

**PAUL'S EPISTLE TO
PHILEMON**

**A COMMENTARY BY
MAX KLEIN**

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The author has studied under the teaching ministry of R. B. Thieme Jr., his faithful and beloved pastor for over 30 years. During that time Max has learned many biblical principles and doctrinal truths which have given him a clear understanding of the spiritual life. It is this spiritual life that Max desires to explain in an easily understandable written form, so that others may also come to know the spiritual life that God has provided for all believers in Jesus Christ.

Preface

Before you begin your Bible study, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, be sure you have named your sins privately to God the Father.

If we confess our [known] sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

You will then be in fellowship with God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and ready to learn Bible doctrine from the word of God.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in [the filling of] the Spirit and [Biblical] truth. (John 4:24)

If you have never personally believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, the issue is not naming your sins. The issue is faith alone in Christ alone.

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey [the command to believe in] the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

The Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, and of the joints and the marrow and is a critic of thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be mature, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Study to show thyself approved, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
(2 Timothy 2:15)

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION

The epistle to Philemon is one of the four prison epistles, written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome which lasted two years from the spring of 60 to the spring of 62 A. D. During that time he wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians, in that order.

Philemon was a slave owner, not uncommon for a businessman since there were millions of slaves in the Roman Empire at that time. Many slave owners and slaves became Christians and advanced spiritually under the teaching of the apostles and other teachers of the Word.

One of Philemon's slaves was Onesimus; lazy and poorly motivated for Paul mentions that "he was formerly useless" (verse 11). He was not only useless, but also entered into crime when he stole a lot of money from his master. Then with that money, Onesimus made the long journey from Asia Minor to Rome where he probably squandered it on high living and licentious behavior. Totally broke and desperate, he remembered what Philemon had said about his good friend Paul and so decided to contact him in prison. The Scripture does not give us all the details, but with a little common sense and a practical understanding of human nature we can still make an accurate deduction of what actually took place. Under normal circumstances, the last person Onesimus would want to meet

would be a close friend of his master - but being broke and hungry, and remembering the many kind things that Philemon had said about the great apostle Paul, Onesimus decided to seek him out.

God knew about Onesimus' situation billions and billions of years ago in eternity past, and knew that Onesimus desired the truth. If an unbeliever wants to know the truth, God will always provide him with Gospel information. Therefore, God had decided in eternity past to use Paul as His agent to communicate the gospel to Onesimus, who responded by believing in Jesus Christ (verses 10, 16). After his salvation, Paul taught him the spiritual life, perhaps for a year or two. It is quite probable that Paul supplied Onesimus with some funds, with Onesimus providing administrative services for Paul in return (verse 13). Eventually, as Onesimus grew spiritually, he realized the need to return to Philemon since he legally belonged to Philemon under the Roman law, and as a runaway slave could be punished severely under that law.

Even though slavery is a social evil, Paul neither condemned nor condoned slavery. Paul knew better than anyone else that slavery was totally wrong because it violates the function of man's free will. However, Paul also realized that to live one's own spiritual life is much more important than trying to solve the social problems in one's country or the world. Paul never became involved in any political demonstration or activity in order to solve social evils. For example, he never demanded that the government pass laws to emancipate the slaves. To protest against slavery would have been tantamount to teaching social reform. Social reform is not necessary for evangelism and spiritual growth, as proven by the fact many hundreds of thousands of slaves had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were growing spiritually. Paul realized that to become involved in social action is to become involved in the things of this world. With this in mind, Paul explained divine policy regarding slavery in the epistle to the Corinthians:

Each one should remain in the situation in which he was when God called him [through the understanding of the Gospel]. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't worry about it. Although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. (1 Corinthians 7:20-22)

Apparently some of the believers in the Ephesian Church were telling their Christian friends who were slaves to reject the authority of their masters. At that time Timothy was the pastor of the church in Ephesus, but didn't know how to instruct the many slaves that were attending. Therefore, Paul had to explain a few things to him:

Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their own masters as worthy of all honor in order that the name of God and doctrine not be maligned. Let those slaves who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them [a lot of people take advantage of having a Christian boss] because they are brethren, but let them serve them [Christian masters] all the more because those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved. Teach and encourage these principles.

(1 Timothy 6:1-2)

In the Roman Empire of the early Christian era, slaves were permitted religious freedom and the right to attend Bible classes taught by the apostles, prophets, pastors and others. In this way hundreds of thousands of slaves grew spiritually, many of these becoming mature believers. As the Word of God permeated the Roman Empire, it affected not only the thinking of the believers, but also the unbelievers. This thinking formed truth in the souls of the Romans so that many

slave owners, both Christian and non-Christian, made the decision to free their slaves voluntarily.

