

Philemon

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This is where there are two series, and the first of the one series of members corresponds with the last of the second; the second of the first corresponds with the penultimate (or the last minus one) of the second; and the third of the first corresponds with the antepenultimate of the second. That is to say, if there are six members, the first corresponds with the sixth, the second with the fifth, and the third the fourth. And so on. The Greeks call it chiasmus. (E.W. Bullinger) It will be observed that the first and last members are alternate. (ibid)

Translation

Phi. 1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus [not Nero], and Timothy [amanuensis], our brother, to Philemon, our beloved and fellow-worker,

Phi. 2 And to Apphia [his wife], our sister [in Christ], and to Archippus [their son], our fellow soldier [seasoned veteran in the ministry], and to the [local] assembly [at Colossia] which meets at your home:

Phi. 3 Grace [experiential sanctification] to you and prosperity [supergrace blessings] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Phi. 4 I keep thanking my God always [on a continual basis], making mention of you [remembering Philemon] during the time of my prayers,

Phi. 5 (because from time-to-time [recurring reports] I hear about your [Philemon's] virtue love [as fruit of the Spirit] and the doctrine which you have [in your soul] by way of application face-to-face with the Lord Jesus [in spiritual self-esteem] and toward all the saints [in spiritual autonomy]),

Phi. 6 In order that our association [fellowship], with reference to your doctrine [fruits of your Bible study], might be operational [produce continual spiritual momentum] towards Christ [category 1 love in spiritual self-esteem] by means of the full knowledge of every good of intrinsic value thing [divine good] in you;

Phi. 7 For I have come to have great inner happiness and encouragement due to your virtue love [category 3 friendship], because the deep and tender affections [emotional response] of the saints [royal family] have been repeatedly refreshed through you [blessing by association], my brother [Philemon].

Phi. 8 Therefore, though I have maximum authority [as an apostle] by means of Christ to command you to do what is fitting and proper under the given circumstances [apply virtue love as a problem-solving device],

Phi. 9 Instead, because of your virtue love [category 3 friendship], I encourage you [grace orientation] even more [allowing him to make his own decision], being such a person as Paul, an ambassador and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

Phi. 10 I am appealing to you [to be grace oriented] on behalf of my theological student, Onesimus, concerning whom I have fathered [spiritually] while in chains [to a Roman Praetorian Guard],

Phi. 11 The one formerly useless [in spite of his name which means “useful”] to you [as a runaway slave], but now [after regeneration] highly useful both to you [as an improved slave] and to me [as a friend and ambassador for Christ],

Phi. 12 Whom I am sending back [to resume his duties] to you [along with Tychicus], that same one who has my very own tender affections [Paul loves Onesimus as if he were his own son],

Phi. 13 Whom I wish [would have liked] to detain for myself [I’ve procrastinated in returning him to you], so that on your behalf [instead of you being here in person], he might keep on ministering to me in my chains [imprisonment] for the sake of the gospel.

Phi. 14 However, I did not want to do anything without your consent, in order that your intrinsic good [produced by doctrine in your soul] should not have to manifest itself by means of compulsion [not through Paul’s compelling arguments or legal action regarding runaway slaves], but rather voluntarily.

Phi. 15 Perhaps for this purpose [by divine design] he was separated from you [by God] for an hour [short vacation], in order that you might have him [Onesimus] back forever [lifelong service],

Phi. 16 No longer as a mere slave, but more than a slave, a beloved [exhibiting spiritual momentum] brother [Christian], most of all to me, but now much more to you, both in the flesh [Onesimus continues to be a slave of Philemon in the human realm] and in the Lord [Onesimus and Philemon are equals in the spiritual realm].

Phi. 17 Therefore, if you continue to have me as a partner [close spiritual relationship], then please receive him [Onesimus] as you would receive me [as a grace partner].

Phi. 18 And if he has wronged you [by running away or staying with Paul too long] or if he owes you anything [due to indebtedness, theft or over-spending], then charge it to my account [a grace-oriented business transaction].

Phi. 19 “I, Paul,” have written by my own hand [binding legal signature]: “I will compensate [promissory note or IOU] you,” so that I do not have to mention to you

that you owe, even yourself, to me [Paul led him to Christ and taught him Bible doctrine].

Phi. 20 Okay, brother, let me benefit [as a return on doctrinal investment] from you [in this matter] because of the Lord. Refresh my deep affections [inner happiness] for you in Christ.

Phi. 21 Because I have confidence in your obedience [proper application of Bible doctrine], I have written to you, knowing that you will do even more [reading between the lines] than what I am suggesting [treat Onesimus well and setting an example to others].

Phi. 22 And at the same time [along with your reception of Onesimus], also prepare for me a lodging [guest room], for I anticipate that through your prayers, I shall be graciously given back to you [just like Onesimus].

Phi. 23 Epaphrus, my fellow prisoner [inmate], salutes you in Christ Jesus;

Phi. 24 Also Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke: my co-workers.

