

A
Doctrinal
and
Devotional
Commentary
on the book of
Philemon

by
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Info page

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INTRODUCTION

To the epistle to Philemon

AUTHOR

The book itself claims that the author is the apostle Paul (v. 1,9,19). The early church Fathers such as Ignatius (AD 110), Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 315), Eusebius (AD 325), Jerome (AD 340) and Augustine (AD 400) have all accepted the Pauline authorship. There has never been any serious dispute concerning Paul being the author. This letter was considered part of the canon as early as the Marcion canon in AD 140.

PLACE AND DATE

It is believed that this letter was written around AD 60-62 when Paul was first imprisoned in Rome.

OCCASION OF THIS LETTER

Paul meets Onesimus who is a runaway slave and Onesimus become a brother in Christ. Paul needs to know what to do with him so he writes to his owner Philemon who was a member of the church of Colossae (Col. 4:9).

PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

- To ask Philemon to forgive his runaway slave.
- To ask Philemon to send Onesimus back to him as his aid.

Philemon is the only personal letter written by Paul to a friend that does not deal directly with ministry. Letters to Timothy and Titus fall under the Pastoral Epistles.

PHILEMON
02 – Greetings

**¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker, ² and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house. ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(LEB)**

Philemon is one of the four epistles which are called the ‘Prison epistles.’ Most likely Paul is in prison in Rome and living in house-arrest. This means that he is able to receive visitors and have people assist him with his daily needs. The letter begins with the following opening:

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

Paul calls himself a ‘*prisoner*’ (DESMIOS) meaning: a captive, in bonds, a prisoner. Notice that he does not say that he is a prisoner of Rome but rather of ‘*Jesus Christ*’. If we assume that Paul meant that he was a captive, we can understand better when he says that he is ‘*a prisoner*’ of Jesus. Yes, he was in house arrest in Rome but this did not make him a prisoner in his sight, for it was his heart that was captivated by his Lord and Savior. May all true believers see themselves as being captive by Jesus. In a real sense all believers are his ‘*prisoners*’:

1 Corinthians 6

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

**20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.
(NKJV)**

We also see the same theme elsewhere. Once we have passed from death unto life through the saving work of Jesus, we no longer belong to ourselves but to the Lord God who has bought us by his blood shed on the cross (1 Cor. 7:23, 2 Peter 2:1). Paul was not the only one who participated in this letter, we see that Timothy’s name is also mentioned:

(v.1) ...and Timothy our brother

By this we can assume that Timothy was with Paul when he wrote this letter. Timothy followed Paul to the very end and he truly was a faithful co-worker. Some followers in the Lord seem to vanish away when difficult situations appear. They become quiet and hide themselves like chameleons by blending in with the crowd. They are ashamed of the one who has died for them. This was not the case with Timothy. Paul could always trust him in all things. Remember what Christ said concerning those who would be ashamed of him:

Luke 9

**26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.
(NKJV)**

Although this letter is a personal letter to Philemon it is actually addressed to four recipients.

(v.1) ...to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker, ²and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.

The first is Philemon who seemed to be a wealthy citizen of Colossae. He was a brother in Christ and also a fellow worker in the Lord. This presumes that in some capacity Philemon was working for the kingdom of God. We will later see that he held meetings in his house. Paul calls him '*our dear friend*' (AGAPETOS) which means: dearly beloved or beloved. In our relationships with others we may have friends and there are a select few who are dear friends. These are closer to us and have a deeper relationship with us. Such was Philemon to Paul – a dear close friend. Philemon is also called a '*fellow worker*' (SUNEGOS) which means: a co-laborer, a companion in labor. May we all have the same qualities as Philemon!

The second person which this letter is addressed to is '*Apphia*'. Paul states that she is '*our sister*'. We conclude that she is a believer in Christ who lives in Colossae and attends the house church which met in Philemon's home. Although nothing is known of her, since her name is mentioned only once in the Bible, some believe that she might have been the wife of Philemon.

