

Philemon: The Love Of A Believer

By

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Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 1 – Introduction

God bless you and welcome to this teaching series on the Epistle of Paul to Philemon.¹ As we get into this short twenty-five verse letter we will see an awesome portrait of three wonderful men who labored together in the gospel. Their love for God and each other sets them apart, and gives us an outstanding example of the impact of the love of a believer.

In the Epistle of Paul to Philemon, Paul requests that Philemon do the right thing and welcome Onesimus, a runaway slave, back as a brother profitable in the ministry. He intercedes for Onesimus while desiring to remain unified and likeminded with Philemon. He vouches for Onesimus and promises to pay for any debts incurred. He stakes his reputation on Onesimus' profitability in the work of the ministry and declares his certainty that Philemon will be magnanimous in dealing with Onesimus.

This epistle is the greatest concise statement on human relations ever written. Paul goes to great lengths to guarantee a successful resolution to the problem they are facing. It shows real leadership in action fighting for people and standing in the gap. It shows the necessity and importance of love and tact in handling difficult situations in the Body of Christ.

AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND DESTINATION:

Paul, who also includes Timothy in the salutation, writes the epistle. It is one of the prison epistles written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome (around 62 AD),



probably during the middle of Paul's imprisonment.² It was contemporary with Ephesians and Colossians and earlier than Philippians, which was the last of the so-called prison epistles.

Onesimus accompanied Tychicus to Ephesus where they delivered the Epistle to the Ephesians. They proceeded east onto Colosse where they delivered the Epistle to the Colossians. It was on that occasion that Onesimus delivered the Epistle to Philemon.

¹ Appendix 1 has different translations of the Epistle of Philemon for you to read.

² Paul was in bonds for two days in Jerusalem and for two years in Caesarea before being imprisoned in Rome. Although Church tradition generally teaches that Paul wrote the epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon from a Roman prison, it is possible that the first three of these, with the exception of Philippians, may have been written while Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea. Most who suggest the prison epistles were written from Caesarea make an exception for Philippians. The evidence is too great that Philippians was written from Rome. See: Bo Reicke, "Caesarea, Rome, and the Captivity Epistles," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.277-286. Also found at: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/caesarea_reicke.pdf.

Paul did spend time in prison at Caesarea for 2 years under Felix and Festus. However, I feel it is more likely that Paul wrote his four prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon) in Rome rather than in Caesarea because there is no mention in any of the epistles or in any external sources that Tychicus was ever in Caesarea at any time. Paul also told Philemon to anticipate his coming soon by preparing a guest-room for him. However, it seems clear from the Acts that Paul was not expecting an early release since Felix would not release him unless he was bribed (Acts 24:26). In addition, the fact that Paul had appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10-11) made it even more unlikely that Paul expected he would be free to visit Philemon any time soon.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 1 – Introduction

OCCASION AND PURPOSE:

Philemon was a fellowship coordinator in the area of Colosse who had a church in his home. He had a slave named Onesimus who had run away having stolen from him.³ Onesimus travels to Rome where he encounters Paul who leads him into the new birth. After his conversion Onesimus became useful to Paul in the work of the ministry. Onesimus stayed in Rome and was taught by Paul for awhile. When Colossians and Philemon were written, Onesimus was called a faithful and beloved brother⁴ and that doesn't happen overnight. Paul recognized Onesimus' responsibility to Philemon and returns Onesimus to Philemon with this epistle.

In the epistle Paul explains the situation as it has developed and asks Philemon to receive Onesimus, not as a returned runaway slave, but as a brother in Christ. If the mystery of God is true, then Onesimus is not property owned by Philemon, but rather a member of the body of Christ fit for the master's use and brother and equal of Philemon and Paul in the eyes of God.

The Epistle of Philemon is pastoral in nature. It deals with the care of the believers, specifically Philemon and Onesimus. When the epistles to Philemon and the Colossians were written, the believers were having doctrinal problems because they were not adhering to the revelation of the mystery, that there is one body with Christ as the head. The believers in Colosse allowed themselves to be swayed from the true doctrine of the mystery to the point that they no longer held Christ as the head of the body. The doctrinal problem that Colossians addresses, not holding Christ as the head of the body and not teaching the mystery, is also evidenced in Philemon. In the twenty-five verses in Philemon, Jesus Christ is referred to eleven times.

Ephesians sets forth the doctrine of the great mystery. Philippians corrects the practical error of not adhering to that revelation, and Colossians corrects the doctrinal error that developed from not holding it fast. Apparently, Archippus was not fulfilling his ministry responsibilities.⁵ Archippus was Philemon's overseer who was responsible to oversee the home fellowships in the area around Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. It is possible that the epistle to Laodicea mentioned in Colossians 3:16 is the epistle to Philemon because they were both delivered at the same time.

Ephesians talks about the one body and the head of that body, Christ.⁶ Colossians⁷ restates the truth that Christ is the head and we are complete in him. People were judging the Colossians and turning their attention from heralding the gospel of the great mystery to trivial matters of what to eat, drink, etc..⁸ They were distracted from what they should be doing by these stupid, piddling, trivial matters. They were setting up different heads,⁹ and not holding Christ as the head.¹⁰

³ Onesimus had at least stolen himself and probably taken other things with him as verse eighteen may suggest.

⁴ Colossians 4:9

⁵ Colossians 4:17

⁶ Ephesians 1:22,23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4,12,15,16

⁷ Colossians 1:18 and 2:10

⁸ Colossians 2:16,17

⁹ Colossians 2:18

¹⁰ Colossians 2:19

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 1 – Introduction

Colossians was written to encourage the acknowledgement of the mystery.¹¹ Philemon needed that full precise knowledge, too.¹² Philemon addresses a specific situation where the importance of keeping Christ as the head is paramount.

I have to admit that I've spent much more time studying Timothy and Titus than I have put into Philemon until recently. But the more time I spend in Philemon, the more I see how valuable it is, and how it tempers the other Pastoral Epistles. Reading Timothy and Titus one is impressed with the resolute authority with which Paul speaks as a leader to other leaders. He is resolute and speaks absolutely using frequent imperatives. The last time I counted there were more than thirty imperatives in the four chapters of II Timothy. That's about one every two and a half verses.

An imperative is a command, a charge, like: "Hold fast the form of sound words." "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." "Study to show thyself approved unto God." "Flee youthful lusts." "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid."

Timothy and Titus have that flavor; they are full of commands. They remind me a great deal of military communication; orders are given and obedience is expected. The words "commandment" and "charge" set a tone that is not easy to miss. Paul says, "I charge thee..." I'm ordering you, so do what I'm telling you. Forms of the English words "command" and "charge" occur seventeen times in Timothy and Titus.¹³

Without the Epistle of Philemon to temper the tone, one might think that leadership was always demanding and authoritative. However, Philemon shows us the other side. In it we find an example of Paul dealing with a situation where he does not command, he appeals to Philemon to do the right thing knowing he would do even more than Paul asked. Although Paul does use the imperative mood four times in Philemon (about one every six verses), he does not make one charge or command. Although he notes that he is bold enough to do so, he does not. He says, "Though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin or command thee... yet for love's sake I rather beseech *thee*."¹⁴ He knew he had the authority as an apostle to do that, but he did not want to use it in Philemon. He spoke to Philemon as an equal, and it is very important for servant-leaders to learn to treat one another with respect as equals.

Now I don't mean to infer that there is anything wrong with speaking authoritatively or using imperatives. Obviously Paul did so in Timothy and Titus, which are God-breathed. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. There is a time and place for that, but it's not all the time and every place. Philemon however shows us another way in which a servant-leader may communicate with other servant-leaders. If we are going to develop heart for one another as servant-leaders working together, we need to be able to be respectful and handle situations with tact and love.

Both Timothy and Titus were called children by Paul, true, genuine, beloved children.¹⁵ They were close to Paul; he loved them and treated them as His own dear children. He brought them up and taught them in the Word as a father, as he says in

¹¹ Colossians 2:2

¹² Philemon 6

¹³ I Timothy 1:1,3,5,18; 4:3,11; 5:7,16,21; 6:13,14,17; II Timothy 2:14; 4:1,16; Titus 1:3,14

¹⁴ Philemon 8,9a

¹⁵ I Timothy 1:2; II Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 1 – Introduction

I Corinthians 4:15. As their spiritual father Paul treats them as dear children charging and encouraging them in the work of the ministry. Their epistles are concerned with conduct in service. Not only does Paul instruct them personally, but he lays down guidelines for the selection and oversight of other servant-leaders, too.¹⁶

In Philemon we see Paul interceding for Onesimus, and pleading for Philemon to do the right thing. Paul also notes that he fathered Philemon in the Word, and gently reminds him of it. However, in Philemon we see Paul beseeching him instead of commanding him.

Since he was convinced of Philemon's obedience, one could wonder what the difference was. Maybe he didn't command him because he didn't think he needed to. If you know someone is going to obey without commanding, why command? Although the outcome may be the same, the manner the likemindedness was established is different. In Philemon we see clearly that leadership is based on inspiration and motivation not domination and manipulation. Beseeching engenders cooperation not intimidation. At the very heart of Philemon we see the desire to do the right thing, and when people have that heart working together is really rather simple.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Roman law made it illegal to harbor runaway slaves and severely punished anyone who did. If the authorities had apprehended Onesimus he would have been harshly punished or perhaps even killed. If his life were spared, he would have been returned to Philemon or resold in the Roman slave market.

Undoubtedly, Philemon would have received a tremendous amount of pressure from other slave owners to do something severe to Onesimus to serve as a deterrent to other slaves considering similar action. Romans were almost universally afraid of their slaves. In 61 AD, right around the time this epistle was written, a slave murdered Pedanius Secundus. As a result, every slave that he owned, around 400, was put to death. In 60 AD Seneca wrote, "You have as many enemies as you have slaves." About half the population of Rome were slaves.¹⁷ Captured runaway slaves were usually very harshly punished, but Philemon was encouraged to withstand the pressure from the other slave owners and treat Onesimus as a brother.

Colosse was a city in the Roman province of Asia, in the west of what is today Turkey. It was situated less than 10 miles up the Lycus valley from Laodicea on a main road to the east. It was the point at which the routes from Sardis and Ephesus joined at a defensible place with an abundant water supply. It had a mixed heritage, culturally and religiously. The mystery religions flourished, as did philosophy and Gnosticism. Many of the Judeans in Colosse worshipped angels. The gospel probably reached Colosse while Paul was living in Ephesus in Acts 19:10. Paul established an outreach center at the school of Tyrannus, and in the space of two years and three months all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Colosse was in Western Asia. It was during that time that Acts 19:11 says, "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul." So when the Word began to move there they saw things

¹⁶ Within the church leadership is exercised differently than in the world. Within the church, the greatest leaders are the greatest servants. See: Mark 10:42-45; Matthew 20:25-28; Luke 22:24-30; I Peter 5:1-4.

¹⁷ <http://www.interlog.com/~gilgames/society.htm>

Philemon: The Love of a Believer **Session 1 – Introduction**

happen in a big way.

Paul was born at Tarsus of Cilicia¹⁸ of Hebrew parents.¹⁹ His father, in addition to being a Pharisee,²⁰ was also a Roman citizen. Therefore Paul himself was a Roman citizen by birth.²¹ That was a big deal. He was born free. Slaves who had been freed were called *freedmen*. Though free, the ignominy of having once been a slave (or being descended from slaves) placed them in a lower social class than citizens. Freedmen were, however, no longer subjected to the brutality of the slave-owning class. Roman citizens were technically the only people with real rights, and these superceded most of the rights enjoyed by others.

Paul may have been chained to a soldier when he witnessed to Onesimus. That soldier was a Roman who could have reported Paul and the runaway slave to the authorities. However, when you walk by the spirit and God works in situations and in people's hearts a lot of things can happen. If you must be chained to a soldier, you might as well be chained to one who is hungry and seeking the truth. That may have been what was happening here. If Paul did not win him to the faith, he was willing at the least to look the other way at times. It does say that the Word reached into Caesar's house. Perhaps this is some of the influence it had.

Philippians 4:22:

All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.

I Timothy was written regarding the rule of the Church during its rise and expansion, and II Timothy was written regarding the church in its ruin while many departed from the faith.²² It is just so wild to me that during Paul's ministry after the Word moved so vibrantly and spread over that entire section of the world covering all Asia in two years and three months, that by the end of his life most people had left him and departed from the faith. II Timothy documents the steps down, but that's for another teaching at another time.²³ Philemon was written to demonstrate how love motivates a servant-leader to fight for his people. It shows how the love of a believer can have an impact and make a difference. This is leadership in action fighting for one person, even a person of the lowest echelon of the culture at the time. You have to set aside all your prejudices if you want to serve at this level of leadership. If Paul thought as the rest of the world thought, he would have never esteemed Onesimus worthy of this kind of personal attention.

Romans 5:7 says, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure [perhaps] for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ died for us when we were dead in sin, without God and without hope in the world. If Paul knew Onesimus

¹⁸ Acts 9:11; 21:39; 32:3

¹⁹ Philippians 3:5

²⁰ Acts 23:6

²¹ Acts 16:37; 22:28

²² *Numbers in Scripture* page 96.

²³ The four steps down are: 1. They turned away from the Apostle Paul (II Timothy 1:15). 2. They erred concerning the truth, speaking contrary to the truth, questioning the integrity of God's Word (II Timothy 2:17,18). 3. They resisted the truth (II Timothy 3:8). 4. They turned unto fables, believing lies (II Timothy 4:33,4).

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 1 – Introduction

was a runaway slave when he harbored him, he was putting his neck on the line. Paul harboring a runaway slave could have cost him his life. He stood against culture; he stood for one individual.

Slavery, although an established institution in the culture and society, was done away with spiritually according to Corinthians and Galatians.