Phi. 25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your [human] spirit.

Introduction

“If it were a matter to be determined by personal sympathies, tastes, or feelings, I should be as ready as any man to condemn the institution of slavery, for all my prejudices of education, habit, and social position stand entirely opposed to it. But as a Christian ... I am compelled to submit my weak and erring intellect to the authority of the Almighty. For then only can I be safe in my conclusions, when I know that they are in accordance with the will of Him, before whose tribunal I must render a strict account in the last great day.” (John Henry Hopkins, 1792-1868, Episcopal Bishop of Vermont)

As usual, this is not a term paper or a sermon, but a string of quotations from Bible scholars ... and an occasional comment from myself inserted for good measure. It is not meant to read smoothly like a book, but as a “cause to pause” and think about something important to the understanding of the epistle at hand.

The question of slavery so obviously suggests itself in connection with this epistle that a short section on the subject seems called for. It is not enough to refer only to Roman slavery, although Onesimus was a slave and Philemon a master under the Roman regime; for Paul was a Hebrew, and the Hebrew conception of slavery must, therefore, be taken

into account as well. (W. Nicoll) Slavery was practiced by the Hebrews under the sanction of the Mosaic Law, not less than by the Greeks and Romans. But though the same in name, it was in its actual working something wholly different. (J. Lightfoot) Then there are the questions surrounding the Civil War in America. “What does the Civil War in America have to do with the Epistle to Philemon?” you might ask. The answer is, “Absolutely nothing.” And that is the point. Nearly everyone I have had a conversation with on slavery, and about 15% of the commentators, view the institution of slavery from a 21st century perspective. That is well and good as far as our modern detestation of the evils of slavery go, but that is an unacceptable lens through which to view Scripture. The Bible must be interpreted according to the time in which it was written.

Isagogics, the historical context behind a study of a Bible passage, is very important to Philemon. I have spent an unusual amount of time researching the topic of slavery because of the commotion that is sure to follow my next quote. (LWB) “The Bible does not specifically condemn the practice of slavery.” It gives instructions on how slaves should be treated (Deut. 15:12-15; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1), but does not outlaw the practice altogether. What many people fail to understand is that slavery in Biblical times was very different from the slavery that was practiced in the past few centuries in many parts of the world. The slavery in the Bible was not based on race. People were not enslaved because of their nationality or the color of their skin. In Bible times, slavery was more of a social status. (Kaiser, Davids, Brauch) There are deep-rooted political and philosophical commitments which influence almost every significant treatment of the topic of Christian slave-ownership ... Moreover, varying ideological commitments play a significant role in interpretation, too. Exegetical judgments may be loaded with theological preferences. The peculiarly modern characteristic in discussion of this issue is the post-abolitionist conviction that Christianity (as we understand it) is fundamentally opposed to the institution of slavery. Since few, if any, can find in Paul’s writings any robust denunciation of slavery to match our own, NT scholars tend to fall into one of two camps. (J. Barclay)

I discovered this “division into two camps” at the mere mention of the fact that slavery as an institution (and slaveowners as a class of people) in the Bible are not considered a sin and might even be promoted in some circumstances. With all due respect to some friends, our conversation quickly ended and a subjective diatribe was leveled against me! The aim of this emotional diatribe was probably to keep me from falling into a pre-Civil War abyss. Since I’m alone in my study and you (the reader) can’t hurl accusations at me, let me assure you of a few things before we continue. First, I do not want to become a slave. Second, I do not want to own a slave. Third, I think it is better to be free than to be a slave, in most circumstances but maybe not all. Fourth, I believe the Bible condones slavery (try to explain away the 10th commandment, if you wish) but not the wicked way in which many slaves were treated throughout history. (LWB) In order to minimize the Bible’s support for slavery, the King James translators used “servant” instead of “slave” in Philemon and other places. The RSV translators used “bondman.” Any knowledgeable authority knows slaves are being discussed, and several versions are honest enough to

admit it as such. This is not a situation appearing in the Old Testament only. Paul not only sanctions slavery but equates serving one's master with serving God in 1 Peter 2.

Confederate leaders during the Civil War were correct when they contended that the Bible supported slavery. The abolitionists were wrong. You will find slavery sanctioned in the prophecies, psalms, epistles of Paul, etc. "There is not one verse in the Bible inhibiting slavery, but many regulating it," said Alexander Campbell. But that is not the question in either 1 Corinthians or Philemon. Why would it be "better" or "preferred" by Paul for a slave (1 Cor. 7) to remain in slavery? Would it have been more difficult for a Christian slave to endure the travail of the "last days" as a freedman? Would it have been to the slave's benefit to remain in slavery, or could he more single-mindedly serve the Lord as a slave? (S. Bartchy) Those are the real questions. Slavery was by no means an ideal situation, but it was often much better than modern men are inclined to think, not only in the time of Homer and classic Athens, but also in the Empire. In both Greece and Italy, large numbers of persons even sold themselves into slavery; they did so for a variety of reasons, among which were to find a life that was easier than they had as freemen, to secure special jobs, and to climb socially. (Dio) The treatment of slaves was not always as advertised either. Petronius once said: "I did my utmost to please my master, a splendid dignified gentleman, whose little finger was worth more than the whole of you." (L. Friedlaender)

