

# Exegesis of Philemon

[Presented at the Chicago Conference at St. Matthews  
Lutheran Church, Niles, Ill., November 10, 1970]

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## Authorship

Origin ascribes the Epistle of Philemon to Paul. Jerome in his commentary on the Epistle, mentions the fact that its genuineness was disputed by some because it did not treat of doctrinal matters; but he holds that it would not have been received by the church from the beginning unless it had been St. Paul's.

The internal evidence is strong. It bears the impress of the Pauline spirit throughout; and one has only to compare the vocabulary & style with those of the other few Pauline Epistles to be convinced at once that Paul wrote it. Only few of the modern scholars reject its Pauline authorship.

## Place and Writing & Date

Paul was in prison when he wrote it. He was not a prisoner for crime, but for the cause of Christ. Therefore the epistle must have come either from Caesarea (Acts 24-26) or from Rome (Acts 28,30) during 58-63 AD. Most writers agree that the group of Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians and to Philemon were written from Rome. (cf Lightfoot's Philippians p 30ff) This would narrow the date of this Epistle to somewhere between 60-63. The most probable date is 62 AD.

## Contents

The Epistles is an appeal made by St. Paul to Philemon himself, on behalf of his runaway slave, Onesimus. Philemon was a citizen of Colossae (Col. 4,17; Phil. 2,10-12; Col. 4,9) and he was also among the converts (v10) of Paul, and he evidently became a very zealous worker, since Paul applies the title *συνεργός* to him. From v5-7 it is clear that he was loving & hospitable. It would seem from v18 that Onesimus had committed a theft. If that is the case, the reason of his runaway would have been fear of punishments. St. Paul's influence upon him must have been strong to have induced him to return. The name Onesimus, like Philemon, is Phrygian, and Phrygian slaves were usually regarded with contempt. The name was very commonly given to slaves, and appears over and over again on inscriptions as the name of a slave.

The Epistle is a witness to the high demands which Christianity makes upon men; and the way in which it teaches the universal brotherhood of man together with the eternal truth. The power of the Gospel & the noble character of St. Paul are the two notes sounded throughout.

## Slavery

The institution of slavery was recognized, though not established, by the Mosaic Law. And it should be noticed that a laboring class, in our sense of the term, was almost unknown. The slave in many cases occupied the same social positions as the servant or laborer in modern times, but differed from him in regard to political status.

The letter to Philemon is the only Word of God dealing almost specifically with the timeless problem of slavery. In our own time we are not confronted with the legal problems of slavery as such, but with the problem of segregation (integration) which in many ways is thornier & paved with countless pitfalls of arguments and rationalization.

The letter of Philemon speaks to that problem, because in the nature of the case segregation is slavery with a different name. Paul's letter and God's instruction stand with or without the aid of the Supreme Court ruling that segregation & separate, but equal facilities are unconstitutional.

What is definitive in this matter for Christians is God's clear statement that Christian people must accept Christians regardless of their color, not as slaves, but "as beloved brothers...both in the flesh and in the Lord." You just don't stay separate from brothers, be they blood brothers or black ones spiritually one with us in faith.

The meaning is clear for our day. Our highest calling as Christians is to promote the knowledge of the good that is in Christ Jesus, His love and salvation. We can do it only in one way...by sharing our faith.

It's not enough to refer only to Roman slavery, although Onesimus was a slave and Philemon a master under the Roman regime. For St. Paul was a Hebrew, and the Hebrew conception of slavery must, therefore, be taken into account as well. Slavery was practiced by the Hebrews under the sanction of the Mosaic Law, not less than by the Greeks and Romans. Hebrew slaves belonged to the covenant people, and the Hebrew laws regarding slavery were exceedingly humane. A Hebrew slave could not be kept as such for more than 6 years. And in some cases a slave was much better in a servile condition than if he were free. And for that reason the Hebrews had a special law laying down the case of those who wanted to be bondsmen "forever." (Jer. 34,8-24) According to Lev. 25,45-46 the Hebrew was permitted to buy Gentile slaves, who became personal property & were inherited by the owners children. But the owners power over the slaves was limited by law; if he punished a slave to cause bodily (permanent) injury the slave gained his freedom; if the master chastised his slave, so as to cause death, he was treated as a murderer. And a slave who had escaped was not to be delivered up again to his master. Note: St. Paul could not be accused of having broken this law in the case of Onesimus, since the latter returned voluntarily.