The third person mentioned is '*Archippus*'. He is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians. It seems that Archippus had ministries in that church and the apostle Paul encourages him to 'carry on'.

Colossians 4

17 And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

(NKJV)

Like many others who have ministries, he needed to be reinvigorated. He is called a *'fellow soldier'* (SUSTRATIOTES) figuratively meaning: an associate in Christian toil. May we all resemble Archippus by having different ministries for the glory of the Lord. May believers never take their eyes off their beloved Savior! We have no other information about this man, for he is not to be found elsewhere in the Scriptures.

The fourth is not a person but a group *'to the church in your house'*. It seems that this letter was also addressed to all the believers who met *'in your house'*. It may be that Philemon had a house that was spacious enough to receive the brethren for their religious meetings. Since Philemon had a slave (Onesimus) or many slaves he was probably a man of certain wealth.

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what Paul desired for this church. There are two things that Paul mentions. The first is *'grace to you'*. The word *'grace'* (CHARIS) means: graciousness of manner of act and the divine influence upon the hearts of men. How Paul desired that *'God our father'* would bestow the much-needed grace to live a life worthy of their calling. Notice that he calls God (THEOS) meaning: a supreme deity whom we know as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *'father'* (PATER) which simply means: a father. True believers have been given the immense privilege of being received into God's spiritual family as adopted children (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). The Colossians, as well as all other born-again believers, can call upon God their father and know that he takes care of them.

Luke 11

11 "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?"

12 "Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?"

13 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

(NKJV)

The second favor of God to be asked for is *'peace'* (EIRENE) which means: to join, peace and prosperity. The Colossians needed peace of heart, a peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7). Life was difficult for Christians in the Roman Empire.

Grace and peace are still needed today and we should call for it for all the brethren. This grace and peace are from both the *'Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'*. If you are a true believer, may you always be grateful that you have access to all the grace and peace that is needed in life. Only remember that grace and peace come from our God and nowhere else!

PHILEMON
03 – Thanking God for Philemon

⁴I thank my God, always making mention of you in my prayers, ⁵*because I hear about your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.* ⁶*I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective in the knowledge of every good thing that is in us for Christ.* ⁷For I have great joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.
(LEB)

There are many things that people are thankful for and in our first verse we see what Paul delighted in – the brethren! He writes that he is ‘*thankful*’ (EUCCHARISTEO) which means: to be grateful, to express gratitude. Paul is thankful and he also expresses his thankfulness, for he writes ‘*I thank my God*’. The expression of a believer’s thankfulness unto his Lord is a marvelous exercise of faith. The Psalms are masterpieces of verbal thanksgiving offered to God. All children of God are called to express themselves and open their hearts unto the Lord.

Ephesians 5

19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,
(NKJV)

Colossians 3

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.
(NKJV)

Why is Paul so thankful unto the Lord? It’s because of Philemon. The proof of this is that Paul says ‘*always*’ (PANTOTE) meaning: at all times, every time when and ever more. His thankfulness was not an occasional event, but rather a steady stream. Paul used his time of prayer to manifest his gratitude – he writes ‘*making mention of you in my prayers*’. May we also make it a habit to thank the Lord for the precious people in our life. When Paul says that he was ‘*making mention*’ of Philemon, the word ‘*mention*’ (MNEIA) means: recollection, recital and mention. We can imagine Paul thinking of people, one by one, and remembering them and their work for the Lord.

⁵ *because I hear about your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.*

We must remember that Paul has never been in Colossae (Col. 2:1). It was through his friend Epaphras (Col. 1:5-8) that he learned about the work there. We do not believe that Paul knew Philemon personally but naturally had heard of him through Onesimus who was in Rome and had become a believer in Christ. That is why it is written '*because I hear*'. The word '*hear*' (SKOUO) means: come to the ears, be reported and understand. While in prison, Paul made friends with Onesimus and heard his life story which is how Paul got to know Philemon. We will see that what Paul heard of Philemon was a good report. May I ask if people around you will testify the same? Will they give a good report concerning your character and your life in general?