If slavery is so wrong, why did Paul advise a slave to remain in the status quo? Hagar was a slave, and the angel of the Lord told her to return to her mistress and submit herself under her hands. In short, "the Old Testament mentioned, legislated on, and did not expressly condemn slavery ... The Jews were allowed to buy "bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy." (A. Hart) Exodus and Leviticus have many passages that sanction the purchase, sale, and even extreme punishment of slaves. "That both the Old and New Testament recognized the existence of slavery when they were written, and nowhere instituted direct commands against it, is absolutely irrefutable." Noting that slavery was an institution whose appropriateness was never questioned in ancient culture, E.J. Gorlich has called upon translators of the Bible to accept this fact and to stop trying to disguise the actual situation by the use of the term "servant" instead of "slave." Slavery is not necessarily a good idea in the modern world. "But it is a requirement of scholarly integrity, and of any true understanding of the Bible, that we should refrain from importing our own modern political and social values into the text." (www.bible-researcher.com) So we are going to investigate slavery for a minute in three different time periods (ancient Israel, Civil War in the 1860's, and Greco-Rome) so we can understand how and why we have the opinions on the topic that we do.

Slavery in Israel

The Bible permits slavery. This statement will come as a shock to most people. The laws in the Bible concerning slavery have very seldom been studied, much less preached upon. But the biblical laws concerning slavery are among the most beneficent in all the Bible ...

For example, kidnapping is forbidden as a method of acquiring slaves (Ex. 21:16), and deserves capital punishment. There are four legal ways to get slaves: purchased (Lev. 25:44-46), captured in war (Num. 31:32-35; Deut. 21:10-14), enslaved as punishment for theft (Ex. 22:1-3), or enslaved to pay off debts (Lev. 25:39; Ex. 21:7). Masters are allowed to beat lazy slaves (Ex. 21:20-27). But if a master murdered his slave, he was executed (Ex. 21:20). There was an elaborate set of laws governing slaves in Israel. (D. Chilton) See pages 998-999 in Unger's Bible Dictionary for starters. (LWB) But there is not a Biblical case for the abolition of slavery in the Bible, not even in Philemon. "How can this be?" you may ask. "It was such an evil practice in Civil War days." Partial answer: In ancient times, slavery was not associated with any particular race, as it was in the U.S. during pre-Civil War days. So by condoning slavery the Bible does not approve of racism. Even a human slave is really a freedman of the Lord. Social status, race, nationality, sex, financial status – none of these things are truly important.

Slavery was part of Israelite tribal society from the beginning (Gen. 16:1). According to the law, both Israelite families and their slaves were included as part of the covenantal community's Sabbath obligations (Ex. 20: 8-11) ... This statute (Ex. 21:26-27) required that male and female slaves be freed if they had been brutalized by their masters ... David, in one instance (2 Sam. 8:2), chose to execute two-thirds of his Moabite prisoners, perhaps as a lesson to that nation or because he simply did not need that many slave laborers. Solomon's public works projects were built by forced labor battalions, drafted from among the Israelite villages (1 Kings 5:13-18) ... Provision for perpetual slavery for male Israelites only occurs in the law when a slave made the decision to remain a slave himself. He may have done this to prevent falling back into the pattern of poverty that had forced him into slavery originally or because freedom would have separated him from his family. (V. Matthews) The story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, indicates clearly the social status of what the Authorized Version politely called Sarah's "handmaid." The proper term is "slave," and the social practices that the Bible takes for granted, without any criticism, are those of chattel slavery. Hagar was simply a piece of property, to be used as needed and thrown out when needed no longer. (M. Smith)

Slavery is humanely regulated in the legal portions of the Old Testament, and in the epistles of the New Testament slaveholders are exhorted to show kindness to slaves, but nowhere in the Bible is there anything which can be interpreted as a disapproval of the institution as such. People of our generation, Christians included, tend to have a very hard time with this, because it seems to amount to a tacit approval of the institution, and we balk at the idea that God did not consider the institution itself to be immoral. Part of the problem is that we have false ideas about what slavery was really like. The life of a slave was not easy, but we get an exaggerated idea of the hardships of slavery from watching movies or reading historical material that is written on a popular level. In most cases the life of a slave was not much different from the life of any lower-class worker. Those who have been in the military have experienced something like it – being legally bound to an employer and to a job that one cannot simply quit at will, not free to leave without permission, subject to discipline if one disobeys or is grossly negligent – all of this is familiar enough to those who have served in the military. (bible-researcher.com)