Much ancient traditional matter is contained in *talmudical* writings. Let us note a few of these on the subject of slaves. It is said, that the master of a Hebrew slave (male or female) "must place him on equality with himself in lodging, food, & must act toward him in a brotherly manner." And according to *rabbinical* teaching a runaway slave who is captured must make good the time of his absence; and if this is the traditional & ancient law, which is very probable, it throws an interesting side light upon our Epistle. (1) It may have been, in part, the reason for St. Paul's insistence on the return of Onesimus to his master. (2) It may have some bearing on the words in v18-19. "But if he has harmed you in any way or owes you anything then make me answerable for it. I, St. Paul, wrote this with my own hand, and I will make it good (repay it)."

These few data are enough to show the spirit of mercy & fellow-feeling which characterized Jewish slavery. The Roman system was much different (cf. Lightfoot's Colossians & Philemon p 320 ff). Note: St. Paul's attitude toward slavery must be understood in the light of the Jewish system.

### **More Data on Philemon**

The churches which Paul had established and about which we know from the letters he wrote to them had difficulties that arose. Most of the problems were of a doctrinal nature. For example: The churches of *Galatia* were abandoning the pure Gospel of Jesus as Paul had preached it and were taking on a strong Jewish character. The church at *Philippi* was split because of persecution and uncertainty about the Gospel. The church at *Colossae* wavered from their faith as they invented deities, angels, whom they worshiped along with Christ. They were rapidly reasoning away Christ and His work on the Cross, substituting a philosophical religion of regulations patterned by the dictates of intellectuals.

This morning I'd like to tell you, not about another church, but about a member of the church in Colossae and the letter Paul wrote to him. It is the most personal of all of Paul's correspondence in our possession and it embodies some of the most practical instruction of a revolutionary character to be found in Holy Writ. That is *The Letter of Philemon*.

In the year 62 AD St. Paul was under house arrest in Rome. He was awaiting the outcome of his trial for treason against the empire. He had the limited liberties of a Roman citizen, which allowed him to live in a private home as he awaited the word of the government's decision. He was permitted to have visitors and it seems that he was also able to preach within a restricted area, With him during his arrest were his fellow missionaries Demas, Mark, Aristarchus, Luke, and Timothy. Messengers from Galatia, Philippi, Colossae, & Ephesus had visited Paul and kept him informed of the developments in the churches he had founded. But one day there appeared at his door the runaway slave of a Christian in Colossae—namely Onesimus, the servant of Philemon.

Philemon and his wife Apphia were wealthy and hospitable Greeks whose home was the center of Christian worship and acts of charity at Colossae. Their son, Archippus, was a novice in the ministry, perhaps a

subordinate of Epaphras, the local pastor. In keeping with their local position they had servants or slaves in their service. One of them by the name of Onesimus had run away and finally came to Rome. There he met Paul and poured out his story. He became a Christian and one of Paul's helpful companions. But the Apostle felt constrained to send Onesimus back since he was still the legal property of Philemon. And to insure that he would receive his servant with good grace and love, St. Paul wrote his letter to Philemon.