What did Paul hear about? Two things are mentioned. Two things stand above the others and these are his '*love and faith*'. Are they not the cornerstones of a godly character? Philemon was a man of '*love*' (AGAPE) which means: affection, benevolence and charity. He had been transformed by the saving grace of the Lord and lived as a true disciple:

John 15

12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

14 "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

(NKJV)

The other trait of character that Paul mentions is '*faith*' (PISTIS) which means: persuasion, credence and conviction. Philemon was a man of faith. He was certain of what he knew about the Lord and he lived his faith. It was not a subject matter or a philosophy he understood and appreciated. His faith ruled his life and dictated what type of person he should be. His '*love and faith*' were directed towards:

(v.5) ...which you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.

His love and faith were pointing '*toward the Lord Jesus*'. The word '*toward*' (PROS) means: direction, forward to and towards. The eyes of Philemon and the manifestation of his love and faith were directed unto Jesus. Christ was the true north of his life and the compass of Philemon's heart always pointed towards him. Is Christ the subject of all of our heart and thoughts? Is he the center of our lives? Do you remember what the greatest commandment is?

Mark 12

**30 'And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.
(NKJV)**

But Philemon's *'love and faith'* was ample enough to embrace not only Christ but also *'for all the saints'*. The word *'saints'* (HAGIOS) means: sacred, blameless and consecrated. The godly love that was poured in Philemon's heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5) overflowed and showered the brethren. A person who is filled with God's love never hides it away or keeps it inside of him. Such a person will openly manifest his love for others. If someone tells you that he is filled with the Lord God and does not really manifest his love unto others, he is a liar!

1 John 4

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

**21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.
(NKJV)**

Is there also a good place in your heart for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you limiting your love to those of your inner circle? May we be like Philemon whose *'love and faith'* was clear for all to see.

⁶ I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective in the knowledge of every good thing that is in us for Christ. ⁷ For I have great joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Paul continues with his theme of Philemon's love for others. We can see by these two verses that he is truly touched by the fruit that this man was bearing. Paul prays that all that is in Philemon will continue, *'I pray that the fellowship of your faith'*. Paul speaks of *'the fellowship'* (KONONIA) which means: partnership, participation and communion. We can imagine that *'fellowship'* was the result of Philemon's *'love and faith'*. Who he was, encouraged people to participate together in the Lord. His life fortified and built-up people around him. I gather that one would enjoy being with Philemon! Fellowship of his *'faith'* (PISTIS) which means: persuasion, credence and conviction, this was the central point we need to understand. Being in fellowship with Philemon was wonderful because it was centered on his *'faith'*. It was who he was in Christ that attracted people and edified them.

His *'faith'* was *'effective'* (ENERGES) meaning: active, operative, effectual power. He had an explosive faith, a contagious faith, a living faith and a faith that attracted others. His faith was also:

(v.6) ...effective in the knowledge of every good thing that is in us for Christ.

His faith was effective as long as it stood *'in the knowledge'*. The word *'knowledge'* (EPIGNOSIS) means: recognition, full discernment. His faith was not 'blind' or pushed by every coming wind. He was able to discern *'every good thing this is in us for Christ'*. He was a mature Christian and knew the ways of the Lord. He knew the *'good thing'* (AGATHOS) meaning: good in any sense, benefit and well. He understood what was good in the Lord and what displeased him. This *'good thing'* was *'in us for Christ'*. The knowledge of goodness is *'in us'* (EN) meaning: a fixed position, instrumentally. The renewing of the believer's mind pours knowledge of goodness in him.

Romans 12

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(NKJV)

If you are a true believer, then the Holy Spirit has been teaching you in all the truth – God's truth. It is up to every child of God to express this truth and make it become alive as Philemon did.

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

We can often forget the impact that we have on other believers. Sometimes it is negative. This is when we manifest anger, envy or impatience. Other times (more often I hope) we have a positive impact on others. This is when we manifest: peace, love, patience, care, faith and so forth. Philemon probably did not know that he had a positive impact on the apostle Paul – he had never even seen him! How true this still is – the impact that our life has on others, even those we do not know.