There are some who deny there was ever slavery in Israel. One can only wonder what Bible they are reading. (LWB) We maintain there was countenanced in the Bible a true slavery, but a humane one. It was a paternal refuge for the impoverished and a sanctuary for conquered aliens. Its restriction was not primarily in the interest of the individual but to preserve a wholesome distribution of independent ownership, operating in connection with the tribal customs of marriage and inheritance. (R. North) It cannot be said that the juridical treatment of slavery in halakhic texts is such as to add any very glorious chapter to the history of Jewish ethics ... but the student of ethics in Israel has no more right than has the social historian to close his eyes to it. (E. Urbach) Temporary self-sale had been known in Jewish circles for centuries. (D. Daube) There are many verses on the treatment of slaves in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. For Jewish slaves who wanted to remain so for more than six years [freedom was automatically given to Jewish slaves in the 7th or Sabbath Year], there are also verses that command “ear boring.” For instance, seven years in Deuteronomy, and up to the next jubilee in Leviticus - unless permanent slavery is voluntarily entered into. (J. Barclay)

The complicated traditions and laws which Paul learned, regulating the relationships between Jewish slaves and Jewish owners, between Gentile slaves and Jewish owners, and between Jewish slaves and Gentile owners, were not theoretical but were descriptive of his immediate social and legal environment. Indeed, even when worshipping in the Temple, Paul saw many slaves assisting the high priests in their ministrations. (E. Urbach) Some slaves reached eminent positions and seem to have become assimilated into the priestly stock. Others were released during the Jubilee. In principle the Jubilee Year, the final year in a cycle of fifty years, was the occasion for the automatic emancipation of a Jew who had become the slave of a fellow Jew sometime in the previous forty-nine years. (J. Morgenstern) Under Jewish law, the Jew who became a slave was required to receive such good treatment that Jews who were anxious to sell themselves into slavery [to avoid starvation or delinquent taxes] often could not find Jewish purchasers. (E. Urbach) The Essenes and the Therapeutae appear to be the only groups in the 1st century who challenged the institution of slavery in Israel.

Note also that the Jewish slave of a Jewish owner could elect to stay in slavery longer than his “normal” enslavement of six years if the owner wanted to keep him. There is even a case of the Rabbis discussing a slave who tried to refuse manumission by claiming that he had not really been manumitted. Security was also a big issue, completely overlooked by writers on slavery today. In the case above, the testimony of the owner was required to enforce the manumission. (I. Epstein) Leviticus also insists that you must call your brother a slave and must not be harsh in your treatment of him: his status as a brother, with the inalienable property rights which will be recognized at the next jubilee, makes it impossible to regard him as a slave in the way that members of other nations may be termed and treated as slaves. (J. Barclay) Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he asked Philemon (in verse 16) to treat Onesimus as a beloved brother rather than a mere slave? He wasn't calling for an end to slavery, but to point out that being a brother in Christ is more important than being a slave or a free man.

The unresolved tension on whether Onesimus is a slave, a brother, or both, is left hanging. This may be due to the fact that Paul was applying subtle Jewish law concerning slavery in his letter to Philemon. Jewish law did not say a word against the institution, but only against maltreatment. Nobody treated slaves as well as the Jews. In many cases, the Jews were rescuing these people from poverty. (LWB) To ask why Paul did not advocate the abolition of slavery in its entirety is perhaps to pose an anachronistic and inappropriate question: no-one in the ancient world (not even those involved in slave revolts) could imagine the social economy operating without slaves, except in desert communities or in utopian dreams ... It is not surprising that no-one in the early centuries of Christian history understood Paul to be questioning the institution of slavery or even the Christian ownership of Christian slaves ... It is difficult to see more than wishful thinking in the statements of those who think that Paul subtly undermined slavery and who represent the various abolitions of slavery in the nineteenth century as the inevitable result of the teaching of Paul or the NT generally. (J. Barclay) It is to this historical mindset that we now turn.

Slavery in the United States

Slavery existed virtually without criticism for some three thousand years before abolitionist movements around the world began criticizing it in the late eighteenth century. An institution that was a normal state of affairs in most countries of the world for 3,000 years was eliminated within the course of a century, although chattel slavery has been resurrected in the Sudan and elsewhere in contemporary Africa ... Servile labor disappeared because it could not stand the competition of free labor; its profitability sealed its doom in the market economy. With the development of capitalism, slavery all over the world became uneconomical, with the result being manumission – the willingness of slave owners to allow their slaves to purchase their freedom – and other forms of peaceful emancipation ... Only in the United States was warfare associated with emancipation ... In the British Empire, emancipation was completed in just six years, and the British government compensated landowners an amount that was estimated at 40 percent of the value of their slaves. By 1840 all the slaves in the British Empire had been freed ... In the War between the States, the explicit monetary cost alone was approximately \$6.6 billion. The North's share would have been more than enough to purchase the freedom of every slave, and give each 40 acres of land and a mule. (T. DiLorenzo)