Galatians 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

That doesn't mean those distinctions did not exist. But spiritually in our ability to minister and live for God and operate the power of God in our lives it does not matter if we are Jew or Greek... If we are bond or free... If we are male or female... Onesimus could walk by the spirit as well as Philemon could. In the culture of that day those were big deals! It did matter, and it mattered a great deal.

I Corinthians 12:13:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

This was the truth, and Paul would stand for it. What better time would there be for Paul to send Onesimus back? Tychicus and Onesimus were delivering epistles that handled this very thing.

However, the issue of slavery never comes up in Philemon. Paul is telling Onesimus to go back and be a slave. He's telling Philemon not to receive him back as a slave, but as a brother. The issue is how Philemon will receive him, and what he will do with him after that. Will Philemon treat him according to culture as a runaway slave or according to the Word as a reconciled brother?

Let's look at what the prison epistles teach masters and slaves.

Colossians 3:10,11:

And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all. [Christ is everything in every person]

This was read to the fellowship when Tychicus and Onesimus arrived in Colosse. The only bragging rights we have is Christ in us the hope of glory. Being a master or a servant made no difference to God. He equally equipped both for the work of the ministry.

Colossians 3:22:

Servants, obey in all things *your* masters according to the flesh; not with

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 1 – Introduction

eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

In whatever situation we find ourselves we have to deal with things with singleness of heart, with focus to do our best.

Colossians 3:23-4:1:

And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

4:1 Masters, give unto *your* servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

This was the epistle that was delivered to everyone. This was general teaching for the fellowship of believers. If you are going to be a master, you better be a good one, or you will get no rewards for it.

I often wondered what it must have been like for Philemon to be in the meeting when Tychicus and Onesimus walk in with the epistle to the Colossians. How Philemon and Onesimus would have reacted upon seeing each other. How Onesimus giving Philemon the epistle from Paul, apologizing for what he had done, and announcing he was back to resume his service as Philemon's slave... how would that have occurred? Deep emotions must have stirred.

Ephesians 6:5-9:

Servants, be obedient to them that are *your* masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:

8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether *he be* bond or free.

9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

Servants were to obey their masters, and masters were to treat their saves with justice and equality. Philemon was to accept Onesimus back after he had changed, so we, too, are to accept people, especially servant-leaders, back when they return to fellowship after having departed for a season. Nobody's perfect; we all make mistakes, but when people change and come back we receive them graciously.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer **Session 1 – Introduction**

STRUCTURE:

- [1-3] A Opening Salutation
- [4-7] B Paul's recognition of Philemon's past actions
- [8,9] C Paul the aged might command, but does not
- [10-12] D Onesimus profitable to me and thee
- [13,14] E Paul's desire for likemindedness with Philemon
- [15-17] D Onesimus beloved to me and thee
- [18,19] C Paul the debtor does not say, but he might have
- [20-22] B Paul's believing for Philemon's future actions
- [23-25] A Closing Salutation

KEY CONCEPTS:

There are certain concepts which are vital in assisting us to understand God's heart in this epistle. Without identifying and clarifying these truths we will miss much of the impact God intends for us to receive.

Jesus Christ: Christ is head, and our direction comes from him. Every member of the Body of Christ is to take his or her direction from him. The frequent references to him are a constant reminder of whom we reverence, obey, and from whom we receive our direction.

If Paul, Philemon, Onesimus, and the believers in their home fellowship hold Christ as the Head of the Body, there should be no trouble resolving this situation, because Christ knows how to fix it. Jesus Christ, in one title or another, is mentioned eleven times in the 25 verses of Philemon.

Philemon 1:

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

When these two names, Jesus and Christ, occur together the former is emphatic by its position, the second being subsidiary and explanatory. Jesus Christ emphasizes Jesus, the humiliated one who is now exalted and glorified as Christ. This first occurrence of Jesus Christ occurs in one of the unique salutations in the epistles. "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ." The emphasis is on his humility and service. This phrase also occurs in verse nine. *Prisoner* is also a key concept, which we will discuss in our next session.

Philemon 3:

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

This Jesus Christ is also our Lord. We are to serve him as a slave would his lord with unquestioned reverence and obedience. The relationship Onesimus had to Philemon, each one of us has to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon 5:

Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the **Lord Jesus**, and toward all saints;

Philemon: The Love of a Believer **Session 1 – Introduction**

Here we are reminded that it is the humiliated one which we made lord of our lives. There is no mention of his exalted or glorified position. He who humbled himself we humble ourselves to and serve as lord. We are serving him who served and set the example

Philemon 6:

That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in **Christ Jesus**.²⁴

This title emphasizes the one exalted far above all principality and power, who once humbled himself. The phrase in Christ Jesus refers many times to our identification with him. He became as we were, and now we have been made as he is. We have been seated with him at the right hand of the Father, where we too reign with him as sons of God with all power. We are to identify with him and walk as he walked with power and authority.

Philemon 8:

Wherefore, though I might be much bold in **Christ** to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

Christ emphasizes the divine relationship of the sent one. *Christ* in the New Testament is the same as *Messiah* in the Old Testament. It means the anointed one. *In Christ* refers to the position of honor and privilege in which God has placed us once we are born again of His spirit. Paul recognized the authority he had in Christ and was willing to use it when it was appropriate. He doesn't do so here, however.

Philemon 9:

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

This is the repetition of the phrase from the salutation, prisoner of Jesus Christ. The next three references address him as the lord.

Philemon 16:

Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the **Lord**?

Philemon 20:

Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the **Lord**: refresh my bowels in the **Lord**.²⁵

Lord emphasizes the authority and lordship arising from and pertaining to ownership.

²⁴ Jesus is omitted in some of the critical Greek manuscripts of this verse, but it occurs in the Aramaic Peshitta.

²⁵ Many of the critical texts have "in Christ."

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 1 – Introduction

In the Lord is a phrase that indicates service to God and God's people.²⁶ We recognize his lordship and remain faithful and committed to do as he directs. We recognize that we have been bought with a price, and we no longer serve man but him who laid down his life for us all. We are *in the Lord* when we are faithful and committed to live for him. If Philemon would remain *in the lord*, faithful and committed to do the will of the Lord, then Paul would rejoice and be refreshed.

Philemon 23:

There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in **Christ Jesus**;

Epaphras was a prisoner along with Paul. He, too, identified with Christ Jesus and recognized his position in Christ, being held captive by his freewill commitment and dedication.

Philemon 25:

The grace of our **Lord Jesus Christ** be with your spirit. Amen. {*Written from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a servant.*}

This closes the epistle as it opened, remembering the Lord Jesus Christ. These eleven occurrences are consistent reminders throughout this short epistle that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who died for us and that we are to live in him. He accomplished our full and complete salvation, and we have been granted the privilege to live and move and have our being in him.

Jesus is mentioned eleven times in twenty-five verses. He appears in six different titles, functioning in different ways. In Philemon we come face to face with our multi-faceted savior, who has done all things for us.

How are people going to see Jesus today? How many trips do you think he is going to make to introduce himself to people? He did it with Paul. Do you know of anyone else? Perhaps that shows us that, for the most part, if people are not going to see the Lord Jesus Christ today until they see him in us. They will never be introduced to him until we open our mouths and speak about him. They may never see the love of Christ until they see it in our hearts and lives.

We have Christ in us for a reason. He has transformed our lives and given us the privilege to represent him. People may never see the Lord Jesus Christ, until they see him in you. Indeed, in the epistle of Paul to Philemon we see the Lord Jesus Christ in Paul as he manifests the love of God, interceding for Onesimus.

Jesus Christ is our example. When we live as he lived and love as he loved, we will be walking in his steps. It is the love of Christ that constrains us, and that gets us to the next key concept, love.

Love: Another key concept in Philemon is *love*, the Greek word *agapē*, the love of God in the renewed mind in manifestation. Love is specifically mentioned in verses five, seven, and nine.

²⁶ For further study see: http://kurios.homestead.com/files/1_in_the_lord.htm

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 1 – Introduction

Philemon 5:

Hearing of thy love [*agapē*] and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;

Philemon 7:

For we have great joy and consolation in thy love [*agapē*], because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

Philemon's love was recognized and appreciated. Paul also mentions it as a reason for his actions.

Philemon 1:9a:

Yet for love's [*agapē*] sake I rather beseech *thee*...

Paul acted the way he did in this epistle because of the love of God he had in his heart. Therefore we see the love of God underlying everything Paul does. Philemon and Onesimus are also called beloved [*agapētos*]. *Agapētos*, refers to one who is characterized by the love of God. They had endeared themselves to Paul, and he loved them very much.

Philemon 1:

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved [*agapētos*], and fellowlabourer,

Philemon 16:

Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved [*agapētos*], specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

The love Philemon has shown to the believers by refreshing²⁷ them is commended, and the great love of Paul for both Philemon and Onesimus is openly apparent. The love of God permeates this entire epistle. There is no other epistle I know that shows the compassion and impact of the love of a believer like Philemon does.

Another word that shows how the deep feelings of love and compassion motivate the believers is *splanchnon*, the words for *bowels*. It is used three times in Philemon, which is more than any other New Testament book. It also shows the depth of emotion and compassion that moved the believers to act on one another's behalf.

Brotherhood/Equality: Another key concept is brotherhood. We see this equality with the use of *brother, sister, partner, and fellow*. Paul addresses the others in this epistle with terms that show equality in their relationships. Paul calls Timothy, Philemon, and Onesimus brother and Apphia, sister. Paul calls Philemon, Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, and Lucas *fellow* laborers, Archippus a *fellow* soldier, and Ephras a *fellow* prisoner. Paul also qualifies his first imperative, saying to Philemon, "If thou count me therefore a partner." Partnership, equality, and brotherhood are also keys to understanding the heart of this exquisite epistle.

²⁷ The Greek *splanchnon* also testifies to the impact of the love of God on the lives of the believers.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 1 – Introduction

Prisoner: The last key to understanding the epistle I want to mention revolves around Paul being a prisoner in bonds. Paul refers to himself twice as “a prisoner of Jesus Christ,” and he makes other references to his bonds in Philemon. He also calls Epaphras a “fellowprisoner.”

We will handle this key concept more at length in our next session. Being a prisoner of the lord was not something that happened at the new birth. Being a prisoner of the lord was a level of commitment and sacrifice at which Paul arrived later in his ministry. We will see in our next session what has transpired in his life before he calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Next session we will start with verse one and see more about Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ. God bless you.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer
Appendix 3 – Ten Pillars Of Wisdom

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

The opening of Philemon is very unique. This is the only epistle that opens this way: “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” This is a key concept in Philemon. It comes up again in verses 9, 10, 13 and 23, which we will read before we finish this session. Paul is also called a prisoner in Ephesians 3:1 and 4:1.

At the beginning of chapter three of Ephesians, introducing the exposition of the great mystery, Paul said:

Ephesians 3:1:

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

This does not only refer to Paul’s physical imprisonment, but also to his attitude and sold-out commitment.¹ Again as he introduces the practical section of Ephesians at the beginning of chapter 4 he says:

Ephesians 4:1:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

Paul describes himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ or a prisoner of the Lord, not a prisoner of Caesar or of Rome. Although this terminology does not come up until after Paul’s imprisonment in Rome, the terminology indicates more than just the simple fact that Paul was chained to a Roman guard.

Acts 28:16:

And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered [allowed] to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

Every other prisoner who got off that ship went to prison. Paul did not. He was allowed to dwell by himself with a soldier who kept him. This was Paul’s “house arrest,” and it lasted about two years.

Acts 28:30:

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

While Paul was there he was chained to the guard and the guard kept him. That’s how they did it back then. Even today we have what we call house arrest, but instead of being chained to a guard, we have electronic bracelets around our ankles, electronic shackles. Back then they just chained them together. Every other prisoner who got off the boat with Paul ended up in prison. Paul was the exception; he was allowed to stay under guard in his own house.

That’s why I know God had to be involved. Paul was not incarcerated in a prison, but

¹ There can be no doubt that the actual imprisonment of Paul everywhere underlies the usage. But this real imprisonment is set in relation to Christ and the gospel.” Kittel, G., TDNT, Vol II p.43.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

was allowed some degree of freedom to entertain friends and guests. One of those he encountered during this time was Onesimus, who was a runaway slave. Now Rome did not have a police force, per se. However they did have men whose sole job was retrieving and returning runaway slaves. That was a high priority to the Romans.

Until that time when he arrived at Rome and was chained to a guard he never wrote of himself as being a prisoner. Many people assume that he was called a prisoner of Jesus Christ, because he was a prisoner of Rome. I just don't think it is that simple or that literal. It doesn't say a prisoner of Caesar; it says a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Being a prisoner is not usually something we aspire to. If you were to ask children, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I would not expect to hear someone respond, "I want to be a prisoner." However, Paul proudly states this of himself. He was a *prisoner of Jesus Christ, a prisoner of the Lord*.

He had been a prisoner before in Philippi, Jerusalem, and Caesarea, but he had never been called that until Acts 28. During this time he receives the revelation of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, which are known to us today as the *prison epistles*.

Yes, he was physically a prisoner of Rome, and he spoke of it in Acts 28. While chained to his Roman guard he called the chief of the Jews together to speak to them about his situation.

Acts 28:17:

And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men *and* brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

Paul was a prisoner delivered into the hands of the Romans, and this is the only place where Paul states it in this way. After this Paul never spoke of himself as a prisoner of Rome or a prisoner of Caesar. He was a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither was he ashamed of his bonds. The bonds to which he referred had a dual meaning. They were both physical bonds and bonds of commitment.

Paul was well aware of physical bonds. In Acts 9:2 Paul bound believers and threw them into prison, and he received that authority from the chief priests.² The earthquake in the Philippian prison opened the doors of the prison and loosened his bonds or bands.³ In Jerusalem the chief captain who rescued him, bound him with two chains.⁴ Paul was left bound in the Caesarean prison in Acts 24 as a favor to the Jews.⁵ However, the same Greek word for bound or bonds, *deō*, Thayer says means to put under obligation of the law or duty. It is used in Romans 7:2 and I Corinthians 7:27 and 39 of the commitment of marriage and the duty to one's spouse. I know in our culture marriage is spoken of derisively as being in bonds or being shackled or having a ball and chain, but Biblically it was positive and showed commitment and duty to one's spouse.