Paul writes *'I have great joy and encouragement'*. These are the two things that the living testimony of Philemon gave to Paul. Notice the word *'great'* (POLUS) which means: many, largely and much of. Paul received a GREAT AMOUNT of *'joy'* (CHARIS)

meaning: graciousness of manner, of act. It was a great joy for Paul to see how Philemon had grown in Christ. This reminds me of what the apostle John wrote:

3 John 1

3 For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.

4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

(NKJV)

Not only was Paul filled with joy but also with '*encouragement*' (PARAKLESIS) meaning: solace, comfort and consolation. His 'new man' was literally built up. Imagine how precious this must have been for Paul, who was imprisoned at the time, To see that his work (through Epaphras in Colossae) was bearing fruit.

(v.7) ...because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Paul was encouraged because of the impact of the love of Philemon on the brethren. He writes that it was '*the hearts of the saints had been refreshed*'. The word '*hearts*' (SPLAGCHNON) means: bowels of affection, tender mercy. The inner most part of a person – his heart had been '*refreshed*' (ANAPAUO) meaning: to refresh, take ease or rest. That was the goodness that Philemon poured out all around him. The words '*through you*' (DIA) means: the channel of an act, by reason of. Philemon was the channel that God was using to refresh the souls of the brethren. He was the chosen instrument in God's hands – as we ALL can be!

Romans 6

13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

(NKJV)

No wonder Paul heard of Philemon and his heart rejoiced at the hearing of the impact he had on people's lives. May it be also the same for us. May our lives reflect that of Christ and bring peace and joy to those around us, for the Glory of our Lord and Savior!

PHILEMON
04 – Paul asks for a favor

⁸ Therefore, *although I* have great confidence in Christ to order you *to do what is proper*, ⁹ instead I appeal to *you* because of love, *since I* am such a one as Paul, now an old man and also a prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ I am appealing to you concerning my child whom I became the father of during my imprisonment, Onesimus. ¹¹ Once he *was* useless to you, but now *he is* useful to you and to me, ¹² whom I have sent back to you himself, that is, my heart, ¹³ whom I wanted to keep with me, in order that he might serve me on behalf of you during my imprisonment for the gospel. ¹⁴ But apart from your consent, I wanted to do nothing, in order that your good *deed* might be not as according to necessity, but according to *your own* free will. ¹⁵ For perhaps because of this, he was separated *from you* for a time, in order that you might have him back forever, 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.

(LEB)

In our last section we have seen the godly character of Philemon and in this section, Paul will have a very personal request.

⁸ Therefore, *although I* have great confidence in Christ to order you *to do what is proper*, ⁹ instead I appeal to *you* because of love, *since I* am such a one as Paul, now an old man and also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

Paul knows who he is in the Lord and the authority that was bestowed upon him by the Lord (Acts 9:15,16) and also from the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). As we also see in his epistles Paul is not troubled with giving commands to the brethren. But there is something different here, Paul does not desire to use his authority:

⁸ Therefore, *although I* have great confidence in Christ to order you *to do what is proper*

Paul has '*great confidence*'. The word '*confidence*' (PARRHESIA) means: all out spokenness, confidence or assurance. He is certain that he has the authority to do this but is not willing to force himself on Philemon. Now Paul says that he can '*order you to do*' (EPITASSO) meaning: to arrange upon, order, charge. Once again, we see the wisdom of Paul. In this particular matter, it would be counter-productive to force himself upon Philemon. Every person in authority should understand this great lesson. Pushing or forcing someone to do something is NEVER good in the long run.

How many times have you seen Jesus force himself on others? If there was someone who could have, would it not be the Son of the Living God – yet he never did. No one should. It is only when we give the freedom for someone to act as he desires, do we really see the heart of that person.

Proverb 23

**7a For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.
(NKJV)**

Paul speaks of something that is *'proper'* (ANEKO) which means: to attain to, convenient, be proper or be fit. What Paul was going to ask Philemon was something that was fitting of a man of God. All true believers need to understand this. No one should ever ask anyone to do something that is not *'proper'* in the Lord. It is a great sin to incite someone to act in an improper way. That is what Satan did in the Garden of Eden and all who follow his ways will be judged.