Paul not only mentioned Onesimus in his letter to Philemon, but also in his epistle to the Colossian Church, since the Colossian Church gathered in Philemon's house. Onesimus traveled back to Colossi with Tychicus, a minister who was also with Paul in Rome. When they arrived, both Tychicus and Onesimus gave a report about Paul and his situation in Rome. After which, Tychicus taught the epistles Paul had written in prison:

Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a faithful minister and a fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts [hold a Bible conference]. He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and beloved fellow believer who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. (Colossians 4:7-9)

V. 1. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our beloved and fellow worker,

In the ancient world a person didn't sign at the end of the letter like we do now, but put his name at the beginning of the letter as Paul did. After signing, Paul does not call himself the prisoner of Nero, despite being imprisoned under the authority of the Roman emperor because Paul understood that Jesus Christ controls history, and so controlled his destiny as well. Paul realized that everything which happened to him had a divine purpose, and that "God causes all things to work together for good, for those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). Realizing these important principles he didn't complain about the unfair treatment of his imprisonment, first in Caesarea (58-60 AD), and then in Rome.

Besides Philemon, Timothy is also mentioned in the salutations of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians and Philippians.

Paul refers to Philemon as a "beloved and fellow worker," a title which recognizes Philemon's proper execution of the spiritual life. Paul did not call every believer a fellow worker. A worker produces; only Christians with much spiritual growth have sufficient understanding and correct motivation to produce effectively (1 Corinthians 13). Since Philemon was a mature believer and beloved, Paul addresses him in this way.

V. 2. Also to Apphia [Philemon's wife] our sister, and to Archippus [Philemon's son] our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your home [the Colossian church]

Courteously, Paul mentioned Philemon's wife, Apphia and his son, Archippus. His son was the pastor of the Laodicean Church and is addressed as a fellow soldier. A pastor must function like a soldier. Just as a soldier dedicates his life for the purpose of preserving the freedom of his nation, so a pastor must dedicate his life to study and teach that he may provide spiritual food for his congregation. This truth, when metabolized and applied, provides freedom in the soul of the believer (John 8:32). Therefore, both the soldier and the pastor must live a life of sacrifice. One fights for freedom; the other studies and teaches for freedom (Paul reminds Archippus of this principle when he reprimands him in Colossians 4:17 for not teaching doctrine adequately).

Paul also addressed his epistle to the Colossian Church because the content of this epistle was beneficial to them as well and indeed to all believers of every generation. However, this letter is first intended for Philemon's consideration since he was the one facing the grace test. After he had read it and had made his decision regarding the pardoning of Onesimus,

then it would be read and explained to all the members of the Church for their edification.

V. 3. Grace to you and tranquility [εἰρήνη / *eirene*] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's plan for mankind is based on God's policy of grace. Grace is all that God is free to do for mankind without compromising His divine essence. Grace is free, freely given and undeserved. Grace means that all things, including salvation, are received from God as a free gift, and totally apart from any type or system of human works. Grace is unmerited blessing and divine provision for mankind before, during, and after salvation.

Grace is a part of God's love which is inseparably related to his righteousness, justice, and omniscience. This is why even though God knew all the horrible things you would do before and after salvation, he still permitted you to be born. God's grace makes the love of God generous, merciful and forgiving.

The Greek noun *eirene* denotes a state of peace and tranquility. Between nations, it refers to the absence of hostilities; in Scripture it refers either to the believer's reconciliation with God or to prosperity and tranquility of the soul. In this verse, *eirene* refers to the prosperity and tranquility of the soul which comes through spiritual growth which takes the believer to the point of loving God and possessing maximum happiness in his soul.

God the Holy Spirit, the one who inspired the writers of Scripture, excluded himself in this salutation as well as in other salutations since it was his purpose to glorify God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (John 16:14), and not himself (Philippians 2:11, 4:20).

V. 4. I always thank my God when making mention of you [Philemon] at the time of my prayers,

Paul wasn't thankful for all Christians. He certainly wasn't thankful for Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim.1:20). He was however thankful for Philemon and respected and loved him very much. If a great Christian respects another Christian, he will pray for that Christian. So, it was with Paul. Paul prayed for Philemon on a consistent basis, and when he prayed for him, he always thanked God regarding him.

Paul respected and loved Philemon because as a mature believer with divine viewpoint he (Paul) had respect and love for Philemon's virtue. The greatest Christian virtue is to love God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Both Paul and Philemon had accomplished this in their spiritual lives. Therefore, Paul respected Philemon for his virtue and visa versa.

V. 5. Because I keep on hearing of your [personal] love and doctrine which [the singular relative has a collective force] you have toward [προς / *pros*] the Lord Jesus Christ and [your unconditional love and doctrine which you have] toward [εἰς / *eis*] all the saints

Generally, the relative must agree in number with the antecedent, that is to say, if the antecedent is plural the relative must also be plural. However, if the plural antecedents (in this case "love" and "doctrine") are in some way seen as a necessary unit, they may be collected into a single idea. Herbert Weir Smyth of Harvard University writes in his book *A Greek Grammar*: "a relative in the singular having a collective force may have its antecedent in the plural."* When Paul used a

* *A Greek Grammar* by Herbert Weir Smyth, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, page 563.

singular relative, he was saying in effect that the doctrinal column and the love column are co-dependant on each other.