² Acts 9:14

³ Acts 16:26

⁴ Acts 21:33

⁵ Acts 24:27

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

Paul spoke of his bonds both physically and in commitment to the cause of Christ. When Paul called himself a prisoner of the Lord, it referred to not only his physical bonds but also his commitment and sold-out attitude. Although he never described himself in this manner before his imprisonment in Rome, the association with the Lord Jesus Christ allegorically takes the truth to another level.

Some scholars believe the phrase prisoner of Jesus Christ meant simply that he was a prisoner because of his stand and his witness for Jesus Christ. He spoke for Jesus Christ, which was what got him thrown in jail, and that is true. However I think it means more than that. It indicates a further level of commitment he didn't have before. Something has definitely transpired so that Paul now refers to himself as a prisoner, when he had not done so before.

I believe two major events precipitated this change. First, he went to Jerusalem when he knew that he should not have gone. Second, he received the revelation of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. These Prison Epistles unfold the greatness of the mystery, the sacred secret God kept hidden from before the foundation of the world until He revealed it to the Apostle Paul.

In Acts 20 Paul was headed for Jerusalem even though God had instructed him not to go. (Paul wanted to be back by Pentecost.) Paul admitted as much in Acts 20:22.

Acts 20:22a:

And now, behold, I go bound [*deō*] in the spirit unto Jerusalem...

Deō, as it is used here, means committed and functioning under a sense of duty. He was bound; he was committed to this course of action. He was functioning under a sense of duty, loyalty, or commitment. He was bound in the spirit. This usage of spirit means the individual entity or self, and refers to issues that result from the operation of a man's mind. This act of Paul's will to go to Jerusalem involved great emotion and passion. Paul had committed himself. He made this decision, and he was committed to it. He was going, and it wasn't up for discussion.

I don't know about you, but I have found myself in that situation on more than one occasion. Because of misplaced loyalty to people or organizations, I found myself acting in similar fashion. Because of my emotional attachment to the people and passion for what I was doing, I overlooked God's specific direction. Because I was so committed and fervent, my judgment was distorted and the resulting resolve was inappropriate. Paul is not the only one who ever acted in this way. It's unfortunate, but I understand why he did what he did.

Acts 20:22,23:

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

23 Save [except] that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

There's God trying to keep Paul out of trouble. God doesn't want Paul incarcerated. He's trying to persuade Paul not to go, but Paul has freewill. Paul is bound; he feels a

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

duty to his brethren the Jews,⁶ and has committed himself to go to Jerusalem. Although God has told him in every city along his journey not to go, he refuses to be budged from his commitment to help his brethren in Jerusalem.

The revelation could not have been any clearer. But Paul wants to save his brethren; he wants to help the Jews; so he decides to go anyway. He tells God, “I don’t care if I end up in prison, I want to do it anyway.” He has an error in judgment. His heart was right, but he chose the wrong course of action. Although God kept working to keep Paul from going, Paul had committed himself; he was blindly loyal to the decision he had made despite the cost to him personally.

Acts 20:24:

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul understood that God changed His mind at times when circumstances and men’s hearts change. He understood that revelation once given may change, but here the revelation is not only established a second time, it is repeated many times.⁷ Paul should have known better. But, he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was groomed under Gamaliel to serve on the Sanhedrin. Paul was a hot-shot; he was a respected member of the Jewish society and had served at the highest levels. He prospered in the Jew’s religion. He knew where they were at. He understood their thinking. He had been there. He had thought that way, too. He just thought that if he could just talk to them, certainly they would listen to him. He had been as zealous of the traditions of the fathers as any one of them. He sought and received authority from the chief priests to imprison and kill the believers. He was one of them — surely they would listen to him.⁸

Acts 20:25:

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

Paul knew he would not see these people again. He knew that grievous wolves would come and not spare the flock,⁹ but he decides to go anyway. God told him all along the way to not go to Jerusalem, but Paul wanted to go. Can you imagine that someone with the love and compassion that Paul had... someone who had traveled so extensively and given himself so selflessly... someone who loved so genuinely... someone who worked so heartily to move the word and establish churches throughout the Mediterranean would ignore God’s direction knowing that all he had worked for would be lost and scattered to the wolves? This mistake would have big-time repercussions that Paul would have to deal with. For a man as committed and driven as Paul was this mistake would be disastrous.

⁶ Romans 9:1-3; 10:1.

⁷ See *Walking By The Spirit*, Wayne Clapp, Hour 3

⁸ Galatians 1:13,14; Philippians 3:4-6

⁹ Acts 20:29

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

In chapter 21 he gets to Caesarea and Philip's daughters tell him not to go. Then God sends down the Prophet Agabus to dissuade him to no avail.

Acts 21:12-14:

And when we heard these things, both we [those traveling with Paul including Luke], and they of that place, besought him [Paul] not to go up to Jerusalem.

13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. [OK Paul if you don't want to do the will of the Lord, do whatever you want to do.]

When the people saw that Paul was unalterably committed to go to Jerusalem they quit telling him to do the will of the lord. Paul's heart was right, but he made an error in judgment. He did not trust God, Who saw the big picture. He knew he was doing the wrong thing. It was after this point that the movement of the Word in Paul's ministry is retarded. In the next two years he doesn't win hardly anyone. We know about Onesimus and we know about Agrippa like it says in Acts 26:28, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

However, after he gets to Rome and receives the great revelation of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, he realizes what he sacrificed back in Asia. He doesn't want to make another error in judgment like that again, so he figuratively, in his thinking, chains himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. He decides he is not just going to be a *doulos*, a bondsman; he is going to chain himself to Christ.

That's the imagery he had in mind. Just like he was chained to the Roman guard, he now pictured himself chained to Christ. After making that mistake, he wasn't going to go anywhere he was not supposed to go again. That's where this figure of being a prisoner of Jesus Christ comes from. I am chaining myself to him, and I am not going to blow it like that again.

We know that God didn't leave him. God never forsook him. It was while he was in Rome in chains that he receives the greatest revelation ever written. He wrote down such exquisite truths regarding the mystery of God, the Sacred Secret that God kept hidden from the foundation of the world. It was after receiving this revelation and reflecting on his mistake in judgment that he by revelation from God calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians he also calls himself an ambassador in bonds.

Ephesians 6:20:

For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Yes he was an ambassador chained to a Roman soldier, but he was also bound to his lord. He was captive to his sold-out commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he spoke, as he ought to speak. Not just when it was easy or convenient; not like he was conversing about the weather; he spoke, as he ought to speak with passion and

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

commitment for his Lord Jesus Christ.

We know God doesn't violate our free will. He never literally takes us captive, but His truth can captivate us. In English "captivate" originally meant to take or hold captive. However, another usage developed on a more positive side. It also means to attract and hold the attention, interest, or affection of, as by beauty or excellence.

You may have heard men speak of a woman being captivating. We may speak of an idea or ideology such as freedom that way. The founding fathers of our country were captivated by freedom and self-government. They were willing to stake their lives, their families, and their fortunes on its realization.

For Paul it was the exquisite beauty of the revelation of the mystery... the excelling excellence of the revelation that God gave Paul enamored him. He was captivated by it in a positive sense. He was so blown away by what God had to say about "Christ in you" and the body God has called him to that he was captivated by it. He was enthralled, his heart and life were captured.

After Paul goes when he knew he shouldn't and ends up in prison as God said he would, God still bestows His grace upon him. That God would give him the revelation of the mystery and allow him to communicate it to God's people after he had made such a terrible mistake touched him to the very core of his being. He saw God's grace bigger than he ever had before.

Paul was allowed to stay in his own hired house and although he was not free to move he still had Onesimus and Epaphras and Tychicus, and Luke and others whom he was allowed to teach. All these fellowlaborers were running errands and teach in his place. That he was allowed to teach a handful of men and still coordinate the work of the ministry while chained to a Roman soldier blew his mind. Paul saw God's grace bigger than ever before.

Paul had made a terrible mistake. Can you imagine a man like Paul who so loved God's people and had traveled so extensively and done so much for the body of Christ to know that grievous wolves were going to come in and scatter the flock. How would you like it as a servant-leader of a home fellowship for God to tell you this was going to happen to your people after you leave. You won't see them again and wolves are going to come and scatter the flock.

But Paul had made a commitment. He was going to win his Jewish brethren. He knew what they were going through; he had gone through it himself. Surely they would listen to him. Look at his credentials. If he spoke to them surely they would understand. But God told him it would not work; he would not be able to win them over.

Can you see now that after he fails, and he gets thrown in prison and God's words were proven true... Can you see how he realizes God's Word is true, and God knows what is best? He now sees that even after he stubbornly refused God's loving direction, God never forsook him. Indeed God opened His Word to Paul to a far greater degree than ever before. God revealed the mystery to him and asked him to spend the rest of his life making it known.

He showed Paul that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile, bond or free, male or female. They all had Christ in them, and Paul was responsible to communicate it to the world. Moses was the one in his administration who was responsible for the law.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

Paul was the one in our administration responsible for the mystery, the sacred secret.¹⁰

Philippians 1:7:

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

What an experiential understanding he had of the grace of God. He had blown it so bad, yet he bounced back and God made known unto him the mystery of His will. God had graced him and the Philippians were partaking of that grace. So are we today. You and I still partake of the grace God bestowed upon Paul. While he was in bonds God made known unto him revelation that is unparalleled in magnitude and glory. This was the pinnacle of the revelation given to our administration, the prison epistles.

We all partake of the grace of God extended to Paul. Do you think Paul was unaware of what God had wrought for Him? I don't think so. I think it vaulted him in his commitment and appreciation for all God had done for him in Christ. When Paul recognized God's great grace on his life he was enthralled. That God would give him the revelation of the mystery and give him the opportunity to make it known was grace upon grace. God's awesome goodness captivated him.

Colossians 4:3,4:

Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

4 That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

He was bound, not just with chains, but in his sold out commitment to the revelation of the prison epistles, the great mystery revealed. He was bound to the gospel of the sacred secret. The great passion of his life was now to make it manifest as he ought.

That's what it means to be a prisoner of Jesus Christ. The revelation of the mystery had so captivated him that he figuratively relinquished his freewill. Paul knew that he ought not to have gone to Jerusalem, and Paul knows now what he ought to do also. He knew what he was supposed to do before and he didn't do it. He knows now what he ought to do now, and he says unto his dying breath he is going to do it. He is going to chain himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. He will not allow anything to get in his way again.

When Paul declared at the end of Colossians, "Remember my bonds!"¹¹ He wasn't just referring to his chains. He wanted them to keep in the forefront of their thinking his commitment to the truth of the mystery and how it captivated him. It was as if he asked them to remember what he had done for the greatness of God's wonderful matchless Word.

In Philippians he speaks of those who did remember his bonds and waxed more boldly because of it.

¹⁰ I Corinthians 9:17

¹¹ Colossians 4:18

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

Philippians 1:13:

So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other *places*;

His commitment to speak the mystery and make it manifest reached even unto the palace and into Caesar's household like it says in Philippians 4:22. Paul's boldness and commitment to speak moved others to action.

Philippians 1:14:

And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds [This word "bonds" refers to more than just his chains. It refers to his sold-out commitment to making known the mystery.], are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

His commitment was to speak as he ought, and they, too, refused to be afraid and spoke as they ought. Paul's commitment and dedication to the cause of Christ inspired others to speak without fear. His commitment to the gospel is an example to us all.

Let's return to Philemon and look at those verses in Philemon that continue the imagery of prison bonds.

Philemon 9:

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

Something has definitely transpired so that Paul now refers to himself as a prisoner. I believe it is much bigger than just his imprisonment in Rome. Like I showed you, I believe it is what he learned as a result of his unwise trip to Jerusalem coupled with the great revelation of the mystery that captivated his heart and his life.

It can't be literal; it must be figurative. He can't be a prisoner of Jesus Christ. God doesn't take our freedom of will away; He doesn't make us prisoners. Jesus said, "The truth makes you free." At the opening of his ministry Jesus said that he came to set the captives free not to hold people captive. It can't be literal; God doesn't imprison us.

Philemon 10:

I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds [*desmon*]:

Paul did get Onesimus born again while he was in Rome in chains. It would be easy to jump to that conclusion, but in the context we must also understand that the bonds he is referring to here he just described in verse nine, his sold out commitment to be held captive by his lord. He was resolved to do what God wanted him to do regardless of the consequences. He was not going to second-guess God's instructions again, he was committed to share the Word with Onesimus regardless of the consequences. Remember that Onesimus was a runaway slave, and harboring him may have cost Paul dearly.

Although he was bound, the Word of God he spoke was not. It was and still is the power of God unto salvation that he spoke of in Romans 1. He echoes this very

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

sentiment in II Timothy.

II Timothy 2:9:

Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, *even* unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

This again is a very obvious place where it could be literal. Remember, however, God's graciousness. Everyone else who arrived with him in Rome was thrown into prison, but he was allowed to stay in his own hired house with a guard. God does work things out so you can keep moving His Word.

These bonds of Roman imprisonment are also used figuratively of bonds of the gospel.

Philemon 13:

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

Now he not talking about himself, he is talking about the gospel. How is this supposed to be literal? What Paul is binding himself to is the gospel. Living chained to a Roman guard was a reality that Paul couldn't escape; he lived with it on a daily basis. He pictured himself bound to Jesus Christ, just as he was bound to a Roman guard. Of course that was figurative not literal.