⁹ instead I appeal to *you* because of love, *since I* am such a one as Paul, now an old man and also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

Paul sets aside the thought of using force to get what he wants and *'instead I appeal to you because of love'*. Paul will *'appeal'* to Philemon. The word *'appeal'* (PARAKALEO) means: to call near, to invite, to invoke. Paul invites Philemon to think about his request. In other words, Paul will leave this in his hands and let him make his own decision. He appeals to Philemon's *'love'* (AGAPE) meaning: affection, benevolence, charity. We have seen in the past that Philemon was a man filled with the love of the Lord and Paul calls upon his love in this particular case also. Paul reminds Philemon that he is an *'old man'* (PRESBUTES) meaning: an old man, an aged man. Is Paul saying this to open Philemon's heart to his needs because he was old and having Onesimus would certainly be helpful. It may be! Paul adds another comment, for he was *'also a prisoner of Christ Jesus'*. This is the second time (1:1) that he mentions that he is a prisoner, yes, of Christ but also in prison in Rome. Is this a second attempt that is used to soften Philemon's heart? No one can be certain but this thought must not be set aside.

¹⁰ I am appealing to you concerning my child whom I became the father of during my imprisonment, Onesimus.

Here we see the appeal of Paul. The word *'appealing'* (PARAKALEO) meaning: to call near, to invite and to invoke is the same word as in verse nine. He invites Philemon to hear him out and later make a decision. His appeal was *'concerning my child'*, we will see this is about Onesimus.

The word *'concerning'* (PERI) means: through, around, with respect to. It was in respect to Onesimus, this run-away slave, who had become *'my child'* (TEKNON) meaning: a child, daughter or son. What does Paul mean by *'my child'* since he was never married and never had any children? This, of course, is spiritually speaking for Paul says *'whom I became father of during my imprisonment, Onesimus'*. Paul had become the spiritual father of Onesimus. He probably was the one who brought him to Christ. Somehow, someday Onesimus and Paul got in touch and Paul evangelized him. By the grace of God this run-away slave became a child of God. He is the one whom Paul is appealing about – Philemon's run-away slave.

¹¹ Once he was useless to you, but now he is useful to you and to me,

Paul will now speak of what Onesimus WAS and what he presently IS. *'He was useless to you'*. The word *'useless'* (ACHRESTOS) means: inefficient and unprofitable. Onesimus did not seem to be a very good bond-servant. For whatever reason, he did not have a good reputation. The proof of this, is that he ran away, even though Philemon was such a good person. Onesimus probably abused his master's confidence and used an opportunity to leave him. But something had changed – he was born-again and his life turned around. Onesimus had become *'useful to you and to me'*. The word *'useful'* (EUCHRESTOS) means: easily used, profitable. He went from being unprofitable to profitable. His new birth caused him to become a new person, a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and that person had great worth! He had now become useful for Philemon for if he returned and worked for him, he would be a changed and honest man. But he had also become useful for Paul, helping him in his chains.

¹² whom I have sent back to you himself, that is, my heart, ¹³ whom I wanted to keep with me, in order that he might serve me on behalf of you during my imprisonment for the gospel. ¹⁴ But apart from your consent, I wanted to do nothing, in order that your good deed might be not as according to necessity, but according to your own free will.

Paul did not keep Onesimus in Rome with him *'I have sent him back'*. The words *'sent back'* (ANAPEMPO) means: to send up or back, send again. Paul would have needed him but he could not keep him for he was a bond-servant of Philemon. He is sending him back with *'my heart'* (SPLAGCHNON) meaning: inward affections, pity or sympathy. This gives the idea that Paul is doing this with a lot of emotions. He would have loved to have him by his side, for he had become his child in the faith, but he decides to return him to his proper place. May all believers learn from Paul – we need to do what is right even though it breaks our heart. Paul would have loved for Onesimus to *'serve me'* (DIAKONEO) meaning: to be an attendant, to wait or serve upon.