The spiritual life advances by means of a double column, namely doctrine metabolized in the soul and love directed toward God. These two columns must advance together. The Christian must learn the Word of God (doctrines or subjects in Scripture) if he is ever going to love God. Learning the Word of God and having a love for God provide fuel for each other. As we learn about God, we develop an appreciation, then a respect and finally a love for him. The appreciation, respect and love in turn motivate the believer to learn more and more about the one whom he loves. In this way the believer develops and maintains his spiritual momentum which if continued will one day propel him all the way to spiritual maturity and maximum glorification of God.

It is also true that there is a relationship between unconditional love and metabolized doctrine in the soul. If there is no metabolized doctrine in the soul, there will be no application of unconditional love toward the members of the human race. If there is no application of unconditional love toward the members of the human race, this can only mean that there is either no metabolized doctrine in the soul or no application of it.

In this verse there are two different prepositions, “pros” and “eis”, both translated *towards*. The Greek word *pros* means closeness or intimacy since it has a literal meaning of being face to face with somebody or something. Though the preposition ‘eis’ also means *towards*, there is no intimacy implied. By using *pros* Paul is emphasizing Philemon’s personal love for the Lord Jesus Christ. The preposition *eis* on the other hand does not connote a close relationship and so refers to the unconditional love that all believers are commanded to have toward one another and toward the entire human race.

V. 6. [And I pray] that the fellowship [κοινωνία / *koinonia*] from your [singular: Philemon’s] doctrine might become effective [energy] by means of the metabolized knowledge [επιγνωσις / *epignosis*] of every good [doctrine] which is in you [plural: in the souls of Philemon & the congregation] directed toward Christ [occupation with Christ].

The Greek word *koinonia* has the following meanings: fellowship, partnership, participation, sharing, association etc. The Greek phrase “ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως / *he koinonia tes pistes*” can be translated as a genitive of description, *fellowship of doctrine* or as an ablative of source, *fellowship from doctrine*.

Fellowship with God based on his word is our relationship with the three members of the Godhead. When the new believer is first filled with the Holy Spirit, he has a relationship with the Spirit and begins to learn God’s plan under the mentorship of the Spirit. However, this fellowship is not going to be much until the believer begins to appreciate and love his mentor. The same is true for God the Father. As we learn about the Father’s plan and his eternal love for us, the quality of our relationship with him, our fellowship increases. So it is with the Lord Jesus Christ. As we mature our fellowship with the Lord becomes so dynamic that eventually we will do everything to please him (Colossians 3:17), and we can say along with the great apostle, “As far as I am concerned living is Christ; dying is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

All true fellowship in the spiritual life comes from Bible doctrine. John defines two stages of fellowship: the first stage occurs during the time when a pastor is teaching his congregation the Word of God. As the pastor teaches his congregation, they have fellowship with one another through their concentration on the Word. After much time is spent in learning and applying the Word, the second stage of fellowship becomes a reality, namely fellowship with God the Father, God

the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ. Without doctrine in the soul, there is no genuine fellowship.

That which we have seen and have heard, we [the apostles] report even to you [the congregation] that you might have fellowship [from learning and metabolizing doctrine] with us [communicators of God's Word], and also our fellowship [from spiritual growth] is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)

The following order should be observed:

1. Fellowship occurs between the pastor and his congregation during the teaching of the Word.
2. The Biblical principles and doctrines learned must be metabolized into spiritual energy.
3. Ultimately, this spiritual energy must produce fellowship with God, namely love for God the Father and the Holy Spirit and occupation with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon is facing a grace-test. If he gets his eyes on Onesimus, he will react and be motivated to punish him. However, if he remains in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, he will follow the advice which Paul gives him in this epistle.

V. 7. For I have come to have [εχω / *echo*] much happiness [from you] and encouragement by your love, because the tender affections [σπλαγχνον *splanchnon* / emotions responding to the doctrine in the believer's soul] of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Paul and all other mature believers share the happiness of God, the same happiness which the humanity of Christ possessed in his soul. "I [Jesus Christ] have taught you these things that my

happiness might be in you, and that your happiness might be completed" (John 15:11). This happiness comes from learning and applying the word of God, and from developing a love for the Lord (1 Peter 1:8). Sharing the happiness of God doesn't depend upon people, money or material things, success, pleasurable experiences, public approbation, or good health. It is not related to any temporary stimulation, excitement or enjoyment in life. Sharing the happiness of God is divine thought in the believer's stream of consciousness.

Paul possessed happiness from the virtue in his soul, from fulfilling his destiny, from his love for God the Father, God the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ. Being a mature believer, he also receives happiness from the spiritual lives of other mature believers. When Paul heard of the love that Philemon had for the Lord, it made him happy as well. This explains the sentence, "For I have come to have [*echo*] much happiness [from you]." The ingressive aorist of *echo* contemplates the beginning of an action; the happiness Paul received in regard to Philemon's love for the Lord began with the reports of Philemon's spiritual growth, and would be completed when Philemon handled this situation correctly.