Philemon 23:

There salute thee Epaphras,¹² my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

Again this gives great support to the figurative use of prisoner. Being a prisoner of Jesus Christ is not the same as being a prisoner of Rome. Epaphras was not, like Paul, chained to a Roman guard, but Epaphras was, like Paul, chained to Christ Jesus in service. Epaphras was free to go in and out. Paul had to stay in the house, but Epaphras, Tychicus, Onesimus, Demas, Luke and others who were with him when he wrote these prison epistles were free to come and go. Epaphras was the one who would deliver the epistle to the Philippians shortly after Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus.

II Timothy 1:8:

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

Again he is bound to the lord; it's not physical. We still use the term prisoner metaphorically today. Have you heard of anyone speak of being a prisoner of love? His love is so powerful that he is held captive by it; he is not free to forsake it. Paul was

¹² Epaphras is a shortened form of Epaphroditus, but there is little agreement in the commentaries as to whether Epaphras and Epaphroditus are the same person.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 2 – Paul, Prisoner of Jesus Christ

never called a prisoner of Jesus Christ prior to Acts 28. Acts is when he got to Rome right after he had gone to Jerusalem against the will of God and ended up in jail. This was an error in judgment on his part. Paul refers to himself as a prisoner, one that is bound, restricted, or captivated by Jesus Christ. He is so committed that he doesn't want to make those errors in judgment anymore.

Before Acts 28 he was in prison (in Philippi in Acts 16 and in Caesarea in Acts 23), but he was never called a prisoner of the lord until he wrote the prison epistles of Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. That revelation changed his life. The exceeding greatness of the unfolding of the mystery affected him dramatically. He had been called a *doulos* and many other things before his trip to Rome, but never a prisoner until after that trip to Rome. He had been in jail before, but now he is bound to the gospel in an even greater way. He wants no more errors in judgment to stymie the movement of God's Word. You may have heard the statement that he holds the Word, but that the Word doesn't hold him. Well, that was no longer true of Paul. Paul not only held the Word, but he was held by it. Its beauty and excellence captivated him. He voluntarily and figuratively relinquished his freewill. He made God's will his will, and he would do as he ought. Paul truly was a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Paul did not mention his apostleship at the beginning of Philemon. He approaches Philemon as a fellowworker. He does not wield the authority of his apostleship, but speaks to Philemon as one equal in rank and privilege, a dear, beloved, friend and fellowworker. We will see as we proceed into the epistle just why Paul does so. God bless.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer
Appendix 3 – Ten Pillars Of Wisdom

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

Let's take an in-depth look at the salutation in verses one, two, and three. We will see, as soon as we begin reading, that the individuals noted here have a history and indeed are dear friends.

Philemon 1-3:

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

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

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

Timothy was with Paul at the time of the writing of Philemon as he was when Paul wrote Philippians and Colossians. They addressed this epistle to Philemon who was a dearly beloved fellowlaborer. "Dearly beloved" is the Greek word *agapētos*. Paul and Philemon had spent time together and worked the ministry together. They shared the love of God one with another and endeared themselves to each other over a period of time. They were friends and loved each other with the love of God.

Philemon was a *fellowlaborer*. *Fellow* indicates that they shared the labor together. You can be a laborer with God by yourself, but you cannot be a fellowlaborer with God by yourself. To be a fellowlaborer you need other fellows to do it with. You need other laborers to work with to be a *fellowlaborer*. Paul and Philemon were partners, companions, comrades, and associates. It indicates someone of the same rank, an equal, a peer. In this opening salutation Paul puts himself, Timothy, and Philemon on equal footing. They are dearly beloved fellowlaborers, equal in the eyes of God and each other.

Tradition says Apphia was Philemon's wife and that's why she is mentioned here, but we can't go by tradition. She was a prominent believer noted for her loving service in Colosse like Phebe was in Cenchrea, who was mentioned in Romans 16:1. She was part of the nucleus of the home fellowship and vitally involved in the people's lives.

The critical texts call Apphia, *adelphē*, sister, instead of *agapētos*, beloved. Certainly she was beloved too, but the word used identifying her was *adelphē*. Like *brother* in verse one which referred to Timothy, *adelphē*, or sister referring to Apphia also makes her of equal standing in the family of God with Paul, Timothy, and Philemon.

Archippus is included in the salutation, too. He is referred to as a *fellowsoldier*. *Fellow* again, indicates that they shared the soldiering together. They were partners, companions, comrades, and associates of the same rank. They were all equals or peers. Tradition teaches that Archippus was Philemon's son and Apphia was Philemon's wife and that the letter was addressed to the entire family. Yes, they were family, but there is no indication that they were father, mother, and child. Apphia and Archippus are vital members of the family of God, their help and understanding and support will be very necessary for the successful resolution of the situation that Paul will address in this epistle. Although, Apphia and Archippus are mentioned in the salutation, it will be clear that the letter is especially for Philemon. Although there will be much learning for

¹ This is second person plural here and includes Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and those who fellowshipped in Philemon's home. It does not occur again in the plural until verse twenty-two and twenty-five.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

Apphia and Archippus, the primary thrust is a personal appeal to Philemon. However, if this situation is going to get resolved, it is going to take the love and support of the entire fellowship.

Apphia and Archippus were included in the salutation because of their service to the local fellowship. Archippus was most likely Philemon's direct overseer. He probably ran a home fellowship himself and helped out the other home fellowship coordinators in Colosse, Laodecia and Hieropolis. When Onesimus returned to Colosse with this epistle, protocol or Christian etiquette and the need for the support of the believers for both Philemon and Onesimus necessitated that the local leadership be informed. It would be necessary for Archippus to rally the support of the local believers behind Philemon and Onesimus. That's why it also mentions "the church in thy house."

The home is where the church met. Philemon is the servant-leader of his home fellowship. Right after the outpouring of the spirit on Pentecost the church began meeting in homes.² Acts 5:42 shows how they continued to meet daily in the Temple and in every house teaching and preaching Jesus Christ. The believers steadily moved from meeting in the Temple to meeting in homes. In Acts 12:12 the believers were gathered in the house of Mary. Romans 16:5 and I Corinthians 16:19 show us that Priscilla and Aquila had a church in their home. Nymphas was a home fellowship coordinator in Laodecia who also worked with Archippus and the Colossian believers.

I Timothy 3:15 talks about the House of God, but it refers not to the Temple but rather to God's people, the household of God today. The word "house" is like the word "church." It is not a place but a people.

I Timothy 3:15:

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house [household³] of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Ephesians also addresses this same idea of God's people as a house or building.

Ephesians 2:19-22:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

The believers are a habitation of God. Whether they meet in the Temple or in their homes, they are built together for a habitation of God. The family is the basic unit of

² Acts 2:46

³ NIV & NJB translate the phrase "in the house of God" as "in God's household." The NAS RSV & NLT translate it, "in the household of God."

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

society, and the pattern for the church. The earliest archeological remains of a church building (3rd century) is a room in a house where they had an altar and a few other things set up.⁴ But it was just one room in a house, not an entire building. As men drifted further from the truth of God’s Word and became more powerful politically, they took over pagan temples and started holding their meetings in formerly pagan temples. Eventually as many pagans accustomed to meeting in temples converted to Christianity, they began constructing their own buildings and patterned them after those pagan temples. In contrast to what we see today, the Biblical accounts refer to believers getting together in homes and other public meeting places like the school of Tyranus.

Verse three is a typical greeting that Paul has in all of his epistles. It is as full and rich here as it is everywhere it is written. The heart of our loving heavenly Father wanting to remind us of the two great realities of life that are ours to enjoy — “grace and peace.” These are the believers staples, like meat and potatoes to us mid-westerners.

After the opening salutation Paul turns his attention directly to Philemon. Let’s read the next section where Paul recognizes what a blessing Philemon has been to the saints. Paul thanks God for Philemon and tells him that he prays for him. He also tells him why.

Philemon 4-7:

I thank my God, making mention of thee⁵ always in my prayers,

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

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

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

Paul’s prayer life was full of thankfulness.⁶ Thanking God for people was a habit he had developed. The word “my” indicates that it was personal and important to him. We are motivated to pray for people for whom we are thankful. He prayed for his servant-leaders and communicated with them regularly. The word “*always*” goes with the word “*thank*” not “*mention*.” The New Living Translation reads, “I always thank God when I pray for you, Philemon.” There is a discipline to remember people with thanksgiving.

“Mention” is the Greek word, *mneia*. Here in Philemon it is a present participle meaning that it is continuous, repetitive, or habitual action that occurs at the same time as the main verb, to thank. This is how he thanked God, he made mention of Philemon in his prayers. *Mneia* occurs seven times and is translated in the KJV as “mention” four times and “remembrance” three times. It is one of nine Greek words⁷ related to memory or remembrance, and Vine says it is always used in connection with prayer. Let’s look at

⁴ <http://ica.princeton.edu/reference/bibresearchguide.htm>

⁵ This is the second person singular pronoun, and it is used until verse twenty-two.

⁶ Romans 1:8; 7:25; 16:4; I Corinthians 1:4; 14:18; 15:57; II Corinthians 2:14; 8:16; 9:15; Ephesians 1:16; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3,12; I Thessalonians 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; II Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13; II Timothy 1:3

⁷ This is one of nine Greek words related to memory or remembrance: *mimnēskō*; *anamimnēskō*; *hupomimnēskō*; *mneia*; *mnēmē*; *mnēmoneuō*; *mnēmosunon*; *anamnēsis*; *hupomnēsis*. Vine says it is always used in connection with prayer. (Find it under “mention” page 742.)

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

those seven uses and see how Paul habitually used a lift list and prayed for people.

Romans 1:8,9:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make [*poieō*] mention [*mneia*] of you always in my prayers;

The heart of the servant-leader effervesces in prayer for his people. At the very heart of our spiritual service to God is habitual, fervent prayer for those whom we serve. We do it without ceasing with the spirit. The spiritual intercession that we make for God's people is our simplest service. We do it by the spirit, without great fanfare, knowing that we make intercession for the saints according to the will of God in this way.

“For God is my witness,” emphasizes how earnest and serious Paul is about this. It notes a solemn oath. Similar phrases also occur in II Corinthians 1:23; Philippians 1:8; and I Thessalonians 2:5. Here in Romans 1:9, it calls attention to something that should not be overlooked. At the very beginning of the foundational epistle to our administration Paul impresses on the mind of the Romans his commitment to pray for them.

I think it is important to note that Paul doesn't simply say, “Philemon, I pray for you.” He says, “I make mention of you in my prayers.” How thankful I am for a mother who put me to bed at night and taught me to say my prayers. At that time in her life she didn't have a great deal of knowledge of God and His Word, but she had a great love for Him. That love did eventually motivate her to find out more about Him.

Like I said she didn't know a lot, but we did the Lord's prayer and the “Now I lay me....” She didn't stop there however, we remembered everyone in our family and our extended family of grandparents and friends who were dear to us. How wonderful to learn to close out my day in prayer to God recognizing His blessing and protection.

One of the first things I learned after getting born again around the age of sixteen was to not only close my day in prayer, but also to open it that way. To greet my heavenly Father with praise and thanksgiving in the morning certainly strengthens me for the day ahead. There is nothing that is going to happen that day that we cannot handle together, so I like to get that in my thinking as early as I can each day.

“Make mention,” translated from the Greek words, *poieō mneia*, means roughly, to do a remembrance. This refers to an established pattern of prayer in the spirit. I refer to it as doing my lift-list. Establishing the habit of praying by the spirit for those with whom you move God's Word is vital to every servant-leader. As believers we develop a lifestyle of prayer and pray prolifically for people and situations never forgetting those who labor together with us in the gospel.

The establishment of the discipline to pray facilitates the habitual remembrance that these scriptures talk about. We direct our hearts to God in prayer for those with whom we move God's Word in a daily habitual manner. Then as we go through our day, our hearts are directed to God in prayer as specific individuals and situations present themselves. God will impress people upon our hearts, and when He does we should faithfully make intercession for them according to the will of God by speaking in

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

tongues. However, I believe what the Bible refers to, as *poieō mneia*, making mention or doing a remembrance is a specific commitment that people who move the Word together make to each other. It definitely makes an impact and brings people together, building love and compassion between them.

Paul says the same thing to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:16:

Cease not to give thanks for you, making [*poieō*] mention [*mneia*] of you in my prayers;

This second occurrence of *mneia* establishes this habit pattern of the servant-leader. Faithfulness to maintain this remembrance in prayer is vital to every servant-leader. We habitually remember people in our prayers.

It helps us maintain the proper mindset. God is involved in this, and He is more concerned about their welfare than we are. When we make mention we do it according to the will of God, and it makes a difference. When we speak in tongues it energizes the power of God, and we get to direct this power where we want it to go. When we stay our mind on people and situations we direct the power of God where we want it to go. This, as Ephesians 6:18 says, takes “watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” We direct the power of God to the situations and people upon whom we stay our minds. This is a service that ought not be overlooked or neglected.

Philippians 1:3:

I thank my God upon every remembrance [*mneia*] of you,

This use of *mneia* is not accompanied by *poieō* or *echō*. It doesn't refer to doing our lift-lists, but to the discipline to pray for people as they come to our remembrance. These two types of prayer form a solid foundation upon which we can build loving, caring relationships. Our predetermined habitual prayer times and our discipline to speak in tongues for people when God brings them to our remembrance form the bedrock of our service to God and His people.

I Thessalonians 1:2:

We give thanks to God always for you all, making [*poieō*] mention [*mneia*] of you in our prayers;

Do you see the pattern? “Thanks,” “always,” or “without ceasing,” “making mention,” “prayers.” This refers again to doing our lift-lists, our habitual remembrance of those with whom we move God's Word with prayer in the spirit.

I Thessalonians 3:6:

But now when Timothy came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance [*mneia*] of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also *to see* you:

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

One of the things that Timotheus reported back to Paul was the good remembrance that the Thessalonians had for those who served them the Word of life. Like Philippians 1:3, this verse refers to the discipline to pray for those who feed us God's Word. This endears one to another. The diligence to keep one another in our prayers builds the desire to see one another and enjoy the pleasure of each other's company. This mutual prayer unites people and builds our love and compassion for each other.