It is a remarkable providence of God that He has preserved such a short writing as this. It might have been thought of as little concern to the church, being not only a letter to a particular person (as those to Timothy & Titus), but of a private, personal matter, namely the receiving of a poor, fugitive servant into the favor and family of his injured master. Really there is nothing that concerns the common salvation. And yet, this Epistle was given, (as the other Scriptures were) by *inspiration* of God, and in the same sort, they are "Profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

At least by allusion, there may be something further in all this. It is certainly applicable to the intercession of Christ for poor sinners. We, like Onesimus, were revolters from God's service, and had injured Him. Jesus finds us, and by His grace, He works a change in us, and then He intercedes for us with the Father, that we may be received into His family again, with the past offences forgiven. There is no doubt that Paul prevailed with Philemon to forgive and receive his servant Onesimus. Now from these general observations we come to the Epistle of Philemon itself.

### Translation

(v1) Paul, a prisoner (for the sake) of Jesus Christ, and Timothy (my brother) unto Philemon, my beloved friend and co-worker. (v2) And to my beloved (sister) Apphia, and Archippus our fellow-soldier (in the Christian warfare), and to the church in thy house (that meets in your home). (v3) Grace (spiritual blessing) to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (v4) I thank my God, always making mention (of Thee) in my prayers. (v5) Hearing of Thy love and faith, which Thou hast (you practice) toward the Lord Jesus, and to all the saints (Christians, God's consecrated people). (v6) So that the fellowship of thy faith (the faith you have in common with them) may become energetic (result in action) by a personal knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's service. (v7) For we have great thankfulness (*charin*) and encouragement (*paraklesin*) by occasion of your love because the bowels of the saints (tender affections of your fellow Christians) have been refreshed by Thee, brother (comforted or cheered by you).

(v8) Wherefore, though having much boldness in Christ (having much freedom of speech in Christ) to order you to do what is proper (to give you directions as to your duty) what is becoming. (v9) Yet for the sake of love (I beseech you, I appeal to you on the ground of love) being as Paul, the aged, (being an old man, as you know) and now also in prison for the sake of Jesus Christ. (v10) I exhort you (plead with you) for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds (to whom I have become a father, while in prison) or (Whom I have converted during my imprisonment). (v11) Who once to thee was unserviceable, but now to thee and to me serviceable (whom you found, did you an ill service, but now he is helpful both to you and to me). (v12) Whom I sent back (to you) again (with this letter) that is my beloved bowels (in so doing I sent a part of myself). Receive him. (v13) Whom I was desiring to keep with myself, (it was my wish to keep him) that for thee he might service me (would attend to my wants) in the bonds of the glad tidings (of the Gospel). (v14) But apart from thy mind, I would do nothing (without your consent or approval I would do nothing) that not as by necessity thy goodness should be (that it might not be done under pressure) but willingly (by choice of your own desire). (v15) For perhaps because of this he was separated from thee (this was the reason I left you for a while) that eternally you might possess him (you might get him back permanently). (v16) No longer as a bondsman (slave) but above a servant (something better than a slave) especially to me, a brother beloved, and how much rather (more) to thee, both in the flesh (personally) and in the Lord. (v17) If, therefore, you hold me as a partner (as one in your fellowship, a bosom friend) then receive him as me (myself—welcome him back as you would me). (v18) But if he has wronged you (harmed you in any way) or owes you (anything) put that on my account (charge it to me) make me answerable for it. (v19) I, Paul, wrote this letter with my own hand (here is my signature) I will repay (I will make it good) for I do not say to you, that even you owe yourself to me (that

you owe me your very soul). (v20) Yes, brother, let me have profit of thee in the Lord (do me this favor) refresh my bowels in the Lord (comfort my heart in Christ) or (give new life to my heart). (v21) Being persuaded (confident-certain) of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that even above what I may say you will do (you will do better than I ask).

(v22) But withal also prepare me a lodging (have a guest room ready for me) (receive me as your guest) for I hope through your prayers, I shall be granted unto you (be permitted to come to you). (v23) Epaphras salutes you (sends his greetings) my fellow prisoner in Christ (Christ's captive like myself). (v24) Also Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers (worker for God). (v25) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you in Spirit. Amen.