It is a great encouragement to any teacher when a student succeeds. Many Christians fail in their spiritual lives and this can be discouraging for those who faithfully teach God's word. However, when the Christians of a church learn and apply God's word well, it encourages the communicator in his teaching ministry.

While refreshment usually connotes restoring physical strength with food and drink, in the Bible it refers to the restoration of the spiritual strength of a person, to revive divine viewpoint and capacity for life. The *ministry of refreshment* is not only the ministry of the pastor-teacher who refreshes the souls of believers through his teaching, but also the ministry of all mature believers providing refreshment through their

generosity, kindness, unconditional love, divine viewpoint and wisdom.

In the New Testament two different Greek words are used to reveal the doctrine of refreshment. When Paul mentions refreshment both in this verse and verse 20, (see also 1 Corinthians 16:18 and 2 Corinthians 7:13) he uses the verb *αναπαυω* (*anapauro*). *Anapauro* is a compound verb meaning *to cease*, for example to cease work or take a break from strenuous activity. Christ brings this into the spiritual context when he says "Come unto me all that are heavy and laden [with the burden of trying to work for salvation], and I will give you rest [*anapauro*]" (Matthew 11:28). In terms of refreshment for the believer, this occurs when he is given a break from tiring human viewpoint, and regains new strength in the divine viewpoint expressed by the mature believer.

Paul also reveals the doctrine of refreshment in 2 Timothy 1:16 using the word *αναψυχο* (*anapsucho*) which has the literal meaning *to revive the soul*, "May the Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, because he frequently refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains." The more advanced a believer is in the spiritual life, the greater is his capacity for life, love and happiness, and so greater is his ministry of refreshment.

The Greek word *splanchnon* has as one of its meanings tender affections, an emotional response to some worthiness in another. A doctrinal believer will appreciate the doctrinal application of other believers. So, the Colossi believers were able to appreciate Philemon's wisdom, compassion and unconditional love. This appreciation produced a good emotional response which refreshed their souls.

V. 8-10. Therefore, although I have confidence [in my authority] in Christ to command you to do what is right because of your love [for Jesus Christ] I encourage you even more, being such a one as Paul, an ambassador, and also now

a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I appeal to you on behalf of my son, whom I have fathered in my chains, Onesimus,

Paul approached different people in different ways. For example, most of the believers in the Corinthian Church were in degeneracy and had little respect for authority, so they had to be reminded of Paul's authority. Therefore, when he wrote the epistles to the Corinthians he approached them as "an apostle of Christ Jesus." However, because Philemon is a mature believer and very respectful of Paul and his position as the apostle to the gentiles, Paul appeals to him from his position as an ambassador of Christ, a position which both Paul and Philemon equally share as believers in the Lord.

Paul could have asserted his authority as an apostle to command Philemon to pardon Onesimus. However, Paul knew that as a mature believer Philemon was capable of making the right decision, and so instead encouraged him "to do what is right." It was important that Philemon make his decision regarding Onesimus from his own free will, and not because he felt coerced into a course of action. The spiritual life of each believer advances or regresses depending upon the decisions he makes from his own free-will. If Philemon chooses to accept the advice of Paul, he will have passed a great test in his spiritual life. Will Philemon remain focused on the Lord, or will he bypass grace and seek to punish Onesimus? If Philemon maintains his love for the Lord, he will treat Onesimus kindly by forgiving him in grace and accepting him as a beloved member of the royal family of God.

V. 11. [Onesimus], the one formerly useless to you, but now highly useful both to you and to me,

This verse reveals Paul's ingenious humor. Being a language genius, Paul makes a pun from the word Onesimus, which has the meaning *useful* or *beneficial*. So if we were to translate his name rather than transliterate it, it would read as

follows: “[Useful], the one formerly useless to you, but now highly useful both to you and to me.” In verse 20, Paul added to his humor by using the cognate verb, *oniemi* (from which we get Onesimus), “Okay brother, I wish to have usefulness [benefit] from you in the Lord.”

V. 12. whom I have sent back to you; this one is my tender affection [σπλαγγχνον / *splanchnon* : my soul appreciates him and so my emotions respond].

Onesimus affected Paul's entire being, both his soul and his emotions. Because this believer had grown considerably and had fulfilled many of the norms and standards in Paul's soul regarding the spiritual life, Paul had developed a great love, respect, and appreciation for Onesimus, and possessed many wonderful memories of him.

V. 13. Whom I was desiring to detain for myself in order that on behalf of you he might keep on administering [to me] in the chains of the Gospel,

Paul not only loved Onesimus as a great friend, but also benefited much from the service which Onesimus provided for him. So, Paul would have liked to have kept Onesimus with him as a constant companion even after his release from prison. However, since Onesimus was a fugitive-slave, he would have to return to Philemon, his legal owner under Roman law.

Paul records the phrase ‘on behalf of you’ because Philemon was obliged to provide some service to Paul, since Paul not only evangelized Philemon, but also was the one responsible for his spiritual nourishment as the apostle to the gentiles.

V. 14. but without your consent I did not want to do anything, in order that your intrinsic good-production should not be as from compulsion but from your own free will.