There's something about prayer in the spirit. There's something about operating manifestations. When you do it God energizes. When we do something, God does something. When we operate manifestations God is actively involved with our lives. He's given us the authority to do it at our will and direct His power wherever we need it to go.

Not only was Paul faithful to pray for Philemon, but Philemon's prayer for Paul would be instrumental in securing Paul's release from prison and facilitating them getting together soon. Toward the end of Philemon Paul mentions Philemon's prayers for him, also. When you move the Word together, you make memories together. When you reflect back upon them, it builds love and unity between believers.

Paul has warm and tender memories of Philemon that come up as Paul prays for him. Paul gives thanks for Philemon's friendship and his care for the believers. This is quite a statement. This is not just a duty or daily regimen; there is an emotional element to it. It is quite an honor to be remembered in prayer to God. It is quite a privilege to do that for someone.

II Timothy 1:3:

I thank God, whom I serve from *my* forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have [*echō*] remembrance [*mneia*] of thee in my prayers night and day;

This last occurrence compliments the first. Again we see the familiar terms: thanks, serve, without ceasing, remembrance, and prayers. Our prayer one for another is vital to our service to God. Paul also notes that he does it night and day.

This phrase *night and day* is the figure of speech synathroesmos, which is the enumeration of parts of a whole that has not been mentioned. These two words are put for the whole day. Paul prayed constantly, at all times throughout the day. It is put in this figurative manner to emphasize Paul's love and discipline to lift Timothy in prayer to God.

In my simple mind and way of thinking, that's a great place to start — night and day. We begin lifting those who are close and important to us night and day—upon retiring and waking. Martin Luther said, "It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night."⁸ Prayer should hedge our days in from beginning to end.

Philemon 5:

Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward

⁸ Leonard Allen, *The Contemporaries Meet the Classics on Prayer*, Howard Publishing Co. LA. P. 72

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

all saints;

Hearing of their love and faith caused thankfulness and engendered prayer. Verse five has a chiasmic structure. “Love” corresponds to “all saints,” and “faith” lines up with “the Lord Jesus.” This structure emphasizes the unity of the entire thought: Love for the saints grows out of faith in Christ. It is like Colossians 1:3 and 4.

Colossians 1:3,4:

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love *which ye have* to all the saints,

We see the same thing in Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:15:

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,

16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

When we believe in the Lord Jesus we get born again, then we can manifest love to all the saints. It's this love that has such great impact upon people's lives. Once Paul knew they were born-again he was faithful to pray for them.

Verse six then clarifies the focus of Paul's prayer for Philemon. It has some great words, which we should be familiar with from other teaching series.

Philemon 6:

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

“That” indicates the purpose or aim of his thanks. This is the focus of his prayers. “Communication” is *koinōnia*, fellowship, an unreserved involvement, a full sharing holding nothing back, a full partnership. “Of thy faith” is a genitive of character. It indicates the quality or character of the fellowship. Our fellowship grows, deepens, or develops as we believe more and more of the truth of God's Word and Christ's accomplished work on our behalf.

You could say the fellowship that is characterized or distinguished by your believing.

Do you believe God loves you?

Do you believe that God wants the best for you?

Do you believe that God wants you to prosper and be in health?

Do you believe that God works within you to will and to do of His good pleasure?

How tenacious are you with those beliefs?

Do they come and go or are they realities you count on every day?

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

Do they form a solid foundation for your life?

Don't you see how what we believe affects the quality of our fellowship? If you believed God was an ogre and mean and vindictive, do you think it would affect your fellowship with Him? Of course it would.

“Effectual” is the Greek word *energēs*, energized. It produces results, and not just any result, but desired results. “Effective” means producing a result or effect. However, “effectual” means producing the desired result, what you want to see happen. The Aramaic uses the words meaning, “yield fruit in works.” It is significant that the fellowship that is characterized by your believing bears fruit. When we get to the place that we fully share or express our believing in the Lord Jesus we will have real fruit.

Paul prays that the full sharing of Philemon's faith **becomes** effectual. This makes me aware that it is possible for it to not be effectual. It can be squelched. Paul deliberately prayed for this purpose. He wanted the communication of their faith to be effectual, powerful, and his prayer was a vital part of that becoming a reality. That's one of the reasons we push ourselves to pray — because it really does make a difference.

“Acknowledging” is the Greek word *epignosis*. That's a full, precise, complete knowledge. The full expression of our believing bears fruit as we acknowledge, completely and precisely, all that we have in Christ Jesus. What is yours in Christ?

Have you acknowledged that you are righteous?

Have you acknowledged that you have a ministry of reconciliation?

Have you acknowledged that Christ is made unto you wisdom?

Have you acknowledged that you can you operate nine manifestations of holy spirit?

Have you acknowledged that you have peace with God?

Have you acknowledged that you are a fellowlaborer with Him?

Have you acknowledged the great mystery of God in Christ in you?

Have you acknowledged that the things that Christ did you can do also?

It's God in Christ in you? You're something special!

The full expression of our believing bears fruit as we acknowledge, completely and precisely, all that we have in Christ Jesus. As we do we will be able to fully express those great truths as we live and move and have our being in Him.

It's hard for me to communicate to someone else that God has made him righteous until I have done it myself. When I acknowledge it, that truth will transform me. Then I can share with you what it has done for me. We speak with authority because we know first hand the transforming power of God in our lives. II Timothy 2:6 says “the husbandman that labourereth must be first partaker of the fruits.” We partake and then speak with authority.

Next look at the phrase “every good thing that is in you.” Most critical texts have “in us” instead of “in you.” If I say it is “in us,” of course it is “in you.” Indeed it is Christ in you as Colossians 1:27 says. However, it is also Christ in us — that's the mystery. We all have Christ in us. It's a together thing. That's one reason the full expression of our faith bears fruit unto good works. We see it in each other, and we encourage one

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

another as we manifest it in our own lives. Knowing if I can do it, so can you, and vice versa.

That's where many people get tripped up. They don't see it in each other. We can't afford to pick at our flesh—there's nothing but disappointment there—we must look at the Christ in each other.

Notice it says “every good thing.” There must be more than one good thing that is in us if we are in Christ. It says *every* or *all*, and we should acknowledge every thing, all of it. That might be quite an adventure! Well, when do you want to get started on it? How long do you think we'll need for it? How about the rest of our lives?

“In Christ Jesus” relates to our identification with Him. Everything that is in Christ is in us. We should identify fully with Him. God has placed us in Christ. It is a position of privilege and responsibility. We were created in Christ Jesus according to Ephesians 2:10. God placed us in Christ; we are seated in the heavenlies with him at God's right hand.

As we acknowledge what God has done for us on the inside we can manifest it on the outside. That's our prayer and believing for one another. That we see the Word bigger... That we understand the Word better... That we move out on it more aggressively... I proceed forth in life on the foundation it sets for me, and so do you. For our faith to become effectual we need to acknowledge every good thing that is ours in Christ Jesus. Let's read some other verses that communicate the same truth.

II Corinthians 9:8:

And God *is* able to make **all** grace abound toward you; that ye, **always** having **all** sufficiency in **all things**, may abound to **every** good work:

God is able to make it happen. Are we willing to acknowledge it, to believe it to the extent that it yields fruit in works. Our acknowledgement provides a firm basis for acting like it... doing it. Talk about every good thing that is in us. All grace, always demonstrating all sufficiency in all things so that we can abound unto every good work. That's pretty big.

Galatians 6:6:

Let him that is taught in the word communicate [*koinōneō*, share fully, it's the verb form of communication in Philemon six] unto him that teacheth in all good things.

We should share fully with unreserved involvement with those who teach us God's Word. When we do so we encourage and perfect their teaching ministry to us. If we let them know how what they taught us made a difference we will not only encourage them to keep teaching, but we will show them what in the teaching had an impact on us. It is important to share these things.

Colossians 1:9-13:

For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

spiritual understanding;

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son:

That's an expanded version of Philemon six. Let's acknowledge what God has done for us. Let's put it in our minds with detail and precision so that when situations in life come up we can call on it and it will yield fruit in good works.

II Thessalonians 2:16,17:

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

That's God's heart for us. He wants us established in every good word and work. As we acknowledge His Word, it will yield fruit in works.

II Timothy 3:16,17:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

Ultimately it is God's Word, which let's us know what those good works are. What should I be involved with? What should I be sharing? How should we be spending our time together? God's Word will direct us. God's Word equips us for anything that comes up in life. With God's Word and revelation we never have to feel without God or without hope in this world. If God said it, that settles it. It's ours. Let's get to work!

Hebrews 13:20,21:

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The Word of God makes known the will of God. Then, when we do it, it works that which is well pleasing in God's sight. If we never get to God's Word, we will never get to God's will. If people want to embrace God's will for their lives, they will need to embrace God's Word. When we embrace the Word of God and come face to face with God in His Word, He can work within us to do that which is well pleasing in his sight.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 3 – Friends and Fellowlaborers

These good works are specifically for us. My good works might not be the same as your good works, but they come from the same word of God and it's God who works in our hearts. Then we follow through and do something with it—those are the good works that He has called us to.

Only as we acknowledge every good thing that is in us, will we become effectual in showing the world what God has done for us. That's God's grace. We speak His Word and see it come to pass in our lives before our very eyes.

Now as we get to verse seven we see why Paul was so thankful for Philemon.

Philemon 7:

For we have great joy and consolation [*paraklēsis*, comfort, encouragement] in thy love, [why] because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. [What a tender statement. That's the family term of equality and equal standing. Paul treats him with respect and dignity.]

Philemon actively blessed God's people. The love of God in his heart impacted people's lives and made a difference. He was a refreshing to the believers. Notice how it says "the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee." Bowels is the Semitic idiom for tender affection, emotion, and deep inner feelings. Friberg says bowels when used figuratively as it is here means, "the deep, inner seat of tender emotions in the whole personality, in differing cultures it is conceived to be *heart, stomach, or bowels.*"

In our culture we use "heart" instead of "bowels." Many of the more recent translations not sticking as closely to the original translate *splanchnon* as heart in this verse.⁹ When we speak of where deep or tender emotions come from we use "heart." On Valentine's day we use pictures of "hearts" not "bowels." In Semitic cultures they used bowels instead of heart for almost the same reality. It is used here for the whole person who in the depths of his emotional life has experienced refreshment through consolation and love.¹⁰

"Bowels" is translated from the Greek word, *splanchnon*. It is used three times in this short epistle. That is more than any other New Testament book. The believers were touched very deeply by Philemon's love. In verse twelve Paul uses the same word to describe Onesimus. Onesimus was a clone of Paul's deep emotional affection for the believers. In verse twenty Paul asks that as Philemon has refreshed the bowels of the saints he do the same for him, one more time.

Paul has recognized what Philemon has done, and shows his appreciation. Paul and Philemon are friends and fellowlaborers of the dearest kind. Paul expects Philemon to continue as he has been with great love, refreshing the bowels of the saints. We will see this as he proceeds into the other important topics, which come up next. God bless you.

⁹ For example, the American Standard Version, New International Version, New American Standard, Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard, New King James Version, Bible in Basic English, New Living Translation, and the New Jerusalem Bible.

¹⁰ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol 7 page 555.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 4 – Paul’s Appeal For Onesimus

Verse eight begins Paul’s appeal for Onesimus. He explains how he is going to do it and why he is going to do it before telling Philemon what it is he wants him to do. He saves the best for last for rhetoric emphasis.

Paul is not going to command; he is going to beseech for love’s sake. He approaches Philemon with tact giving many different reasons for Philemon to respond appropriately or properly.

Philemon 8,9a:

Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin [command, order, charge] thee that which is convenient,

9 Yet for love’s sake I rather beseech *thee*...

Paul had great boldness in Christ. He spoke what God wanted spoken in the way God wanted it spoken. There is no reason to think he is doing any differently now. Thayer defines the Greek word for bold, *parrhēsia*, as freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech, speaking openly, frankly, without concealment, without ambiguity or circumlocution (beating around the bush). Paul was able to get to the point; he was able to say exactly what he wanted to say in the way he wanted to say it.

Paul is free to do as he pleases. He is pursuing this course of action because this is how God wants him to handle the situation. Remember he is writing by revelation. All scripture is God breathed and that includes Philemon. Paul is doing this at God’s direction. As I said before, although Timothy and Titus have many charges and commands Paul refrains from doing so in this epistle.

“Enjoin” is the Greek word *epitassō*. It is used ten times in the New Testament, and it is translated “command” eight times and “charge” and “enjoin” once each. “That which is convenient” is the Greek word *anēkō*, meaning fitting, befitting, appropriate, proper, or that which is one’s duty. Paul could have commanded Philemon to do the right thing, but he does not. Instead he beseeches.

Look at how some of the other translations handle this.

Philemon 8,9a: NIV

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

Philemon 8,9a: NAS

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do* that which is proper, yet for love’s sake I rather appeal *to you*...

Philemon 8,9a: RSV

Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you

Philemon 8,9a: NRS

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 4 – Paul’s Appeal For Onesimus

Paul makes the point that although he is free to command he chooses not to. Verse nine tells us what he does instead.

Philemon 9:

Yet for love’s sake¹ I rather beseech *thee*, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now² also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

“Beseech” is in the Greek *parakaleō*, which is usually translated “beseech, comfort, or exhort.” This is the verb form of *paraklēsis*. In I Corinthians 14:3 it says of the worship manifestations that they are for edification by way of exhortation and comfort. Instead of commanding Philemon, Paul is exhorting Philemon; he’s urging him; he’s encouraging him. Paul now refers to himself as Paul, the aged. This is the Greek word *presbutēs*, which means aged man. Aged men functioned in the assemblies as elders, which were dignified positions.