Slavery in Rome, Greece, and Israel (most often cited examples) was not race-centered. Slavery in the U.S. was almost entirely African and in many cases became racially centered. This is an historical preconception about slavery that is almost impossible to erase from our minds when attempting to discuss the topic. Automatically, anyone who reads Scripture and concludes that the Bible allows the practice will be condemned by others as being a racist – in spite of the fact that slavery in the Bible was not about race. The majority of slaves owned by the three civilizations mentioned above were not African, but a true mixed multitude. Then why did we have a Civil War in the United

States? If you ask someone raised in the north, they will probably say to abolish slavery. If you ask someone raised in the south, they will probably say to maintain states' rights. Who won the war? The north won the war – so the north as victor “had the right to record as history and to enforce his point of view as the official and accepted history of the war.” (James & Walter Kennedy) Jefferson Davis predicted that if the South lost the war, the North would write its history. That's exactly what happened, and the victor even used the Bible (out of context) to support their victory. Is that so surprising? In any case, abolitionism was proven incompatible with Christian orthodoxy. But that did not stop antislavery fanatics nor their brainwashing policy in the Press. “Yankee journalists” replaced the Bible as the standard of truth with man-centered “morality, emotionalism and a distorted sense of philanthropy.”

Absence of Biblical condemnation against slavery didn't stop anti-slavery thinking in the United States. The abolitionist arguments that came from quoting “chapter and verse” were extremely weak and usually out of context (championed by Quakers), but their philosophical, ethical and moral arguments in themselves were quite powerful. Together with members of the press, abolitionists journeyed south, digging up horror stories wherever they found them. Their creed was “give up your unblessed property, forsake your evil habits, change your laws, and alter the Constitution.” What many history textbooks call “abolitionist agitation” was actually crusader arrogance gone mad. “Moral degeneracy in the North continued to accuse wealthy slave-holders in the south of immoral degeneracy. Christians on both sides of the issue were undoubtedly “out of fellowship” and refused to listen to the opposing side with any objectivity. The abolitionists grew in numbers, became very well organized in big cities in the north, and began financing “rebellions and insurrections” in the south. Once the issue attacked the pocket-book, war became the most likely option. (LWB) The moral imperative of antislavery fostered an interpretive approach that found conscience to be a more reliable guide to Christian morality than biblical authority. (J. Harrill) Not much has changed since then. Many who assume that the Bible is anti-slavery hold that position from an emotional and moral basis, not a biblical one. Some of them would rewrite the Bible itself to ensure their viewpoint reigns supreme. (LWB) Unfortunately, however, we cannot correct NT passages that appear to be immoral, even when the interest to do so serves the noblest of aims. (J. Harrill)

Antislavery and abolitionist crusaders ransacked Scripture for texts condemning slavery, but the NT proved a particularly thorny place for them to look. Two primary problems demanded exegetical solution: first, the disturbing silence of Jesus Christ on slavery; and second, the perhaps more disturbing outspokenness of the apostle Paul ... The “learned and pious” translators of the KJV never once, in the whole Bible, gave the word “doulos” the meaning “slave,” but “servant.” “*If they were slaves, the translators of our Bible would have called them so.*” This literalism about, and semantic subterfuge of, the biblical text in English came from an orthodox attempt to protect antislavery and abolitionism from infidelity charges. It was also a response, albeit weak, as anti-intellectual arguments generally are, to the critical research of America's leading biblical scholars, such as Moses Stuart of Andover Theological Seminary, who tried to debunk

this “servant” theory as absurd. The antislavery and abolitionist preachers, however, questioned the wisdom of taking “a solemn practical question at first into Greek and Hebrew lexicons, grammars, critics, and commentators, one-half of whose ideas are baked stiff in the oven of German hermeneutics.” Authors in this intellectual camp used philological subterfuge of the original Greek to exculpate Paul from positions dangerous and hostile to their own. The main target was Paul’s letter to Philemon. Antislavery and abolitionist authors tried to force exegetical control over this letter because it was potentially the most dangerous book in the entire Bible. The danger of defeat from damning proslavery exegesis outweighed the danger of infidelity from philology and the German biblical criticism. Antislavery and abolitionist intellectuals argued that the Onesimus mentioned in the letter was not a slave but a free apprentice, employee, or even actual brother of Philemon. (J. Harrill)