## Exegesis of Philemon

### The Preface v1-7

(v1-2) In the first two verses of the preface are the persons from and to whom this Epistle is written. Paul, who calls himself a "prisoner of Jesus Christ" (*desmios*)—a prisoner for the faith and preaching of the Gospel, and Timothy, sometimes called by Paul "his son in the faith" but now, as he is more grown in years, he styles him his brother. Paul wrote this letter to Philemon and his wife Apphia, and with them Archippus, his fellow-soldier in the Christian warfare (Note: The title suggests the idea of conflict and hard service for the truth, with a view of final victory) and to the church in Philemon's home (Note: this means the Christians who met for worship in Philemon's home).

Philemon was the head of the family, in which Onesimus was a servant or slave. The letter was addressed to Philemon. And Paul, in the highest degree of the ministry not only calls Timothy, an evangelist, his brother, but he calls Philemon, an ordinary pastor, his dearly beloved co-worker and fellow-laborer. And Apphia, his wife, who took care of the domestic affairs, the apostle direct to her likewise. She is mentioned before Archippus, who was a minister in the church of Colossae, and perhaps a co-worker with Paul there. Paul called Philemon his fellow-laborer, and he calls Archippus, a fellow-soldier. And lastly this Epistle is addressed to the church that meets in Philemon's home.

NOTE: Ministers must look upon themselves as laborers and soldiers, who must be faithful and endure hardship. They must be on guard and make good their post. They must stand together and strengthen one another's hands and hearts in the work of their calling. They are provided with spiritual weapons, and God gives them the skill and the talents to use them.

As *laborers* they must minister the Word and Sacraments, watch over souls, "as those that must give an account of them." And as *soldiers*, they must fight the Lord's battles, and not entangle themselves in the things of this life. (2 Tim.2,4) And to these it is added "And to the church in thy house." Up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century we have no evidence of church buildings, as we know them, for the purpose of worship. And in Rome several of the oldest churches appear to have been built on the sites of houses used for Christian worship.

(v3) Next is the Apostles *salutation*. "Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (cf Rom. 1,7) This is the usual Pauline greeting. *The Expositors Greek Testament* says that it is a combination of the Greek Salutation (*charein*) and the Hebrew one (*shalom*). This is one of the tokens of every Epistle. It has not only the affection of a good wish, but the authority of a blessing. The priests under the law were to bless the people, and so are the Gospel ministers, in the name of the Lord.

Note: The favors desired are "grace and peace." In the Old Testament the salutation was "Peace be unto you!" and Paul adds "grace," that is the good-will (work) of God in us. And these favors come from "Our Father," as God and "from the Lord Jesus Christ as Mediator. (Note: Here I'd like to throw out a question and ask, why is the Holy Spirit not named?) In 2 Cor. 13,14 we find the benediction in full. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."

Now in the next 4 verses Paul expresses the affection he had for Philemon, by thanksgivings and prayer to God in his behalf, and the great joy for the many good things he knew and heard to be in him.

## The Thanksgiving v4-7

Paul says in v4-5: “I never stop to thank God and make mention of you in my prayers (cf Eph. 1,16; Phil. 1,3)—I have heard of your love and faith which you practice toward the Lord Jesus and to all the Christians, so that the faith you have in common with them may result in action.” (cf Col. 1,7-8; 4,12) Paul and Epaphras were fellow-laborers in the work; they served the same Master, though one was an apostle, the other an ordinary minister.

In v6 Paul says—(RSV) “I pray that the sharing of your faith may promote the knowledge of all the good that is ours in Christ.” \* For St. Paul as for all Biblical writers faith was more than an intellectual belief. By sharing the act of faith, by loving and serving God and man as Christ Himself had done, Philemon, in Paul’s view, would be promoting the knowledge of the good, the love, and the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Paul said that the act of love was most necessary for Philemon, for he was to receive Onesimus, “not as a slave but as a brother in the flesh and in the Lord.” (v16) He was all but saying, “Free him, my friend!” Paul felt that this would promote in the slave and in the church of Colossae a knowledge of the good that is in Christ Jesus. Paul had constant opportunities for worship and secret devotion and He prayed for others.