His age called upon someone to help him out and Onesimus would have been the perfect candidate. Paul speaks of his old age and his imprisonment. It was because of the '*gospel*' (EUAGGELION) meaning: a good message, the gospel, that he was in prison and not because of any crime against the Empire.

¹⁴ But apart from your consent, I wanted to do nothing, in order that your good deed might be not as according to necessity, but according to *your own* free will.

This is Paul's appeal to Philemon – he needed his '*consent*' (GNOME) meaning: cognition, opinion and resolve. Paul needed Philemon's blessing if Onesimus was to stay with him. Notice that in verse twelve, Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon. He did not keep him in Rome and asked Philemon if he could stay – he sent him back to his master. He probably sent him back so that Onesimus could apologize to his master for running away and also (as we will see) he might have stolen from him. Paul recognizes the importance of dealing openly with sin and for the offended to offer their forgiveness. Paul writes:

(v.14) I wanted to do nothing, in order that your good deed might be not as according to necessity, but according to *your own* free will.

Paul wanted Onesimus to come back but he did not want to force Philemon to do so if he did not wish to. Paul wanted Philemon's decision '*your good deed*' (AGATHOS) meaning: good, benefit and well, to not be based '*as according to necessity*'. The word '*necessity*' (ANAGKE) meaning: constraint, distress or must needs. In other words, he did not want to twist Philemon's arm and force him to send him back. Quite the opposite '*but according to your own free will*'. The words '*free will*' (HEKOUSION) means: voluntariness, willingly. Paul gave Philemon a choice and he certainly was not going to interfere with his decision. Do you sometimes interfere slightly to get your way? May we say as the Lord did:

Luke 22

42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

(NKJV)

Paul ends his appeal with another thought:

¹⁵ For perhaps because of this, he was separated *from you* for a time, in order that you might have him back forever, 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.

Here, he speaks of the unseen hand of God in our life. He uses the word *'perhaps'* (TACHA) which means: possibly or perhaps. Paul encourages Philemon to consider that this may be the hand of God, this may be His doing. It just may be that *'he was separated from you for a time that you might have him back forever'*. Could it be that Onesimus *'was separated from you'* (CHORIZO) meaning: to place room between, separate for a reason? This reason is *'that you may have him back forever'*. The word *'forever'* (AIONIOS) means: past, future, eternal and everlasting. Philemon had him temporally but now (being born-again) he will have him forever not as a slave but as *'a beloved brother'* (AGAPETOS) meaning: a dearly or well-loved brother.

Paul places the fact that Onesimus had become a *'beloved brother'* to himself and also to Philemon, a brother *'both in the flesh and in the Lord'*. He had become a real brother *'more than a slave'* but a brother in Christ. This is my appeal, this is the case that I present before you and it's all in your hands – what will you do?

PHILEMON
05 – The confidence of Paul

¹⁷ If therefore you consider me a partner, receive him as *you would me*. ¹⁸ But if in anything he has caused you loss or owes *you anything*, charge this to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write *this* with my own hand: I will pay it back, lest I mention to you that *you owe me even your very self besides*. ²⁰ Yes, brother, I ought to have some benefit of you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

²¹ Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you *because I* know that you will do even beyond what I say. ²² At the same time also, prepare a guest room for me, for I hope that through your prayers I will be restored to you.

(LEB)

In this section, Paul continues to plead in favor of Onesimus, his new brother in Christ. We have seen that Paul wants Onesimus to do the right thing, by sending him back to Philemon. He also desires Philemon to do the right thing towards Onesimus.

¹⁷ If therefore you consider me a partner, receive him as *you would me*.