“The evidence that there were both slaves and masters in the churches founded and directed by the apostles,” pleads the moderate Congregationalist Leonard Bacon, “cannot be gotten rid of without resorting to methods of interpretation which will get rid of anything.” Abolitionists then claimed that biblical interpretation must look beyond the flat reading of the text. It aims to “discern” in Protestant fashion the kernel of universal truth lying beneath the superficial meaning of individual passages ... The kernel that controlled biblical interpretation became Jesus’ so-called Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (J. Harrill) Every passage of Scripture that was proslavery was rejected at face-value for the kernel of the Golden Rule. How did this work out practically when it came to maintaining or emancipating slaves? (LWB) Many slave-holders in the South were open to a gradual form of emancipation, but inflexible Garrisonites and hungry investors in the North had their eyes on southern property. While the North had invested in factories and materiel, the South had invested in land and slaves. If investors in the North could demand the immediate freedom of slaves in the South, southern landowners would go bankrupt. Yankees could then move in and take over plantations for a fraction of their value. A champion of slavery wrote, “Supposing that we were all convinced and thought of slavery precisely as you do, at what era of ‘moral suasion’ do you imagine you could prevail on us to give up a thousand millions of dollars in the value of our slaves, and a thousand millions of dollars more in the depreciation of our lands?” As for general emancipation, immediate or remote, its difficulties and its dangers were clearly realized by many impartial observers. Some calculated the immense sums that would be necessary to compensate the owners for their slaves. The planters themselves foresaw nothing but ruin for both races ... Against this battery of argument the abolitionists were conscientiously obtuse. (A. Hart)

Most of those scholars who stress the grammatical considerations prefer the “take freedom” interpretation (such as J.H. Moulton, C.F.D. Moule, M. Thrall, N. Turner), and most of the scholars who stress the importance of the context prefer the “use slavery” interpretation (such as J. Weib, H. Greeven, J.N. Sevenster, E. Kasemann). Scholars who read of the terrors of slavery in the ancient world urge that Paul was allowing, indeed encouraging, a slave to take his freedom, if he could get it. But those who judge first-century slavery to have been a relatively benign institution, affirm Paul’s own indifference to this social condition. (S. Bartchy) Some relegated the institution of

slavery to the previous Jewish dispensation. Christianity, in their mind, was superior to and an improvement upon laws that governed the nation Israel. Mankind was improving, marching forward, and slavery was not part of the future. Some even pontificated that the freedom principles of Christianity caused the decline and downfall of slavery in the ancient world. (LWB) You can read about the horrors of slavery from the hands of wicked slaveowners in every (abolitionist) book you read, including slave revolts and armies of runaway slaves. You can also read about the blessings of slavery from the hands of beneficial slaveowners, such as those comments made by Epictetus – himself a former slave. The bottom line to this angle in the argument is, in my opinion, not so much the institution itself but how it was managed. (S. Bartchy) But rather than focus on the reality of the institution of slavery and how it was managed, the abolitionist hermeneutic declared their own “moral intuition” as supreme to the text itself. (LWB) Individual emotions and experiential religious truth replaced the plain sense of the Bible ... the rational conscience written by God on the heart (Unitarianism) instead of the verbal inspiration of Scripture became the basis for interpreting the Bible. Radical abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison took this logic to its extreme conclusion ... He eventually declared the Bible “a lie and a curse on mankind.” (J. Harrill)

If the “freedom” to which Paul refers in 1 Cor. 7:21 is not related to “striving” on the part of the slave but rather is the result of the owner’s action, then Paul could be saying that he, of course, has no objection to the slave becoming a freedman, for all earthly positions have been relativized. (S. Bartchy) That’s essentially a form of emancipation. The South in the nineteenth century was already moving toward the gradual emancipation of slaves. But this is not what the striving was really about. “The War for Southern Independence was not so much a war of brother against brother as it was a war of culture against culture. The South is seceding from the North because the two are not homogeneous. They have different instincts, different appetites, different morals, and a different culture. Other than language, there was very little that the two sections held in common. These two peoples had grown so far apart and had become so different that the political union could not be held together without the utmost caution on both sides. (Kennedy) From 70-80% of the Confederate soldiers and sailors were not slave owners. (J. Tilley) Who in his right mind could honestly claim that the Southern soldiers and sailors, the vast majority of whom were not slave owners, went to war against a numerically superior foe and endured four long years of hardships, all in order to allow a few rich men to keep their slaves? (Kennedy) But Garrisonian crusaders damned institutional Christianity as collaborating with proslavery, and Frederick Douglass’ “gospel of freedom” pushed both sides closer to war. (J. Harrill) In the process, Calvinist exegesis (Charles Hodge) destroyed the hermeneutical subterfuge of Barnes – the issue was settled in Scripture. But did the war initially begin on the debate over slavery? No, even though the “servant” hypothesis was “bad scholarship” and “bad Christian faith,” the war started on the issue of secession, not the Scriptures. (LWB)

No, the war was not fought for or against slavery. Nor was it a civil war, because there were not two factions attempting to gain control of the government. These are myths created by the victor, similar to the myths created about the true nature of slavery in the

United States. The war began over a state's right to secede from the union they had once voluntarily joined, i.e., state's rights. One-by-one, many southern states saw an irreconcilable set of differences between their culture, their way of life (not related to slavery), and their biblical and moral principles. They did not want their life to be regulated by the population of a few large cities in the north, so they legally seceded. The north said, "You do not have the right as states to secede from the union, and if you do so, we consider that an act of war." These southern states seceded anyway, and the north "started the war," which those who lived in the south at that time called the "War of Northern Aggression." Once again, the south interpreted the constitution correctly, understanding fully the debates and correspondence that went on prior to the signing of the U.S. Constitution by the states years ago. (Kennedy) In order to make sure the north didn't use slavery as an excuse to go to war, and to protect certain elements of the original constitution that were being abandoned by the north, the south (Confederate States) drafted a constitution similar to the one they were seceding from.