Note: Paul thanks God for the love he heard Philemon had, and for his faith in Christ also. These are the prime Christian graces. And faith worketh by love and never without it. Love proceeds faith. In Rom. 1,18 Paul says: “I thank my God because your faith is published throughout the world.” (cf Col. 1,3-4) Paul thanks God for the good that was not only in the churches, but in the individual persons he wrote to, even though it was known to him only by report. Paul hopes that the fruits of Philemon’s faith and love might become conspicuous and constrain others to come to Christ “that their light might so shine before men, that they, seeing their good works, might be stirred up to imitate them.”

## The Motive for His Thanksgiving v7

(v7) ...He adds a reason, “For we have a great joy (thankfulness \**charin*) and consolation (encouragement—*paraklesin*) in your love, because the bowels of the saints (the tender affections of your fellow Christians) are refreshed (cheered) by you, brother.” The good that you have done and are still doing is a matter of much joy and comfort to me and others, and I hope that you will continue in such good fruits more and more.

## Application:

The meaning of the above is clear for our day. We are to promote the knowledge of the good that is in Christ Jesus, His love and His salvation. That is our highest calling as Christian people. And we can do that in only one way—by sharing the act of faith, by living, loving, and witnessing our Savior. We look upon the consecrated efforts of our teachers in Vacation Bible School, who labor to teach the children the meaning, the use and the beauty of Christian Prayer. We look upon our Lutheran Collegians organization in our Wisc. Ev. Synod. Many students offer their assistance in summer programs in Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, etc. By so doing they have shared their faith with a most important part of the church. This shared faith will promote the good that is in Christ Jesus, because their teaching has become a part of the faith of little hearts. These people have demonstrated that they are promoters, arduous in their efforts to build the church of Christ.

Brethren, there is no greater task than to promote the Gospel of Christ. As we seek to do that in our own community, we shall have earned the name promoters, but more important, we shall show the world the blessed gift of love and forgiveness that is in Christ Jesus.

## Main Business v8-21

(v8)—“Wherefore” (*dio*) from what was before—“noted about the good that is reported of you, especially your love to all the saints, now let me see it, on a further occasion. Forgive and receive your servant, who is now a convert.—“Wherefore, though having much boldness (much freedom of speech in Christ) to order you to do what is becoming (proper) (*to anekon*). Note: The primary meaning of this verb is that of “having arrived at”

or “reached,” and ultimately, that of fulfilling a moral obligation. (Expositors). The word also occurs in Eph. 5,4; Col. 3,18)

Note: The apostles had great power in the church over the ordinary ministers. And this was a matter within the compass of the apostle’s power to require. And ministers as such are to use prudence in the exercise of their power. Yes, they must use godly wisdom and discretion.

(v9)—Paul goes on. “but for the sake of love (I appeal to you on the ground of love) being as Paul (an aged man, as you know) and now also in prison for the sake of Jesus.”—Here Paul, an aged apostle, now suffering for Christ & His Gospel, making a request, saying: “If you want to do anything for an aged prisoner, comfort me in my bonds, and make my chain lighter, grant me this one desire. If you do, you will honor Christ. He will take it as done to Himself.”

Note: We are accustomed to think of Paul as the persecutor of the Church, the inspired Apostle, the illustrious missionary, the author of many epistles. And here he is presented as *Paul the aged*. He himself penned that word.

Really Paul was not so old...about 60 years—but he had endured many labors, perils, and trials, which had aged him prematurely. (cf 2 Cor) He was beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, etc. When he noted his hands fettered with chains, his eyes now dimmed and hazy, etc., it made him realize, he was no longer the man he once was. But age had its compensation, and Paul uses it as an argument of weight.