Paul’s initial appeal is based on three things. First and most importantly, love. Love is the best motivator, and Paul brings up the love they have for one another and the Lord Jesus Christ as the major reason for his request. Love activates; it energizes.

The two other indirect appeals are also to encourage Philemon to comply. Paul calls himself, “the aged.” This carries a symbolic meaning that extends beyond the literal words themselves. Paul is referring to the dignity of his position as an elder, which should encourage more consideration. An elder’s words were given more weight because he had proven himself wise over time. In the Hebrew culture age was honored. The law prescribed that honor be shown to the elderly.

Leviticus 19:32:

Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head [those whose hair is white or gray with age], and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I *am* the LORD.

In their culture they showed respect for the elderly by rising when they entered the room. We all give consideration and make concessions to older people out of respect for the full life they have lived, especially those who have labored in the gospel and remained faithful. Paul indirectly asks for this kind of consideration.

The phrase “now also prisoner of Jesus Christ” is also encouraging. Paul’s dedication and zeal for communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ regarding the great mystery and his willingness to suffer imprisonment for the cause of Christ is further reason for Philemon to extend more consideration to his requests. If Paul can suffer or endure

¹ There is no word for “sake” in the Greek or Aramaic. It could be simply translated, “Yet because of love.”

² This word is one reason some scholars suggest Philemon was written from Caesarea. They feel that this word means “recently.” They say Paul’s intent is to show he has recently been incarcerated. Which would necessitate an earlier imprisonment in Caesarea not Rome. However, *nuni*, is an emphatic form used more for emphasis than brevity of time. It is used only in Paul’s epistles and means “at this very moment.” Even if brevity of time were indicated, Paul didn’t become a “prisoner of Jesus Christ” until receiving the revelation of the mystery. It doesn’t just refer to his incarceration, but also to his commitment to speak the mystery as he ought.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 4 – Paul’s Appeal For Onesimus

imprisonment for the cause of Jesus Christ, certainly Philemon could also extend himself to do what Paul is about to request. This is all a part of the appeal to Philemon. Paul is using everything at his disposal in speaking winning words to persuade Philemon. All of this is done before telling exactly what his request is.

In verses eight and nine Paul has just dealt with the how and why. How – he beseeches rather than commands. Why – because of the love of God they both have for one another and the Lord Jesus Christ. In verses ten through twelve Paul gets to what and who.

In verse ten Paul gets to the matter at hand. He appeals for Onesimus, being well aware of his history with Philemon. It is obvious that Paul has a history with both of them. However, Philemon is unaware of Paul’s recent history with Onesimus.

Philemon 10:

I beseech [*parakaleō*] thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds,

Onesimus occurs at the end of the verse in the Greek and Aramaic. This is for rhetoric reasons; it is very emphatic and dramatic. It should read:

Philemon 10: [Literal from Greek]

I beseech thee for my dear child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus:

Paul again uses the word *parakaleō*, the word for comfort, exhort, or encourage. In verse nine he mentioned why he was encouraging. Here he focuses the encouragement on Philemon (I beseech thee.). Paul would not use his authority to relieve Philemon from the responsibility to do the right thing willingly. He laid it all upon Philemon. The decision was to be entirely his. Before we finish I’ll share why he did.

As I said, “Onesimus” occurs at the end of verse ten in both the Greek and Aramaic. This saves the surprise for the end. It is both an emphatic and dramatic presentation. Paul calls Onesimus his son, *teknōn*, a term of endearment. We know that Onesimus was not physically Paul’s child, but he, like both Timothy and Titus, had endeared himself to Paul, and they were all loved as his own dear children. He also explains that he has begotten him in his bonds. Paul has led Onesimus to the new birth, while under Roman arrest and a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Philemon 11:

Which [who, Onesimus] in time past was to thee unprofitable [useless], but now profitable [useful] to thee and to me:

Paul admits that Onesimus has formerly been unprofitable or useless. Onesimus running away was at the very least theft. He stole himself from his master if nothing else. However, verse nineteen may imply he also took things that were not his when he departed. However, Paul asserts that Onesimus is now profitable to both of them.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 4 – Paul’s Appeal For Onesimus

The use of “profitable” in association with Onesimus is a play on words.³ The name, Onesimus, was frequently borne by slaves. Its meaning is “helpful or profitable.” Such descriptive words were often used as slave names. Verse eleven indicates that Onesimus had not lived up to his name, but Paul who has “begotten him in his bonds” has no doubt that Onesimus will be as “profitable” to Philemon as he has been to himself. “Profitable” was unprofitable, but now that he is a believer he is truly “profitable.” Onesimus had faithfully served Paul over a considerable period of time. However long a time it was, it was long enough for Onesimus to have proven himself faithful and endeared himself to Paul as his own true child. This doesn’t happen in a week or a month.

Colossians 4:7-9:

All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, *who is* a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord:

8 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts;

9 With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They shall make known unto you all things which *are done* here.

However long Onesimus had been with Paul is was long enough to prove himself faithful. That is not something that happens overnight.

Verse eleven is a figure of speech, meiosis. Paul is doing his best to get to Philemon’s heart. By this figure one thing is diminished in order to increase another thing. One thing is lowered in order to magnify and intensify something else by way of contrast. It is used for the purpose of emphasis, to call one’s attention, not to the smallness of the thing thus lessened, but to the importance of that which is put in contrast with it.⁴ In Philemon verse 11 the thing diminished is Onesimus’ theft and flight. The thing magnified has three parts. Paul is magnifying; 1) the salvation and spiritual growth of Onesimus, 2) Onesimus’ benefit and service to Paul while he was in prison, and 3) Onesimus’ potential benefit to Philemon. The acts of theft and flight are diminished because compared to Onesimus’ personal salvation; his refreshment to Paul, and his potential profitability to Philemon the loss of money and time of service is inconsequential.

The insertion of “to thee and to me” is also unusual and atypical. He has not proven himself useful to Philemon yet, for he has just returned. Paul’s statement of Onesimus’ profitability to Philemon is like the figure where things known to be future are spoken of in the past tense.

Do you remember when Joshua was told to take the Promised Land? God said, “Arise, go over this Jordan... every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon [future tense], that have I given [past tense] unto you already.” It was future tense to Joshua and the Children of Israel, but it was past tense to God. In God’s eyes it was an accomplished reality, a done deal, but from Joshua’s perspective he had to still arise and go get it. It was future to Joshua, but God spoke of it in the past tense.

That is what Paul is doing in essence here. It is a way of saying this is absolutely

³ Bullinger, E.W., *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, paronomasia*; formerly useless now useful.

⁴ Bullinger, E.W., *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, pages 155, 157.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 4 – Paul’s Appeal For Onesimus

going to come to pass, contingent upon you taking the believing action. It is a way of holding out the promise to encourage the compliance. It’s the proverbial carrot in front of his nose. Do you understand that figure? You can’t get a donkey to move with a two-by-four, but if you put a carrot in front of his nose, he’ll step forward to bite it. Then you keep moving the carrot and he keeps moving forward. Paul held out the promise to encourage the compliance.

Philemon 12:

Whom I have sent [epistolary aorist] again: ~~thou therefore receive~~ [not in the critical texts] him, that is, mine own bowels [other translations have heart]:

“Sent again” is an epistolary aorist, in other words he is coming with the epistle. We would say, “I am sending him back.” They used the aorist, “I have sent him back.” Meaning by the time the letter was read he would have been back there.

“Thou therefore receive” are not in some critical texts. I believe it should be omitted, too. The idea of receiving him does not come up until verse 17 where he asks him to receive him. This section’s emphasis is that Paul is sending him. It displays how dear Onesimus is to Paul and the sacrifice Paul is making in sending him back.

“Bowels” represents Paul’s personal feelings. Comparing Onesimus to Paul’s bowels is a figure of speech, metaphor, which is a comparison by representation, where the bowels represent Onesimus. It’s like losing Onesimus tore his insides out. That’s how beloved Onesimus was to Paul. Verse twelve could read, “I am returning to you him that is mine own bowels, my very heart.”

Onesimus had so fully shared with Paul that Paul could speak of him as *his own bowels*. Bowels here as earlier in verse seven, refers to the seat of the emotions. Onesimus is as Paul with the same deep inner feelings and emotions — the same compassion, the same commitment, the same heart. It was as if they were two hearts cells beating together.

When two heart cells are placed next to one another on a petri dish, even if they were beating at different rates when they were placed together, they soon take up the same rhythm and pound the same beat. That’s how Paul and Onesimus had become. We too, have the same opportunity. When we share our hearts and labor together in the outreach of God’s Word we soon learn to beat together and become as one heart and one soul.

Let’s look at some other translations of this verse. They remain consistent to translate “bowels,” as “heart.”

Philemon 12: ASV

whom I have sent back to thee in his own person, that is, my very heart:

Philemon 12: NIV

I am sending him-- who is my very heart-- back to you.

Philemon 12: RSV

I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 4 – Paul’s Appeal For Onesimus

Philemon 12: NRS

I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you.

Philemon 12: NLT

I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

If you thought Paul was a good guy, what would you think of Onesimus. Onesimus had acquired the same heart that Paul had. Paul could speak of him as his “heart.” The early church had this wonderful singleness of heart.

On the Day of Pentecost there was great outreach and impact as God’s Word was declared and three thousand were added to the church.

Acts 2:41-47:

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need.

46 And they, **continuing daily** with **one accord** in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and **singleness of heart**,

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

They enjoyed a singleness of heart and praised God and shared grace one with another. In Acts 4 after being beaten and let out of jail, Peter and John returned to their company. They had an electrifying prayer meeting where the place was shaken. They operated great power and enjoyed great grace upon them.

Acts 4:32,33:

And the multitude of them that believed were of **one heart** and of **one soul**: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

We strive for likemindedness and maintain our singleness of heart. We, too, can be of one heart. We can have the same unity of purpose that Paul describes between himself and Onesimus.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 4 – Paul’s Appeal For Onesimus

Philippians 2:1-5:

If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels [deep feelings and emotions] and mercies,

2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be **likeminded**, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

3 *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

For the Word to continue to move and prevail we need servant-leaders who of the same heart and soul. We need to lock in to and do what we know is God’s Word and will.

Philippians 2:19-22:

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.

20 For I have no man **likeminded**, [*isopsuchos*, equal in soul] who will naturally care for your state.

21 For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.

22 But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

When we make full proof of our ministries, and have our hearts beating together so that we have the same bowels and mercies, we will see a unity and likemindedness that does not come from compulsion but is voluntary. Certainly if Philemon and Onesimus can work out their differences, there should be nothing in our fellowships that cannot be worked out. In Paul we see the love of a believer; we see the constraining love of Christ. If we will let that same love of Christ constrain us we too will see unity restored and people moving together with the love of God.

Verses thirteen and fourteen form the central section of Philemon and is main point toward which all these verses press and from which verses fifteen through twenty-five proceed. We will get to them in our next session together. God bless you.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer
Session 4 – Paul’s Appeal For Onesimus

Philemon: The Love of a Believer **Session 5 – Without Thy Consent**

In our study of Philemon we have come to the central section of the epistle. Everything up to this point builds to it, and everything after it proceeds from it. Let's review the structure we looked at briefly in the introduction.

STRUCTURE OF PHILEMON (Introversion)

[1-3]	A	Opening Salutation
[4-7]	B	Paul's recognition of Philemon's past actions
[8,9]	C	Paul the aged might command, but does not
[10-12]	D	Onesimus profitable to me and thee
[13,14]	E	Paul's desire for likemindedness with Philemon
[15-17]	D	Onesimus beloved to me and thee
[18,19]	C	Paul the debtor does not say, but he might have
[20-22]	B	Paul's believing for Philemon's future actions
[23-25]	A	Closing Salutation

In this structure the A's correspond, the B's correspond, and so forth. Some who handle this kind of structure will separate the central section E into its two corresponding parts to show how indeed there is a correspondence throughout. However, I combined the two corresponding sections of E to show how it points to a central section. Section E could be divided into two sections: 1) Paul's desire to retain Onesimus with him and 2) Paul's refusal to do so without Philemon's consent. Together we see how adamantly Paul fights to maintain his likemindedness with Philemon. Paul considered Philemon his partner and refused to act unilaterally. He wanted Philemon's consent.

In *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* Bullinger has a section on *correspondence*. He handles the two major types of correspondence in scripture: alternation and introversion. Philemon's structure is the later. Bullinger calls this structure "by far the most stately and dignified presentation of a subject and [it] is always used in the most solemn and important portions of the Scriptures."¹ It is commonly called a chiasmus in English.

Its arrangement mirrors an arrow pointing to the main point or major section of the scripture. The structure draws our attention to the center as if there was an arrow pointing to it. Verse thirteen tells of Paul's desire to retain Onesimus with him, and verse fourteen states Paul's greater desire to maintain likemindedness with Philemon. Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him, but he refused to do so without Philemon's voluntary consent. It was Philemon's decision to make. Not only was it up to Philemon, it was a decision he must make voluntarily not out of compulsion.

The necessity of likemindedness between Paul and Philemon was so critical that Paul says, "Without thy mind or consent I would do nothing." Paul was a man of action. His penchant for serving and ministering and the resolve with which he usually acted is here

¹ Bullinger, E.W., FOS page 374.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer **Session 5 – Without Thy Consent**

held in abeyance. He would not act without Philemon's consent. He knew what was right, but he would not move ahead until he knew that Philemon was with him. Their unity was very important, and Paul fights to maintain their singleness of heart.

Philemon must forgive Onesimus and receive him as a brother, an equal in Christ. However, Paul would not command this. He would not legislate it. At least, he did not want to in this epistle. This was a decision that Philemon must make voluntarily, willingly. God's Word commands us to forgive.