Paul wants Philemon to benefit spiritually from this situation. In order to do so, Philemon must make a free-will decision to forgive Onesimus and possibly even to emancipate him. There is no spiritual benefit gained if one is forced into doing what is right.

V. 15. Perhaps for this reason he was separated for an hour [though in reality 1-2 years], in order that you should have him back forever.

Paul wanted Philemon to see this entire matter from God's viewpoint. The Lord could have foiled Onesimus' plan to steal a large sum of money from his master and then to escape to Rome, but he didn't. So, Paul is suggesting that perhaps it was God's will for Onesimus to arrive in Rome. Then, when Onesimus' attempt at finding happiness finally led to total desperation, he sought the help of Paul, who led him to the Lord.

Philemon as a mature believer was very kind and generous to his slaves. However, under this pleasant environment, it was impossible for Onesimus to appreciate the grace gift of salvation. Onesimus had to be desperate before he realized his need for salvation. The same is true for many unbelievers and believers. They do not appreciate grace until they face a disastrous situation. Some unbelievers searching for the truth will only listen to the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ in times of crisis. Paul had to be blinded; Onesimus had to be in a very difficult situation before he would listen to the gospel.

Many Christian easily assert that this or that is God's will. On the other hand, even though Paul was a mature believer he does not state that this was certainly God's will. However, it

appeared to Paul that God permitted Onesimus' successful escape to Rome that he might hear the gospel message from Paul and then to be taught by him.

V. 16. No longer as a slave [just a slave] but more than a slave, a beloved brother, most of all to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh [referring to his status as a slave] and in the Lord [his status as a brother in Christ].

Even though Onesimus is now a believer in Christ, it does not change the issue of authority or his status under the laws of establishment. He is still a slave; Philemon is still the master. However, now that he has attained spiritual adulthood he is respected by Paul and by many other believers in Rome. Paul is not seeking for Onesimus' emancipation here, but wants Philemon to share in his respect and admiration for Onesimus who is still a slave, but also in union with Christ.

V. 17. If you have me as a partner [and you do], I urge you to receive Onesimus as you would receive me.

Since Paul and Philemon are both mature believers, they are both fulfilling their responsibilities in the spiritual life. So even though they have different spiritual responsibilities related to their spiritual gifts, they are still spiritual partners in Christ. As partners, Paul uses the *imperative of entreaty* which is a subtle usage of the imperative form, used when making an urgent request.

Philemon has the greatest possible respect for Paul, and would accept him into his home as a beloved and honored guest. Paul is requesting that Philemon extend this same type of hospitality to Onesimus.

V. 18-19. If he has wronged you and he has, or if he owes you anything and he does, charge it all to my account. I, Paul,

have written this by my own hand, I will pay the damages so that I do not have to mention that you owe me even yourself.

Paul mentioned two types of debt in these verses. The first was the financial debt owed to Philemon by Onesimus; the second was the spiritual debt that Philemon owed to Paul.

Onesimus' financial debt to Philemon was twofold. First, to make the long journey to Rome, he would have had to have stolen a substantial amount of money. Even though Onesimus was a slave, being a Greek native meant that Onesimus probably had some form of academic training. The fact that he had the enterprise and courage to get himself to Rome, and that Paul used him in an administrative capacity is evidence that he was quite intelligent. Therefore it is also likely that Philemon would have used him in an administrative position in his household, which would have given Onesimus access to Philemon's money.

Secondly, Philemon had lost revenue as a result of Onesimus' absence and would have had to invest extra money in a replacement for Onesimus. Onesimus therefore owed Philemon a substantial amount. So, how can Paul confidently claim he will compensate Philemon for the loss?

Paul would not have made this promise to repay Philemon unless he knew he had the means to do so, and many passages in scripture reveal that Paul was a man of some wealth. For example, Paul was asked not only to pay for his own sacrifices regarding the Nazarite vow, but also the animal sacrifices of four other Jewish men who didn't have the necessary funds to cover the cost of the expensive sacrifices involved in this religious ritual (Acts 21:23, 24). Then in his imprisonment in Caesarea, Felix the governor (knowing of Paul's family and their wealth) was expecting a bribe from Paul (Acts 24:26). Later when he was sent to Rome while awaiting trial, he was permitted to rent his own house (Acts 28:16, 30).

Paul's wealth came from two sources: his family and the Philippian Church. How much he received from his family we do not know. We do know that Paul's parents were citizens of *Senatus Populusque Romanus* (SPQR: the Senate and People of Rome) (Acts 21:39; 22:25, 28) and so were apparently quite wealthy. Roman citizenship was a sought after privilege that very few could obtain, being a privilege that went hand in hand with high standing and financial wealth.

The Philippian Church sent large sums to Paul on a number of different occasions. Many of them had been prospered financially by the Lord because of their spiritual advance. Since Paul had provided them with the doctrine that enabled them to reach spiritual maturity, they thought it only right that they fund this greatest man of doctrine that he might be able to continue his evangelizing, teaching and writing ministries. When they heard that this great man of doctrine was making tents in Corinth, they immediately collected a large sum of money which they entrusted to Apaphraditus, their pastor to deliver to Paul in Corinth. Interestingly, even though the Corinthian Church never ever provided any financial support for Paul, they started to malign him regarding the funds which he received from the Philippians. So, with the approval of the Holy Spirit, Paul answered their untruthful attacks motivated either by their envy of the money or of their jealousy of the Philippians, or both.