The apostle Paul, desires Philemon to think about the situation that he is bringing to his attention. The word ‘*consider*’ (ECHO) means: to conceive, to count. If you understand, then you will accept me as a ‘*partner*’ (KOINONOS) meaning: a sharer or an associate. Paul is asking Philemon if he thinks that he is an associate with him in the Lord’s work. He brings this subject back to where it belongs – in the hands of the Lord. If you and I are working for the same Lord then ‘*receive him as you would me*’. The word ‘*receive*’ (PROSLAMBANO) means: to take to oneself and take unto. I am sending you Onesimus and I am asking you to take him unto yourself as you would take me into your home. Paul desires Philemon to stop regarding Onesimus as a worthless run-away slave and to consider him a co-worker in the Lord.

This is a wonderful statement! The way one perceives another Christian should change as the person is changed in Christ. We ALL carry a past but does this past remain with us (as a heavy burden) for the rest of our lives – NO! We should all look at each other as the Lord sees us. We should understand that the past is the past and we should welcome each other with open arms. Onesimus had truly changed and Philemon should change his vision of who he is. Do we hold prejudices against certain Christians because of their past? May our vision also change.

¹⁸ But if in anything he has caused you loss or owes you anything, charge this to my account.

Because of this verse many believe that when Onesimus fled away from his owner he also may have robbed him. Paul speaks of a 'loss' (ADIKEO) meaning: to be unjust, to do wrong. Onesimus did something that was unjust towards Philemon and we do not know what it is. It seems that Onesimus 'owes you' (OPHEILIEO) meaning: to owe, to be under obligation. So, what should Philemon do? Should he imprison Onesimus and try to get justice in his favor? Paul thinks differently and says 'charge this to my account'. The word 'charge' (ELLOGEO) means: reckon on, attribute, impute. Paul tells Philemon NOT TO charge Onesimus for his misdoings but rather to put it on his account! Is that not what the Lord Jesus has done for all true believers? Has he not taken on himself all of our offenses? Has he not accepted to pay for our sins? Is this not also a model for all disciples to follow to not charge the offenses of others. Are you holding on to an offense? Are you holding a grudge against someone? May we all be like our Savior who willingly accepted our offenses and brought forgiveness.

¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will pay it back, lest I mention to you that you owe me even your very self besides.

Paul is authenticating his letter for it was written 'with my own hand'. There were times when someone wrote an epistle for Paul and he would only sign it as with Romans:

Romans 16

**22 I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.
(NKJV)**

This letter was a personal one and Paul wrote it by his hand. It would also serve as a guarantee that the letter that Onesimus would bring to Philemon was authentic and not some trick. For a second time, Paul writes that he will take Onesimus' debt and pay it personally – 'I will pay it back' (APOTIMO) meaning: to pay in full. Just as Christ paid 'in full' for our debts so Paul wanted to 'pay in full' the debt of his brother in Christ, Onesimus. At the same time, Paul reminds Philemon that he also has some kind of debt towards him! 'You owe me even your very self besides'. We don't know for certain what kind of debt Paul is referring to. What we can see is a parallel between Onesimus owing towards Philemon and Philemon owing towards Paul. Some believe that Paul is referring to the fact that Philemon's conversion was brought forth through Paul in some way. But again, no one is certain.

²⁰ Yes, brother, I ought to have some benefit of you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

Paul speaks of *'some benefit'* (ONOMA) meaning: to gratify, to deserve, to have joy. Paul is hoping that Philemon will bring him joy *'in the Lord'*, by doing what is right. May we also find joy in seeing others walk in the Lord and may others have joy seeing ourselves do the same. Paul is asking Philemon to *'refresh my heart in Christ'*. The word *'refresh'* (ANAPAUO) means: to repose, to refresh and to have joy. It is obvious that Paul is nervous about this situation and what Philemon will decide to do. He would love to keep Onesimus and have him by his side. He hopes for the best and desires to have peace and joy. He asks Philemon to give him this gift of peace by forgiving Onesimus and letting him go back to Rome. May we also be the instruments that bring peace and joy to the hearts of the brethren.

²¹ Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you *because I know that you will do even beyond what I say.* ²² At the same time also, prepare a guest room for me, for I hope that through your prayers I will be restored to you.