Now God does not despise the aging man. We find this to be true when we turn to our Bible. To the aged *Abraham* God revealed His purpose of destroying Sodom & Gomorrah. Aged *Enoch* (365) before the Great Flood was most precious in God’s sight. And God uses *Moses* to bring His people from the land of bondage. *Simeon*, who was of great age, picked up the Infant Jesus in the Temple and sang a hymn of praise.

I’m sure the Word of God becomes more endured to us as we advance in years. We note the apostle at 60 is still employed in church service. And think of the wonderful letters he wrote, and the wisdom and consolation that is found in them. He may have had authority, but he did not always use it, he did not exercise it. He knew that love is mightier than law, a request in this case more powerful than a command. So he writes v8-9 “Wherefore I might be bold in Christ to give you directions as to your duty, yet for love’s sake I appeal to you.”

Note: There is no question that age with past experience, and the knowledge of the human heart, makes us more mellow, considerate, gentle, forbearing, and patient.

(v10)—“I plead with you for my child, Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds (to whom I have become a father, while in prison) or (whom I have converted)” Paul wants to say:—He may be your servant, yet in a spiritual sense he is now a son to me, God having made me the instrument of his conversion.

(v11)—“Who once was unprofitable, but now he is helpful both to you and me.” Yes, unsanctified persons are unprofitable persons. Even his godly master and mistress had no influence upon his character. But conversion always results in a change of social character. And thus Onesimus was now profitable both to Paul and to Philemon. Onesimus gave a new joy to the apostle by his conversion, while he waited on him, no doubt, in the ministry of private service and kindness.

(v12)—“Whom I sent back to you again (with this letter) that is my own bowels, receive him.” I love him as I do myself, and I have sent him back to you, and ask you to receive him. Do it for my sake. Receive him, as one that is dear to me. I think it will be for your advantage to receive him. He is changed, and you may expect him to be a faithful and dutiful servant, though in time past he was not that way.

Note: Even good folks may sometimes need great earnestness to let go their resentments and forgive those who have injured and offended them. Maybe it looks that way here, when Paul is so earnest and pathetic, mustering up so many pleas and arguments to gain what he requests. Philemon, a Phrygian, may have been of a rough and difficult temper, and may have needed all these pleas and arguments to move him to forgiveness. We should all strive to be like our Lord, who is “slow to anger, and ready to forgive, and abundant in pardon.”

(v13)—“I was desiring to keep him with myself, that he might serve me (attend to my wants) in the bonds of the glad tidings (of the Gospel).”

(v14)—“But apart from your mind (without your consent) I would do nothing that not by necessity thy goodness should be, but willingly.”

Note: Onesimus did not return of his own accord. He may have had some misgivings as to the reception he would have as a returned slave who had run away, or he may have been ashamed to appear again in the community, where his misdeeds had been made known. Paul would have liked to keep him around to serve his wants, but he also recognized Philemon's right to have him restored to his home.

Paul had apostolical power, but he also wanted to show what regard he had to civil rights, which Christianity does by no means supercede or weaken, but rather confirm and strengthen. Paul knew that Onesimus was Philemon's servant, and Paul would not hinder his return, especially since Onesimus had seen his sin and repented, and was willing to return.

(v15)—“For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that you might get him back permanently.”—Paul here speaks of a “departure for a season,” but really it was a criminal going away. Sin is always sin and the evil of it is not to be lessened, but in the person of a penitent sinner, as God covers it, so must we. God overruled the misdeeds of the servant for good. He always makes up for the losses of His saints in His own time and way.

(v16)—“No longer he comes to you as a slave, but something better than a slave, esp. to me, a brother, beloved, and how much more to you, both in the flesh, personally, and in the Lord.”—He comes to Philemon no longer in the character of a slave, according to the world's acceptance of the term, though he is still a slave. (v21); but the relationship between slave and master were in this instance to become altered.