Or did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the good news [evangelization & Bible teaching] of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches [sanctified sarcasm], taking wages from them to serve you [Bible doctrine]. And when I was present with you, and was in dire need, I was not a burden to anyone [Paul worked for a wage; he never asked anyone for money]. For when the brethren came from Macedonia [the Philippian Church] they fully supplied my needs. And in every way I have

kept myself from being a burden to you, and I will continue to do so [will continue to disdain their total lack of appreciation]. (2 Corinthians 11:7-9)

Also recognize, Philippians, that at the beginning of my ministry with reference to the good news, when I had departed from Macedonia, not one church had contributed to me in the application of giving and receiving, except you only. (Philippians 4:15)

They sent a large contribution to Paul when he was in Corinth because Paul would not do what a lot of Pastor-beggars do today. He didn't walk around with worn out clothes and a starving expression on his face, or tell other Christians to pray for his financial needs in the hope that they would give him some money, rather he went to work in the tent-making business until the Philippians heard about it and sent an offering.

Here is Paul the greatest man of doctrine ever and among the many Churches that were blessed by him not one of them even tried to help him even a little bit except for this one church. Paul never asked for a dime because he knew that it was the Lord's responsibility to provide and at the right time the Lord always did. The Lord used one of the most thoughtful and gracious congregations that will ever exist to provide for Paul's needs.

The Philippians sent their second offering while Paul was at Thessalonica. "Because even in Thessalonica you had sent an offering more than once for my needs," (Philippians 4:16) Then when Paul went to Rome for his first Roman imprisonment, they sent another offering.

But I have received very much inner happiness by means of the Lord, because now [Paul is writing from Rome] at last you have revived your thinking concerning me, toward whom also you have been

thinking [giving starts with a thought], but you had no opportunity [to give: God would not permit it since Paul was in reversionism besides he is in jail and doesn't need it]. (Philippians 4:10)

However, when you shared by giving and became partners with me in my pressure [Roman imprisonment] you functioned honorably [giving can be honorable].
(Philippians 4:14)

Philemon had an even greater debt to Paul who not only gave the gospel message accurately to Philemon, but also was indirectly responsible for the spiritual nourishment which enabled Philemon to get a good start in the spiritual life. As a mature believer, Philemon now has great integrity in his soul, and from his integrity he should realize that he owes Paul the greatest possible debt, far greater than the financial debt owed to him by Onesimus. Even though Paul did mention Philemon's debt to him, he didn't want to be so impolite as to mention it, but did so only to remind Philemon of God's grace. Also, even though Paul knew that it was unlikely that Philemon would even consider his offer to repay the financial debt incurred by Onesimus, removing the financial issue meant that Philemon was being forced to concentrate on the spiritual issue. Will he react with anger and hatred, punishing Onesimus for what he did? Or will he treat Onesimus in grace, just as the Lord has treated him in grace?

V. 20. Okay, brother, I wish to have benefit [οὐννημι / *oniemi*] from you in the Lord [perfect standards]; refresh [αναπαύω / *anapauso*] my tender affections [emotions respond to correct application of doctrine] in Christ.

The Greek word *oniemi* is in the voluntative optative voice which expresses a wish for someone to do something, by

using their volition to make a free-will decision to do so. Paul led Philemon to the Lord and then taught him the Word of God. Now, Paul is saying to Philemon, let me have benefit from your spiritual growth. If Philemon fails this spiritual test, it could send him into reversionism and eventually the sin unto death (1 John 5:16), in which case Paul will not have received any benefit in teaching the spiritual life to Philemon. However, if Philemon passes this test and refreshes Paul's inner being through his forgiveness of Onesimus, and continues to advance to the point of maximum glorification of God, then Paul would have received much benefit from having taught Philemon.

The Lord has perfect standards of grace. The Lord treats us in grace; we must treat others in grace. We must adjust to his standards: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

Happiness is in the soul; emotions are responders. The correct use of one's emotions under the control of correct thinking in the soul helps a person to appreciate the content of his soul. The frame of reference in the right lobe provides information for the memory center which stimulates response in the emotions. Therefore, the emotions become a stimulus to happiness. Emotions themselves are not happiness; but they make you aware that you're happy.

My son, if your heart [soul] is wise then my heart [soul] will be happy; my reins [emotions] will rejoice when your lips speak what is right. (Proverbs 23:15, 16)

This passage in Proverbs explains how refreshment works. The father's soul and emotions are refreshed by his wise son who communicates what is right. Happiness enters the father's soul when his son also possesses wisdom in his soul, with the father's emotions responding to his son's integrity.

