruits, but with the roots of things. "Paul has no word of reproach for the masters on the injustice of their position; he breathes no hint to the slaves of a social grievance needing redress."

Suppose he had done so, and the slave population, which was four times as numerous as the citizen population, had been emancipated what then? Were the slaves capable of governing themselves, or of being governed on equitable terms with freemen?

Paul saw a long way ahead, and left the Cross to do its work in its own time and way.

Centuries were to pass before the implications of the Gospel with reference to this institution would be widely felt and acted upon. But that time came; and what Paul commenced, Wilberforce to a large extent, completed.

All this marks off Christianity, not only as unique, but as the only hope of men. If social evils are ever to be adjusted, Christianity must be the motive and the power.

## 7. ITS SPIRITUAL VALUE.

This consists in the analogy which the circumstances bear to the Gospel story.

This analogy has not been better put than in the words of Luther : "This Epistle sheweth a right noble lovely example of Christian love. Here we see how St. Paul layeth himself out for the poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleadeth his cause with his master; and so setteth himself, as if he were Onesimus, and had himself done wrong to Philemon.

Yet all this doeth he not with power or force, as if he had right thereto; but he strippeth himself of his right, and thus enforced Philemon to forego his right also.

Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also doth St. Paul for Onesimus with Philemon; for Christ also stripped Himself of His right, and by love and humility enforced the Father to lay aside His wrath and power, and to take us to His grace for the sake of Christ, who lovingly pleadeth our cause, and with all His heart layeth Himself out for us.

For we are all His Onesimi to my thinking." With that we may close, deeply thankful for this precious little Note, and eternally grateful for our own experience of the grace of God which it reflects.

"Grace to you mid peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen"