Note: Paul does not say “not a servant” but “not *as* a servant.” Philemon and Onesimus are now brethren beloved. Now there was a double obligation to duty on Philemon's part corresponding to the double tie—that of the flesh and that of the Spirit—by which he was now connected with Onesimus. Now they were of the same common faith.

(v17)—“If you look upon me as a bosom friend, a partner, then receive him as me.” This is a plea of Christian fellowship. Paul regards Philemon as a fellow brother in faith, love and life. This fellowship implies that all saints have a common Father (Eph. 4,6) a common elder Brother (Hebr. 2,11) a common inheritance (Eph. 2,19) a common grace (Phil. 1,7) etc. Thus the believers become of one heart and soul. “Receive him as myself.” This is a sincere plea. In Phil. 2,4 Paul says: “If there be any fellowship of the Spirit—look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

Note: Onesimus was now a partner as well as an apostle. Therefore, as the old Puritan says: “Love me, love my partner. One partner receives another, even for a partner's sake.” If Philemon loves Christ, why not Onesimus. “Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of these little one's, ye have done it unto Me.” (Mt. 24,40)

(v18)—“If he has wronged you in any way, or if he owes you anything put it on my account (make me answerable for it).

(v19)—“I, Paul, wrote this with my own hand, I will repay it, for I don't say to you that you owe me your very soul.”—It seems that Onesimus had frankly confessed his misdeeds to Paul. And Paul uses mild language to describe them. He does not say that Onesimus robbed his master, because he did not want to hurt the feelings of the slave or his master. But he just speaks of the wrong done. Yes, if a sinner is penitent why should his old sins and follies be put in the forefront? Paul says, if he has done wrong, I will repay it, I will put my name on the bond. Onesimus was unable to make restitution, and if Paul became his surety, it was with an implied wish that Philemon would take a liberal view of his duty in the matter.

(v20)—“Yes, brother let me have joy of you in the Lord, do me this favor, refresh my bowels in the Lord (give new life to my heart).” Here Paul becomes more personal in his urgency. His appeal is affectionate. He had plenty sadness to depress him, and it was natural that he might look for a little joy from the obedience of his disciples. And he refers to the real source from which he gets his strength...his Lord. Constantly he rejoiced and gloried in the Lord, and commended his example to his converts and to all Christians generally.

(v21)—“Being certain of thy obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do better than I ask.”—It seems certain that Paul wrote this whole Epistle himself. This was quite exceptional as he usually employed an amanuensis (One employed to write what he dictated.) cf v19

Paul assures Philemon that he does not doubt his obedience, but he thinks it necessary to stir up his mind to remind him of his obligations. It seems as though Paul hints that Philemon might even release the servant

from slavery. Yet, Paul did not demand this.—Lightfoot says “Throughout this epistle the idea would seem to be present to his thought, though the word never passes his lips. This reserve is eminently characteristic of the Gospel. Slavery is never directly attacked as such, but principles are inculcated which must prove fatal to it.”

(v22)—“But withal prepare me also a lodging (have a guest room ready for me) for I hope that through your prayers, I shall be granted unto you (be permitted to come to you.)” Now Paul comes to another thing—a visit to Colossae. And he’d like to be a guest in Philemon’s home. And this he also requests of him. And Paul prayed often with much earnestness. (Rom. 15,30; 2 Cor. 1,11; Eph. 6,18) Likewise here, he believed in prayer (James 5,16)

(v23)—Now follow salutations and prayer... “Epaphras salutes you (send his greetings) my fellow prisoner in Christ.” (v24)—Also Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.”—(v25)—“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you in Spirit.” Amen!

Epaphras was of Colassae. (Col. 4,12) He was with Paul at the time of his writing his epistle to that church. By office he seemed to have been an evangelist (Col. 1,7; 4,12) laboring among the Collossians. He perhaps accompanied Paul, laboring in the same work of teaching and propagating the Gospel. He was confined in the same prison for the same cause—not for any crime or wickedness, but for the faith of Christ, and their service to Him.