Find a copy of the Constitution of the Confederate States of America and read it. Chances are, you have no idea what some of the differences were to the constitution we currently have in place. For instance, there are two items in the first sentence that the south "highlighted" because they thought the north had abandoned these principles that were originally part of our constitution: "Each state acting in its sovereign and independent character" (states rights) and "invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God." There was also a clause that gave the President a line-item veto and a requirement that the budget be balanced – no cost overruns. The word "equality" was interpreted by the south as "equality of opportunity" while the north reinterpreted it as "equality of result." There were also attempts to figure out a way to eliminate the appointment of judges in favor of an elected judiciary. In many ways, the south is still fighting the north over these two governing principles! But now the political philosophy that resembles the former "North" is a handful of very large cities or voting bands while the principles of the former "South" is the rest of the country that does not live in these large bands. Instead of looking at the "red state, blue state" maps, look at the maps which show where conservative and liberal philosophies of life inhabit the U.S.

But I'm running afield of the topic under discussion: slavery. Read Section 9 of the SCA constitution if you can find a copy in the library or online. The first clause reads "The importation of negroes of the African race, from any foreign country, other than the slaveholding States or Territories of the United States of America, is hereby forbidden, and Congress is required to pass such laws as shall effectively prevent the same." Not only did the Constitution of the Confederate States of America outlaw the importation of slaves from Africa into the South, but the very first veto issued by President Jefferson Davis was on a bill that he deemed to be in conflict with that part of the Confederate Constitution that prohibited the importation of African slaves. Those who believe in the myth of the "Slaveholders Confederacy" will have a hard time understanding why the president of the Southern Confederacy and the very constitution of that Confederacy were both opposed to the importation of African slaves. But cultural bigots have never allowed truth to stand in the way of their prejudice. (Kennedy) It is also a known fact that

thousands of slaves joined their masters in battle for the South, something the northern press obliterated from nearly all of their war reports.

The reasons the North fought the South were not the result of differences in principles of constitutional law, but only because their profits might be lost if the South was successful in its move for independence. The Northern merchantile interest feared a loss of their political and economic control of an expanding, agricultural America. When Abraham Lincoln was asked why the North should not let the South go, his reply was, "Let the South go? Let the South go! Where then will we get our revenues!" The real issue between the North and the South was political and economic – two different cultures with conflicting economic systems. And the great fear of the commercial North was that all or part of the commerce west of the Appalachian Mountains would pass through New Orleans and leave the Eastern ports with very little commerce. (Kennedy) "If the South secedes and forms their own government, they will not employ our ships or buy our goods. What is our shipping without it? Literally nothing. The transportation of cotton and its fabrics employs more ships than all other trade. It is very clear that the South gains by this process, and we lose. No – we MUST NOT let the South go." (Union Democrat editorial, Manchester, New Hampshire) So if the war wasn't really about slavery, even though the abolitionists insisted that it was, then one might ask if slavery in the South was really as bad as they claimed it was?

Slavery in the South was not that different than slavery in Greece and Rome, with two exceptions: (1) All of the slaves were from Africa and were brought here against their will, and (2) All of the slaves were black and in some parts of the country (ironically, especially in the North) racism reared its ugly head. So what was it really like in the majority of cases? A slave [in 1860's America] was not an uncommon present to young people setting up housekeeping; many ministers were slave-holders, and Bishop Polk, of Louisiana, owned about 400 and was a notably good master. [In the South] clergy, lawyers, physicians, college professors, and the few scientific men were, for the most part, members of slave-holding families, and were completely identified with the great slave-holders in maintaining the institution. (A. Hart) Generalizations on slavery [1830-1860] were difficult: in some places and under some masters it was cruel and debasing; in other communities and under different personalities it was a patriarchal system, in which master and slave felt themselves members of one family. (ibid) Slavery in the Bible has virtually nothing to do with race. In the US, slavery was founded on the sin of racism, but that is not the nature of slavery relative to the Scriptures. (C. Ray)

Now it's not my intention to build a case for slavery, because I don't think the institution offers anything beneficial to America today. My point is that if you read BOTH sides of the issue, North and South, you will most likely find that you are deeply ingrained with one viewpoint only – and that viewpoint is quite erroneous and possibly affects the way you read and understand slavery in ancient Greece and Rome. In other words, before you begin studying the institution of slavery in the Bible, throw out that daily diet of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and other propagandist literature that you were taught in public school. If you don't, your preconceived notions will prevent you from understanding why the Bible

does not condemn the institution of slavery; and why Paul sent Onesimus back to his slave master, Philemon, instead of encouraging him to revolt. Slavery didn't matter. So if it didn't matter, why did the North win the war? Slavery in America did not come about by any of the legitimate means mentioned in Scripture. It came about through "man-stealing" which is punishable by death in Exodus 21:16. The vast majority of Africans did not sell themselves into slavery, nor were they captives from any war we fought and won. They were kidnapped, transported against their will, and sold. God takes a dim view of that form of slavery.