Ephesians 4:32:

And be [imperative mood] ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

However, this must be done willingly and not out of compulsion. We know we must forgive, but we cannot just go through the motions. It cannot simply be mental assent. It must be heartfelt and voluntary. Of course, like it says in Ephesians, forgiving others springs out of recognition of what God has forgiven us of. We are to imitate God and forgive as we were forgiven. Indeed at no time are we more like our loving heavenly Father than when we do so.

The entire epistle builds toward Philemon doing the right thing by his freewill choice. Everything up to this point has led to this, and everything from this point on will proceed from it. Paul and Philemon are best of friends, dearly beloved fellowlaborers. It is vital that they not let this situation with Onesimus come between them.

Paul could have commanded Philemon to forgive Onesimus. He commanded the Corinthians to do as much.

II Corinthians 2:7-9:

So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm *your* love toward him.

9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

Paul didn't need to test Philemon's obedience. Philemon was an obedient servant-leader who had proven himself time after time. Paul beseeches him because he knew the kind of man he was. He respected his ministry service to God's people. Paul knew Philemon would do the right thing; he knew Philemon would do even more than he asked.

Paul really wanted to keep Onesimus with him, but he knew the right thing to do was to send him back. What to do with Onesimus was a decision Paul knew only Philemon could make. Paul did not want anything to come between himself and his dear friend Philemon, so he sent Onesimus back to Philemon for him to decide what to do.

Paul's comment in verse 21 regarding doing even more than he asks, refers to Philemon returning Onesimus to Rome to minister unto Paul in the bonds of the gospel. Paul never asks Philemon to do so, but he lets him know his desire.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer **Session 5 – Without Thy Consent**

Philemon 13,14:

Whom I would [*boulomai*] have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

14 But without thy mind would [*thēlō*] I do nothing; that thy benefit [*agathos*, good deed, blessing, act of goodness, gracious act] should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

“Would” in verse thirteen is the Greek word, *boulomai*. It means to will with determination. Paul would prefer to have Onesimus stay with him. That would be the better plan. Indeed, that is what he planned on doing, but it was not the right thing to do. It was not Paul’s place to make that decision.

Perhaps it would have been the best thing for the movement of the Word in the bonds of the gospel in the short term, but in the long run, it is always better to do the right thing and cover all your bases properly. We should never hurt anyone’s feelings or treat them in an unloving or disrespectful manner. Having respect for the people you work with and not taking advantage of them will pay off in the long run. We never lose by putting others before ourselves. Yes, it may inconvenience us, but it will demonstrate our love and respect for them. As leaders, we must esteem others better than ourselves. Consideration for others is important to any servant-leader.

Paul knew that if Philemon were with him, he too, would be a great help. Having Onesimus with him was like having Philemon there. They served with the same heart and compassion, and each reminded Paul of the other. However, he could not rightly make that choice. It was something Philemon would have to decide. Paul did not want anything coming between him and Philemon. He did want to give occasion to the adversary to divide them.

Working with other servant-leaders requires great love and tact. It would have been simple for Paul to send the note with Tychicus informing Philemon that Onesimus was with him and requesting that he be able to stay and help with Philemon’s permission. That would save Onesimus the long arduous journey, and benefit Paul in that he would not lose any time with Onesimus. However, the right thing is not always the convenient thing. Assuming Philemon would do the right thing and allowing him to do it are two different things. Philemon must do this thing voluntarily.

The phrase “in thy stead” means on your behalf. Onesimus would be working with Paul in the movement of the Word on Philemon’s behalf. It would be an honor to both of them.

Paul’s statement that “without thy mind I would do nothing” shows that Paul truly considered Philemon his partner. Paul couldn’t make decisions unilaterally. Since Philemon was his partner Paul needed his consent, his advise, his counsel, his love. That’s what a partnership is about. It’s about doing things together as fellowlaborers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Mind” in this context means “consent, advise, or counsel.” “Would” in verse fourteen is not the same word as “would” in verse thirteen. The first was *boulomai*, meaning to determine or plan. In verse fourteen it’s the word, *thēlō*, referring to an intense desire.² *Thēlō* in verse fourteen is less thought through but more spontaneous and

² Companion Bible Appendix 102

Philemon: The Love of a Believer **Session 5 – Without Thy Consent**

intense than *boulomai* in verse thirteen.³ This desire or want springs from natural impulse or intense emotion. It's moving and not always logical or deliberate. It is the difference between the natural impulse and the reasoned resolve. Maintaining likemindedness should be our natural intense desire as it was for Paul.

Paul did not want Philemon to do it out of necessity; he wanted him to do it willingly. "Necessity" means "compulsion." When people think they *have to* instead of they *get to*, they are much more grumpy and difficult to work with. We try to never take people for granted. We assume that people who work with us are blessed to do it, but we should not assume that it is always or will always be that way.

Reminding people they have a choice can be a very liberating thing. My children would frequently ask, "Dad, do I have to?" My response would invariably be, "No, you get to." It's a matter of attitude. If they had the right or proper attitude, they would enjoy the obedience much more.

Paul's attitude throughout this situation is what is the right thing to do, what would bless Philemon the most. He wanted to make Philemon's decision as easy as he possibly could. Paul did not want to do anything without Philemon's consent, so that anything Philemon would do, would be voluntary of his freewill and not forced.

This section is the focus of the epistle. All the action taken up to this point leads to it. Are Paul and Philemon partners or not? Do they act in each other's and their mutual best interest or not? The rest of the epistle will also flow from their consent concerning this decision.

Next Paul specifically requests Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother, not a slave. This request, although an imperative, is couched in a conditional clause. Paul has just declared how important his likemindedness with Philemon is to him. Now, if Philemon resolves to act in the same manner and count or esteem Paul as a partner, he would receive Onesimus as a new creation in Christ. Onesimus was no longer just a slave, a natural man, owned by and subject to the will of Philemon, he is now a brother and equal to both Paul and Philemon. They all have been purchased with a price, and all now belong to God.

Philemon 15-17:

For perhaps he therefore departed [was separated] for a season [an hour; a little time], that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

16 Not now as a servant [*doulos*], but above a servant [*doulos*], a brother beloved [*agapētos*], specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh [as your slave], and in the Lord [as your brother in Christ]?

17 If thou count me therefore a partner [*koinōnos*], receive [*proslambanō*] him as myself.

Paul doesn't use this word "perhaps" very often. It's only here and in Romans 5:7 where it is translated "peradventure." Paul brings up this possibility to soften the harsh reality of what Onesimus has done. Paul is not stating this as an absolute fact, but brings it up as a possibility for Philemon to consider.

³ See E.W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance*, Samuel Bagster, Will, Page 884

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 5 – Without Thy Consent

When used in verse fifteen Paul was not speculating. He was not unclear about God's benevolence or the grace, which led Onesimus to Rome where Paul won him to the Lord. Through the use of "perhaps," Paul expresses humility and lack of prejudice. He is not acting like a know-it-all stating unequivocally that this is the case. Neither does he come off as making the case that Onesimus should have departed. Rather as a brother, partner, or equal he throws out this possibility for Philemon's consideration. The use of "perhaps" does not suggest that Paul doubted the possibility, but rather that he wanted to encourage Philemon's independent consideration of it.

"Departed" is a tactful way of referring to the reality that Onesimus stole, betrayed a trust, and fled as a fugitive. This is another example of a meiosis. One thing is lowered in order to magnify and intensify something else by way of contrast. It is used for the purpose of emphasis, to call one's attention, not to the smallness of the thing thus lessened, but to importance of that which is put in contrast with it.⁴ Paul is again diminishing the season or little time (which was probably about two years) Onesimus was gone to magnify the eternity they will spend together. Eternity will be spent as brothers and not as master and slave, so why not begin to think and act with that reality in mind now.

Like the prodigal son in the parable of the forgiving father, Onesimus' departure initiated a crisis through which he made a life-changing decision. Although the gospel was always available to Onesimus while in Philemon's service, it is not unusual for unbelievers to not respond to the gospel of the grace of God until they find themselves challenged by a crisis or difficult situation. Regardless of how long he was gone and what he did before he left, before he left he didn't believe, and now he is returning as a brother in Christ.

Paul respects and loves both Philemon and Onesimus. They are both mature believers and have both refreshed Paul and been helpful in the work of the ministry. Because Paul loves and respects Onesimus, he wants Philemon to do so also. Further complicating matters is that the new spiritual relationship between Philemon and Onesimus does not alter the legal, established, institutional relationship of the two men; one remains the master and the other the slave.

This cuts right to the heart of the matter. If the mystery is to be lived and both Philemon and Onesimus are equal in the sight of God, how should that effect their master/slave relationship now? Will the gospel change the culture or will the culture continue to dominate in the lives of the believers?

Paul makes the point to again mention how beloved Onesimus is to him. Just as Paul opened the epistle addressing Philemon as a "dearly beloved fellowlaborer," he now describes Onesimus in the same words. Paul says Onesimus was beloved, especially to himself and guarantees that he will endear himself to Philemon again—both in the flesh as a servant in Philemon's household and in the lord as his brother serving in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's imperative to "receive him as a brother" is found in a conditional phrase. Paul's command to Philemon to receive Onesimus is couched with the phrase, "if you count me as a partner [*koinōnos*]." Paul has made it clear from verses thirteen and fourteen that he counts Philemon as a partner, and now gives Philemon the opportunity to

⁴ Bullinger, E.W., FOS pages 155, 157.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer **Session 5 – Without Thy Consent**

respond in kind.

Paul and Onesimus share fully as do Paul and Philemon. Therefore Philemon and Onesimus should also do the same. Paul requests that Philemon receives Onesimus as he would receive Paul himself. That's putting all three of them in the same status. What Christ has done for all of us Paul does for Onesimus. We will come back to that thought later.

Philemon 17:

If thou count me therefore a partner [*koinōnos*], receive [*proslambanō*, in the imperative] him as myself.

From verses thirteen and fourteen we know Paul considered Philemon a partner, now he wants to know if Philemon considers him as a partner. His command to receive Onesimus as he would Paul himself is couched in a conditional clause, "If you consider me a partner." The word partner is *koinōnos*, one who shares fully in the partnership. This is not a limited partner but one who shares fully.

Luke 5:1-10:

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing *their* nets.

3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

7 And they beckoned unto *their* partners [*metochos*, sharing in or partaking, limited partner], which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

10 And so *was* also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners [*koinōnos*, full partners] with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

James, John, and Peter were full partners, and those in the other ship shared or partook with them enjoying some things in common but not all of them. Vine says of the two words: "*Koinōnos* stresses the fact of having something in common, *metochos*, the

Philemon: The Love of a Believer **Session 5 – Without Thy Consent**

fact of sharing; the latter is less thorough in effect than the former.”⁵ *Metochos* implies that though some things are held in common there are other things which are not.

Hebrews 2:14:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of [*metechō*] the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

Metechō is the verb from which *metochos* is derived. Jesus took part *metechō*. He took flesh but not blood. He shared but he didn't share fully. His sinless blood came from God and the flesh he took from his mother, Mary. He had to be a lamb without spot. The blood he had came from the sperm God placed in Mary.

So, if Philemon considered himself to be a full partner⁶ with Paul, he would receive Onesimus as Paul himself. The word receive in verse seventeen is *proslambanō* meaning, according to Thayer, “to take as one's companion or to receive into one's home with kindness or to grant access to one's heart.” We might say, befriend. Paul's request is for Philemon to treat Onesimus as he would treat him personally.

Previously Paul has refused to act without giving Philemon the opportunity to decide what to do with his returning slave. Now Philemon must decide if indeed he is a partner of Paul. If Philemon is committed to the work of the ministry and wants to continue to endear himself as a fellowlaborer he has some decisions to make. We have every reason to believe that he does as Paul continues to give Philemon reason upon reason to do so.

⁵ W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, MacDonald, Partner, Page 846

⁶ Titus was also noted as Paul's partner in II Corinthians 8:23.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer
Session 5 – Without Thy Consent

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 6 – Put That On My Account

In our final session we will see Paul extend himself on Onesimus' behalf. He, in essence, admits that Onesimus has wronged Philemon and owes him dearly, but he intercedes and asks Philemon to put it on his account. Paul says send me the bill, charge it to my account; I will personally take care of it. There is no way Onesimus could pay back Philemon, and Philemon knew he could not. However, Paul gives his personal IOU to assure Philemon that it will be handled.

Philemon 18,19:

If he [Onesimus] hath wronged thee [Philemon], or oweth *thee* ought, put that on mine account;

19 I Paul have written *it* with mine own hand, I will repay *it*: albeit [although] I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides

Paul concedes that Onesimus has wronged Philemon, but he pledges to make full restitution. We know that debt is not desirable and that the Word teaches abundance and not debt. However, in this situation Paul by revelation puts himself in debt. He assumes whatever debt Onesimus has incurred. He does this even though he is apparently not fully cognizant of what that debt might be, he commits himself by his own hand to make it good.

Can't you just hear Paul saying that? "Put that on my account!" Has he wronged thee? I'm sorry! Put that on my account! I'm sorry! Has he disappointed thee? I'm sorry! Put that on my account." Has he let you down, disappointed you, and caused you a great deal of hurt and pain? Put that on my account! Those words speak volumes, "Put that on my account!" Paul is standing in the gap for this poor man, who along with his fellow slaves, formed the dregs of society. This man who was bought and could be sold... This man who was subject to the whim of his master... This man who in the world's estimation was worth less than a fine breeding stallion... Paul puts his life and reputation on the line for Onesimus, a runaway slave.

However, Paul does not see him as a runaway slave any longer. In God's sight and Paul's, he is an Ambassador of Jesus Christ. Paul affords him equal rank and privilege as himself. Paul witnessed to him and, after leading him into the new birth and the operation of the manifestations, has the joy to call him brother. He accepts him as an equal and treats him as he would treat Christ Jesus himself. Paul knew the worth of his soul. Paul knew his value to God and the work of the ministry.