A question must be asked – is Paul over confident of the outcome? He says that he is *'confident'* (PEITHO) meaning: to convince, to assent, to rely. Is Paul presuming that Philemon will do what is the right “Christian” thing to do? He speaks of Philemon’s *'obedience'* (HUPAKOE) meaning: compliance, submission and obedience. We can see by the rest of the phrase that he is speaking of Philemon being obedient to his request. Is Paul overstepping his authority? Does his desire to have Onesimus with him make him ‘go too far’? Personally, I have difficulty with this verse. I see Paul as being very human and allowing his desire to overcome him and not leaving this in the hands of the Lord. Paul is putting a lot of ‘weight’ in this letter.

He also writes *'I know that you will do even beyond what I say'*. The word *'beyond'* (HUPER) means: a place above, beyond, across. And how did Paul *'know'* (EIDO) meaning: be aware, behold, consider what Philemon was going to do? Again, I have to admit, it is beyond my comprehension. Unless he ‘knows’ because he knows Philemon so much that he knows that he will do what is right, because Philemon does that all the time!

²² At the same time also, prepare a guest room for me, for I hope that through your prayers I will be restored to you.

Paul abruptly changes subjects and speaks of his future plans – *'prepare a guest room for me'*. The word *'prepare'* (HETOIMAZO) means: to prepare, to provide or to make ready. Paul hoped to be released in the near future and if this would happen, he would go and visit Philemon.

We also see the importance of prayer in Christian living. It would be through prayer that Paul would be released. May we also pray for our brethren who are imprisoned in jails across the world. The word '*restored*' (CHARIZOMAI) means: to grant as a favor, rescue. God's favor can be granted when his children intercede on behalf of others in the faith.

PHILEMON
06 – Conclusion

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit.

We have come to the end of Paul's letter to Philemon. It was not meant for us to know its outcome. Did Philemon receive this letter? Was Onesimus forgiven? Was he allowed to go back to Rome to be with Paul? As long as we are here on earth we will never know.

In his conclusion, Paul speaks of certain brothers in the faith. The first is Epaphras. Paul speaks of him in Col. 1:7 and 4:12. It is believed that it was through his ministry that the church in Colossae was born. He is called a faithful minister and also a dear fellow-servant. We see that he is with Paul as a *'fellow prisoner'* (SUNAICHMALOTOS) meaning: co-captive, fellow-prisoner. It is said that Epaphras *'greets you'* (ASPAZOMAI) meaning: to enfold in the arms, to embrace. Since Philemon seems to be the founder of the church of Colossae, it is very natural that Epaphras is very close to its members.

We also see Mark. He is also mentioned in Col. 4:10,11, 2 Tim. 4:11. Peter also speaks of him in 1 Peter 5:13. He had abandoned Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37-39) in their missionary voyage but later we see that he came back to be with Paul and also Peter in their ministry.

We see Aristarchus. He was a native of Thessalonica, and a faithful fellow-laborer with Paul (Acts 20:4; 27:2; Phm. 1:24). In Ephesus, his life was threatened during the riot started by the unhappy silversmiths, (Acts 19:29). Having escaped, he then continued with Paul and was a prisoner with him at Rome (Col 4:10).

We see Demas. He is also mentioned in Col. 4:14. This is a sad story for later on Paul writes that Demas abandoned the Lord (2 Tim. 4:10).

2 Tim. 4

10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

Finally, we have Luke, the beloved doctor who wrote the gospel of Luke and also the Book of Acts. All four of these men are called '*fellow workers*' (SUNERGOS) meaning: co-laborers, work-fellow. It seems that these four men were not in prison as Paul was for, they are called '*fellow-workers*' while Epaphras is called a '*fellow-prisoner*'. As we can see the Lord God made certain that Paul was well surrounded by believers while he was in Rome.

²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit.

His blessing is that of '*grace*' (CHARIS) meaning: the divine influence upon the heart. The grace of Jesus would be '*with your spirit*'. The word '*spirit*' (PNEUMA) means: breath, fig: the human spirit. He wishes blessings to Philemon that only Jesus Christ can bring. May we also desire the best for others and teach others that, the best they can have, comes from the Lord God himself.