*Marcus* (Acts 12,12), He was a cousin of Barnabas, son of a certain Mary, who lived at Jerusalem, and was probably born in that city. (Col. 4,10) John was his Jewish name, and Mark his name among the Romans. The John Mark of Acts 12,12-25, and the John of Acts 13,5 & 13 becomes Mark only in Acts 15,39, Col. 4,10, 2 Tim 4,11, Philemon 24. The change of John to Mark is analogous to that of Saul to Paul. He was once estranged from Paul but now at his side. (Col. 4,10) They were reconciled and the differences forgotten. (2 Tim 4,11) Paul bids Mark to be brought to him, “for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”

*Aristarchus*—(Col. 4,10—He and Mark were Jewish Christians. He was of Thessalonica. (Acts 20,4; 37,2—a devoted follower of Paul. He is first mentioned at Ephesus, together with Gaius, the Macedonian, as a companion of Paul’s travels. (Acts 19,29) We next hear of him with Paul at the end of his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey. (Acts 20,4) We find him embarking with the Apostle on his voyage to Rome. (Acts 27,2) Lightfoot thinks he may have left St. Paul at Myra, and returned to Thessalonica for a time (p 34, note 2). And he is with Paul at the date of the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon.

*Demas*—the name is probably a shortened form of Demetrius. He was not a Jew but a Gentile Christian. (Acts 16,10; 20,5-6) He is censured as having forsaken Paul, “from love of this present word.” (2 Tim. 4,10) Whether he repented and returned to his duty the Bible is silent. But he is joined with others who were faithful, as he is also in Col. 4,14. Lightfoot considers him a Thessalonian.

*Luke*, the beloved physician & evangelist, who came to Rome; companion of Paul. Name occurs 3 times (Col. 4,14; 2 Tim, 4,11; Philemon 24) He is also the author of the Acts. He was Paul’s associate in his greatest dangers.

Note: The ministry is not a matter of carnal ease or pleasure, but pains. If any are idle in it, they don’t answer their calling. (Mt. 9,38) “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers (not loiterers) into the harvest.”—“And the people are bid to know thorn that labor among them, & are over them in the Lord, and esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” (1 Thess. 5,12-13)

In closing v25—Paul prayed for grace, the love of God. This final verse is a repetition of the grace pronounced in v3. This is a simple, but beautiful prayer addressed to the Philemon household.

Dear Brethren... In closing, I’d like to add these words. Be not envious or jealous of one another. Rejoice in the labor of others. Knowing the difficulties, depressions, and disappointments that attend this sacred office, be charitable, cheering one another. Let us all keep in mind above all personal ambition the great cause of our common Master, Christ Jesus.

### **Summary of Philemon:**

Philemon is an Epistle to a particular person, Philemon, a rich Christian, presumable personally unknown to Paul (v5) (cf. Col. 1,4). His slave Onesimus, escaped (v15f) it seems, after a theft (v18). Philemon



lives with his wife, Apphia, and with Archippus, his son, evidently in Colossae, for Onesimus originates from there. (Col. 4,9) Archippus is also sought in Colossae, according to Col. 4,17.

The runaway Onesimus met with Paul somehow. He was accidentally brought to the same prison, where he was converted by Paul (v10) and entered into close relationship with him. (v12 & 16) Paul would have liked to keep Onesimus with him in the service of the Gospel, but he recognized his legal claim which Philemon had upon his slave. So he sent him back to his master.

Paul pleads for the fugitive, who otherwise would have had to look forward to severe punishment, Paul does not command, though he could have on the basis of his apostolic authority (v of & 14 & 21). It is Paul's hope that Philemon "will do even more than I say" (v 21). Paul only requests the restoration of Onesimus into the household of his master.