V. 21. Because I have confidence in your obedience, I wrote to you knowing that you will do over and above what I say.

In writing this epistle Paul never calls slavery a social evil nor does he make an issue out of it. He only requests that Philemon cancel the debt and forgive Onesimus for the injustice caused (v. 18) while expecting that he will also make a free-will decision to emancipate Onesimus (v. 21). Even though Paul does not make an issue of slavery in this, or indeed any of his epistles, he has a mature believer's attitude toward slavery. Starting with his acquaintance with Onesimus in Rome, Paul never treated him like a slave. Paul respected the volition of Onesimus and never forced him into a course of action. Since Paul treated Onesimus as a free person, Onesimus responded to and served him with the greatest possible loyalty. Philemon, indeed all believers, need to learn from this example.

When a believer is listening to Bible teaching, he must associate that teaching with the metabolized doctrine already in his soul. Under the teaching ministry of Paul and Epaphras, Philemon has come to understand many doctrines of Scripture. He has learnt that the free will of man coexists with the sovereignty of God; he knows that the purpose of government is to protect the freedom which God has designed for mankind. He is aware that each believer is not only an ambassador for the Lord, but also an eternal royal priest. These doctrines should motivate Philemon to free Onesimus and any other slaves that he has in his possession.

Paul does not have confidence in people as such, but has confidence in the doctrine in a person's soul. Therefore, since Philemon possesses doctrine, Paul has confidence in him and in his decisions.

V. 22. At the same time also prepare for me lodging because I have confidence that through your prayers I shall be graciously returned to you.

Remember that prayer is a wonderful ministry, indeed the most powerful ministry that a believer may have, especially in a time of crisis. There were a lot of great believers in the Colossian Church and other churches throughout the Roman Empire, and through their prayers Paul was acquitted and released.

Upon completion of Romans, Paul intended to go directly to Rome and teach the believers in the Roman Church (Romans 1:10-13; 15:23, 24a), after which he would go on his 4th missionary journey to Spain (Romans 15:24b-25). However, he was distracted by his emotional desire to evangelize the Jewish unbeliever in Jerusalem and to explain the spiritual life to the pastors there, of which Paul severely failed in both these areas. The phrase "but now I am going to Jerusalem" in 15:25 reveals his switch to emotion, giving no good reason for doing so. The Roman Church is in the heart of the Roman Empire and a very important church. The believers there have been waiting for Paul to teach them for many years, and since Paul was the apostle to the gentiles, it was his responsibility to do so. On the other hand, the ministry in Israel was the responsibility of the other apostles (Galatians 2:7-9). Furthermore, the pastors in Jerusalem were not interested in Paul's teaching which they demonstrated when they interrupted and criticized Paul upon his arrival there.

After Paul had greeted them [the pastors teaching in area in and around Jerusalem] he began to report in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God [interrupted him by shouting praises to God, a hypocritically way of stopping Paul's explanation of the spiritual life]. Then they said to Paul, 'You see, brother [hypocrisy], how many thousands of Jews have believed and all of them are zealous for the law

[legalism in contrast to the spiritual life]. They have informed us [they were spying on Paul] that you teach all the Jews who are living among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses [Paul taught that even though the Christian could benefit from the instruction found in the Mosaic Law, the Christian's spiritual life is not learned from the Law, but from the New Testament epistles], telling them not to circumcise their children [Paul taught that circumcision was not part of salvation nor the spiritual life] or live according to our customs [Why should Paul teach Jewish customs to gentile Christians?].’ (Acts 21:19-21)

In addition to this, the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem would not listen to his presentation of the gospel:

The crowd [unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem] listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, ‘Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!’

(Acts 22:22)

Paul was harshly disciplined by the Lord for his decision to act upon his emotions and totally disregard the will of God. Even though the Lord had warned Paul of the consequences of going to Jerusalem, Paul obstinately continued on his journey (Acts 20:23; 21:4,11). Because of his disobedience Paul spends four years in prison: two in Caesarea and two more in Rome. Before going to Jerusalem, Paul was being blessed by God in a marvelous way. Unbelievers were responding to Paul’s evangelism wherever he went. These he would organize into churches and assign qualified men to teach them. At the same time he was constantly training other men for the ministry. Last but not least, he had embarked on a very successful writing ministry. However, all this was removed from Paul in the first

two years of his imprisonment in Caesarea, with the exception of the opportunity to witness to a handful of VIPs, who did not even believe in Jesus Christ. It was not until his imprisonment in Rome that God permitted Paul to write again, and was able to evangelize and teach in limited capacity (Acts 28:31).

Since he had spent four years away from many of the Churches in Greece and in Asian Minor, he apparently decided to visit them prior to going on his fourth missionary journey (Philemon 22; Philippians 2:24).

V. 23. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you.

Epaphras was the faithful pastor of the Colossian Church in the home of Philemon before being imprisoned in Rome with Paul. Under the study and teaching ministry of Epaphras the believers in Colossi did very well. Even though he could no longer teach his congregation due to his imprisonment, he used his time to diligently pray for them. Being a great believer and a great prayer warrior, he also prayed also for the nearby Churches in Hieropolis and Laodicea. (Colossians 4:12-13).