Paul knew this man was called of God and ordained to minister in the name of Jesus Christ, and without knowing exactly what he did or what he owed Philemon, he says, "Whatever it is, put that on my account!" It didn't matter to him the price he had to pay; Jesus Christ had already paid far more dearly than Paul ever would. Paul stepped up to vouch for this man for whom Christ had died and whom no one had the right cast off. Paul loved this man dearly because he responded to the gospel and served faithfully while he was with Paul. Paul recognized the change, the radical change in his life, and resolved to do whatever it took for him to be accepted of the brethren. Onesimus was already accepted in the beloved, Jesus Christ according to Ephesians 1:6. That was good enough for Paul. Paul spoke of him as his brother, his faithful fellowlaborer in the gospel.

You know, Barnabas had done as much for Paul in his early days. When he was

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 6 – Put That On My Account

born-again and boldly spoke in the name of Jesus Christ, people had trouble believing that this murdering Pharisee had really changed. It was Barnabas who went to the apostles and vouched for him and recommended him.¹ He taught and trained Paul and traveled together with him in the early days. Without Barnabas' love and support, doors of service may not have opened to Paul as quickly as they did. Paul now does the same for Onesimus, guaranteeing in his own hand that this slave was now their brother and equal in the eyes of God.

After this promise or guarantee, Paul gives Philemon another reason to comply. He does it with another figure of speech. He uses an indirect, loving reminder. Although Paul says he is not going to mention something he has in essence already mentioned it. That's the figure apophasis or insinuation. Paul says he would not mention that Philemon owes his salvation to Paul, but when stating that he would not mention it, he has mentioned it already. You should note however, that Paul never presses it any further. It is just a gentle reminder. Paul knows Philemon's heart and love for him so he need only allude to it or hint at it. He does not need to harp on it. Paul will repay the money himself rather than press Philemon to simply forgive the debt. Paul is trying to remove any hindrance to Philemon's voluntary compliance.

Paul has made his request and now affirms that he is confident that Philemon will respond positively. Although Paul uses strong language the grammatical constructions in the Greek still allows Philemon his free will. There is no demand or coercion in the imperative of entreaty that Paul uses. It is just a simple loving request of one's brother. Verse twenty contains another play on words to soften the request.

Philemon 20-22:

Yea, brother, let me have joy [imperative or optative mood] of thee in the Lord [in your service to God and God's people]: refresh [imperative mood] my bowels in the Lord [in Christ].

21 Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

22 But withal [*hama*²] prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

"I shall be given" is the Greek *charizomai*, most often translated forgive. It is in the word family of *charis*, grace. The Emphasized Bible translates the KJV phrase "I shall be given unto you" as "I shall be granted as a favor unto you." The Williams translation says "I shall have the gracious privilege of coming unto you."

The words "let [me] have joy" is in the Greek, *oninēmi*, meaning to receive help, profit or benefit. It is a verb form related to the proper noun Onesimus. "Let me be *Onesimized*." Paul is saying I have given Onesimus [Profit or Helpful] to you now, I desire that you give me joy or profit or help [a form of the word Onesimus], too. This is done to humor Philemon — to get him to smile — to encourage his consent. He might as well have said, "Let me get help as well as you get Helpful (i.e. Onesimus)." He then asks Philemon to refresh him as he has so many times before.

¹ Acts 9:27

² It's an interjection such as "by the way," or "while you're at it" or "one more thing.]"

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 6 – Put That On My Account

The implication is... that doing as Paul has asked will indeed provide the desired refreshing. Paul has confidence in Philemon's obedience although he has only insinuated and not directly commanded Philemon regarding what to do.

Paul's confidence that Philemon will do even more than he has asked is an indirect reference to Paul's desire expressed in the central section. Paul knew Philemon would receive Onesimus back as a brother, and he is also confident that he would do even more than he has asked. What a model or example of Christian love it would be if Philemon would grant Onesimus his freedom and allow him to return to Paul in Rome and continue his work in the ministry of the gospel. This epistle would forever be a memorial to how the great mystery makes a difference, and how Christian doctrine has continued to change all cultures in which it prevails.

Finally Paul mentions his desire to see and fellowship with Philemon again when he gets out of prison. He expected release from his house arrest in Rome soon.³ Paul's request for lodging shows not only his love for Philemon but also his recognition of the effectiveness of Philemon's prayers on his behalf.

Paul valued prayer. He habitually made mention of people in prayer, and he was thankful for their remembrance of him. Indeed he sought such prayer on his behalf,⁴ and he faithfully interceded for God's people in this way.

Eight times Paul either directly or indirectly requested prayer for himself. This is put no more directly than in I Thessalonians 5:25 where he says, "Brethren, pray for us." II Thessalonians 3:1 repeats, "Brethren, pray for us."

Paul cherished the prayer of God's people on his behalf. He was well aware of its impact on him and the ministry. The idea Paul mentions that their prayer for him will bring him to them is also echoed in other scriptures.

Romans 15:30-32:

Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together [*sunagōnizomai*] with me in *your* prayers to God for me;

31 That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which *I have* for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints;

32 That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.

The Roman believers pushed themselves in their prayer lives to be the best, just as athletes exert every ounce of their strength to be their best. They strived together as a team each diligently and dedicatedly doing their part. The prayer here mentioned would facilitate Paul's deliverance from them that believe not, the acceptance of his service to the saints, and another time together with the Romans.

Paul also encouraged the Hebrews to pray for him and shorten their time apart.

³ He wrote the same to the Philippians. See Philippians 2:24.

⁴ See Romans 15:30-32; II Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18,19; Philippians 1:19; Colossians 4:2,3; I Thessalonians 5:25; II Thessalonians 3:1; Hebrews 13:18,19

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 6 – Put That On My Account

Hebrews 13:18,19:

Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

19 But I beseech *you* the rather to do this [pray], that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Again their prayers would bring them together in the work of the ministry. Mutual prayer like this binds hearts together and makes personal contact more anticipated and profitable.

Paul closes the epistle sending greetings from others whom Philemon knows and respects. Just as the opening salutation mentioned those who labored together with Philemon, the closing salutation mentions those working along side of Paul. These all wanted Paul to communicate their love and greetings to Philemon and his home fellowship also.

Philemon 23-25:

There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your [plural] spirit [i.e. with you all]. Amen.

Epaphras is also mentioned in the letter to the Colossians, which was written at the same time as Philemon and delivered during the same trip.

Colossians 4:12,13:

Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently [*agōnizomai*] for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them *that are* in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.

It is interesting that Paul mentions how Epaphras exerted himself on behalf of the Colossians in prayer in order that they would stand mature and complete in the will of God. He was very zealous for the believers there, and Paul and God thought Philemon ought to know about it. Apparently Epaphras was from Colosse and had ministered to them in the past, so he would be well known to the Colossians and Philemon.

Colossians 1:7,8:

As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Although Paul refers to him as a “fellow prisoner” in Philemon it seems doubtful that he was actually imprisoned since Paul says he is working hard on behalf of the Colossians, the Laodiceans, and the Hierapolitans. What he had done is fully submitted

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 6 – Put That On My Account

to the will of God. Epaphras is a prisoner figuratively not literally. It is interesting that this word for fellowprisoner is *sunaiçmalōtos*, a fellow prisoner of war. This compliments the description of Archippus, in the opening salutation, as a soldier. They were all engaged in spiritual warfare for the sake of the gospel.

It is interesting to note that Mark is John Mark who had earlier left Paul while they were on an itinerary. Mark had problems on his first trip with Paul and left.⁵ Paul did not want him to go on a second trip. Barnabas split with Paul over this issue.⁶ Mark is here again helping Paul⁷ and also helps Peter.⁸ Obviously Paul had taken him back, and they were once again laboring together.

Aristarchus was caught in Ephesus instead of Paul.⁹ He is a Macedonian of Thessalonica who helped Paul.¹⁰ Paul also calls him a fellowprisoner in Colossians 4:10. He may have gone to Colosse at some later date with Mark and greeted them in person.

Colossians 4:10:

Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)

Demas helped Paul in Rome. Later because of worldly loves, he left Paul and went to Thessalonica.¹¹ Luke was a helper of Paul,¹² and traveled with him on many occasions. He is Greek and writes the gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Luke travel with Paul and labored at his side extensively.¹³ He is also mentioned in Colossians.

Colossians 4:14:

Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.

Just as the epistle opened referring to the grace of God it closes in the same way. This final benediction is typical of Paul and common in his epistles. "The grace of our [That's a together word.] Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, with you all."

What happened as a result of this letter? Did Philemon receive Onesimus as he would have received Paul? Did he return him to Rome to help Paul in ministry? We do not know; we are never told one way or the other.

Paul's confidence is enough to convince me that things played out even as he wrote. What excitement would have filled Philemon's heart if Paul had returned in person rather than just sending the letter? I can imagine the warm and vibrant welcome Paul would have received. Of course, that is how Paul asked and expected Philemon to receive Onesimus, with all the appropriate pomp and circumstance.

⁵ Acts 12:25, Acts 13:5,13

⁶ Acts 15:36-40

⁷ See also Colossians 4:10 and II Timothy 4:11.

⁸ I Peter 5:13

⁹ Acts 19:29

¹⁰ Acts 27:2; Acts 20:4

¹¹ Philemon 24; Colossians 4:14; II Timothy 4:10

¹² Colossians 4:14 and II Timothy 4:11

¹³ The so-called "we" sections in Acts are when Luke traveled with Paul. See Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 6 – Put That On My Account

The Great Mystery or the Sacred Secret doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is not just theoretical or doctrinal. Indeed if it is not lived and is not practiced in our daily lives what difference does it make? This Great Mystery of God will only have the impact God intended as it shapes the way we think, speak, and act. It is great to rejoice and celebrate Christ in me, but unless I recognize and celebrate Christ in you, I'm missing the mark. The mystery of godliness is a great equalizer. It doesn't matter from what culture we come, what genetic background we have, what God says about us is true. If we believe God's Word, we will receive its promises. In God's eyes we are all equal and accepted. The revolutionary ideas of equality in gender and social status that rocked the Roman world should continue to rock ours also.

Galatians 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

If indeed we are one, we should act like it and honor one another. We should esteem one another better than ourselves and hold each other in high regard. Romans set the doctrine very clearly.

Romans 15:5-7:

Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

6 That ye may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

We are to be likeminded. Christ Jesus is to be our standard. When we look at each other we should see the Lord Jesus Christ. We should treat one another as we would treat the Lord Jesus Christ himself. That is what will glorify God. It is nice to say, "God we give you praise and glory." But this verse tells us that this kind of likemindedness glorifies God. If Christ received us to the glory of God, what reason would be sufficient for me to not receive you? The acknowledgement of the mystery is not optional if we are to live the "It is written" lifestyle.

Colossians 2:1-3:

For I would [*thēlō*, the intense spontaneous desire] that ye knew what great conflict [*agōn*], I have for you, and *for* them at Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love [*agapē*], and unto [*eis*] all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to [*eis*] the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, ~~and of the Father, and of Christ~~; [Many critical texts omit.]

3 In whom [which, i.e. the mystery] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer

Session 6 – Put That On My Account

There are treasures of wisdom and knowledge that come from the full assurance of understanding and acknowledging the mystery of God. That's one of the reasons for mentioning all these people at the end and the beginning of the epistle. They are living the mystery. Their lives and hearts are knit together with Paul and Philemon in the work of the mystery. Paul's great concern is that everyone in Colosse would have their hearts so knit together. The only way this will ever happen is to acknowledge the mystery, and let it make a difference in our everyday lives.

It is available, as Romans 15 said, to with one mind and one mouth glorify God. This takes us being likeminded one to another according to Christ Jesus. These men and women mention in this little epistle accomplished this. It is not beyond our reach. It is a reality we can make our own and enjoy for the rest of our lives.

I know some people may have had trouble reconciling the many rhetorical devices Paul used to elicit a favorable response from Philemon. They see Paul pressuring Philemon to respond as he wants while speaking in such humble terms as manipulative. They suggest that Paul may have used guilt or emotional blackmail to control Philemon's response.

I do not think that is the case. These men were dearly beloved fellowlaborers, friends of the best kind. For Paul to do that would have been wrong, and Philemon would have certainly picked up on it. Yes, it was perfectly clear what kind of response Paul wanted and expected. However, it is also equally clear that Paul was making his appeal out of love without compulsion.

Paul had Philemon's best interests at heart as well as Onesimus'. Paul wasn't being manipulative; he was being motivational. What's the difference? Motivation promotes the benefit of the hearer, while manipulation promotes the benefit of the speaker. Paul honestly sought the benefit of both Philemon and Onesimus. Remember he said in verse fourteen that he wanted Philemon's benefit or blessing to proceed out of a willing heart not out of a necessity. He also confessed his reliance upon Philemon's goodwill. Paul refused to act until he knew Philemon was in agreement with him. They were partners. Although Paul may have had every "right" to prescribe Philemon's behavior, he deferred his rights to Philemon's free choice. These were indeed friends of the greatest magnitude, and they would never attempt to manipulate one another.

In this short twenty-five verse letter Paul demonstrates the heart of a servant-leader. He pleads for Onesimus and intercedes for him. He applauds Philemon's love that has consistently refreshed the believers. Paul is himself refreshed knowing that Philemon would do even more than he has asked.

The prison epistles impacted Paul very much. This gracious revelation changed his life. His commitment to serve increased the more he communicated what God had made him to be in Christ. The mystery or the sacred secret has continued to change every culture where it has been allowed to thrive. It is my heart's desire that it impacts your life where you live today. It is my prayer that our hearts continue to be knit together unto the full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgment of the mystery. Let's fight for one another as Paul did for Onesimus, and let's expect our partners to stand with us likemindedly in moving God's Word over the world. God bless you.

Philemon: The Love of a Believer
Session 6 – Put That On My Account

Philemon: The Love of a Believer
Session 6 – Put That On My Account

Philemon: The Love of a Believer
Session 6 – Put That On My Account

Philemon: The Love of a Believer
Session 6 – Put That On My Account