V. 24. Likewise Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas, possibly through John Mark’s mother, Mary of Jerusalem. It was in her home that the early church in Jerusalem met (Acts 12:12, 25). John Mark was converted under the ministry of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but abandoned them as they sailed for Pamphylia, (Acts 15:38) a very dangerous area, and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). He later recovered from this spiritual failure and desired to go with Barnabas and Paul on their second missionary journey anywhere from three to five years later, but

Paul would not permit it. Paul was unwilling to give Mark a second chance, a grace failure on Paul's part whereas Barnabas realized that Mark was qualified for the missionary journey and needed to be graciously forgiven, and given a second opportunity. For this reason a great argument arose between Paul and Barnabas. Eventually, Paul went on his second missionary journey with Silas, and Barnabas went with John Mark to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-40). Although Paul failed the grace test, later he realized his mistake and passed the word along to welcome John Mark (Colossians 4:10). Just before Paul is executed he instructs Timothy to come to Rome and to bring this great man with him, "Get Mark and bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11 b). The very fact that Paul mentioned Mark in his letter to Philemon would serve as a reminder to Philemon not to make the same kind of mistake which he himself had made, i.e. the grace test regarding Mark.

Aristarchus was a Jew, "These are the only Jews [Justus, Mark & Aristarchus] among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they proved a great comfort to me" (Colossians 4:11b). It is quite unusual for a Jewish man to possess such a famous Greek name as Aristarchus (best ruler) unless he took that name upon some momentous occasion. Since he was a prominent man in Thessalonica, it is quite likely that he was knighted, a system of administrative aristocracy instituted by Julius Caesar for the purpose of maintaining stability within the provinces of the Roman empire.

He joined Paul on his 3rd missionary journey, being seized by a mob in Ephesus and nearly killed (Acts 19:29), and surviving only because God had a plan for his life. He accompanied Paul to Greece and was with him in 59 AD when Paul was taken prisoner to Rome. According to extra-Biblical tradition he was martyred in Rome by Nero.

Demas was a gentile member of the Pauline team mentioned here and in the epistle to the Colossians (4:14) because he was with Paul at that time of his first Roman imprisonment. However, during Paul's second Roman imprisonment, he deserted Paul in Rome and went to Thessalonica circa 66 AD. "Do your best [Timothy] to come to me, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica . . ." (2 Timothy 4:10).

Demas is the shortened form for Demetrius. So, it is possible that the Demetrius that John writes about in circa 96 AD is the Demas that forsook Paul. If this is true, then Demas recovered from his spiritual failure to become a great believer, "Demetrius has been well spoken of by everyone, and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him and you know that our testimony is true" (3 John 12).

There appears to be no reason for God the Holy Spirit to have John write about Demetrius unless he were the same person that had forsaken Paul. The Holy Spirit wants the believer to realize that one can fail terribly in his spiritual life, yet still recover to become a great believer. If the believer is still alive after great failure, God expects that believer to recover; resume the spiritual life and to glorify him.

Luke was a member of the Pauline team, joining them at Troas on Paul's second missionary journey. Luke's use of pronouns in his writing of Acts helps us to work out his personal travels: "So, **they** [Paul, Silas, Timothy] passed by Mysia and went to Troas....after Paul had seen the vision, **we** [Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke] got ready at once to leave for Macedonia . . ." (Acts 16:8-10). Luke accompanied Paul to Philippi, but was not part of the persecution of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:22). Luke remained in Philippi: "When **they** [Paul, Silas & Timothy] had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica . . ." (Acts 17:1), but rejoined Paul when he passed through Philippi on his 3rd missionary journey: "...then **we** set sail from Phillipi after the

Passover and came to them at Troas . . .” (Acts 20:6). From then on it seems that Luke remained with him until his death in Rome, accompanying Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6-21:18), to Rome (Acts 27:1; 28:2, 12-16), and is last mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:11 as the only one with Paul in Rome.

Luke probably had a medical practice in Troas where he joined Paul and became his personal physician. Luke realized that it was more important to keep Paul alive and healthy than to keep 100 other people alive and healthy.

Luke was educated in Classical Greek and so used Classical Greek to write both Acts and Luke. Both Paul and Luke were very well educated and intelligent and became close companions because they respected each others spiritual life and enjoyed each other's intellectual capacities. Unfortunately even this great friend deserted Paul in his trial before Nero: “At my defense, no one came to my support [Luke was in Rome] but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them” (2 Timothy 4:16).

V. 25. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with your spirit [of the Colossian Christians]. Amen.

Paul strongly encourages the Colossian believers to learn and apply the grace of God. This grace comes from the Father's plan and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Philemon 3). The Christian's relationship with God is through his human spirit, which God gives to every believer at the moment of salvation. The Christian is taught the Word of God via his human spirit:

And the soulish man [Paul's expression for the unbeliever] cannot receive the things [spiritual truths] from the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand because they are spiritually discerned [the Holy Spirit teaches the human spirit]” (1 Corinthians 2:14)

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