Slavery in Greece-Rome

It is extremely hard to describe the conditions of slaves without becoming emotive and partisan, stressing one-sidedly either the benefits or disadvantages of being a slave ... In practical terms, the quality of life of a domestic slave depended very much on the disposition of the master and that could cut both ways: proximity to a cruel master could result in suffering an unlimited range of evils, but a kind and generous master could make life both tolerable and hopeful. (W. Buckland) The extremes are much less significant than the ordinary realities taken for granted by slaves and masters. (J. Barclay) Epictetus can imagine a man who had recently been freed looking back wistfully on the days when "someone else kept me in clothes and shoes, and supplied me with food, and nursed me when I was sick." (Diss. 4.1. 37). But it was also assumed that slaves must expect to be disciplined by flogging or worse. (Proverbs 29:19). In the normal run of life in Greece and Rome, where the time-honored structures of society seemed unchangeable, it was impossible to imagine a slaveless society, except in a utopian dream-world where food cooked itself and doors opened of their own accord. (J. Barclay)

Slavery in first-century Greco-Roman society was different from slavery in the nineteenth century in the United States. (R. Jewett) Slaves who were forced to come to the United States had no choice of whether or not they wanted to be slaves. Slaves in the Greco-Roman world often did. Slavery in Roman times was often the result of personal bankruptcy or need; people sold themselves or their children into slavery for a set amount of time in order to pay off their personal debts or to receive money. (C. Wansink) The buyers who put up the cash to retire those debts were then entitled to that slave's services for a fixed time period. Onesimus, a pagan, could have become a slave under those circumstances. Even if Onesimus had not sold himself into slavery, even if others had not sold him into slavery, his "being accepted as a brother" – which Paul expects here – very well may have resulted in debts. And Philemon would have been seen as justified in expecting return on his investment. (D. Martin)

It is significant that none of the authors who had been in slavery, whose works are known to us, attacked the institution in which they had once lived. They did write about the behavior, bad or good, of individual owners and slaves, but they never counseled the slaves to rebel. Indeed, no freedman-author comes near championing either slaves or freedmen as groups in themselves. (S. Treggiari) It is difficult for a person who is acquainted primarily with modern slavery to conceive of slavery as a way of life which

was preferred by some persons in the 1st century, so it may seem strange to him that owners of slaves often found it to their own advantage to manumit their slaves. The most important benefit which the institution of manumission brought to the owners of slaves was the increased efficiency of slaves who anticipated their “freedom” as a reward for good work. The slave who wanted to be freed did his work well; the owner encouraged his slaves to work well by regularly manumitting those who had given him a number of years of faithful service. (Duff)

The more one studies the frequency and variety of causes for manumission, the more one realizes that Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:21 could not have referred to a flight to an asylum, since it was not possible to become free by such a flight. The fugitive slave was an exception in this period because conditions of slave-life were improving and because almost every urban slave could expect to be manumitted. (S. Bartchy) A slave who took the risk of running away was presumably driven to it by poor treatment or by a lack of manumission prospects, and we must suppose that similar factors must have motivated Onesimus (if indeed he was a runaway), even though he was in a Christian household. (J. Barclay) Presumably the fugitive’s chance of eventual manumission would also be seriously impaired. (Bradley) The most Onesimus could realistically hope for would be that his penitence and Paul’s letter of appeal would somehow mitigate the punishment he would ordinarily expect. (Petronius)

When reflecting on Philemon, it is wise to understand that there was no general climate of unrest among the slaves to whom Paul was accustomed to meeting. Nor is there any indication that the slaves who became Christians at Corinth also became restless in their slavery because of their new faith ... Manumission was too commonplace and too real. And a slave did not have to accept or refuse an offer of manumission from his slave owner. It happened to him. And while some slaves were undoubtedly glad it did, others would have preferred to remain in slavery ... Among the ideas which have distorted both the modern comprehension of slavery in the Greek and Roman world are the assumptions that there was a wide separation between slave and freeman status, that slaves in general were badly treated, and that everyone who was enslaved was trying to free himself from this bondage. None of these assumptions are true for 1st century Corinth. The step from slave to freeman status was often a relatively small one. A person’s experience as a slave depended primarily upon the character, customs, business and social class of his master. Warm, friendly relationships often developed between slaves and their owners; these relationships sometimes resulted in adoption or marriage into the family. (S. Bartchy)

In some aspects of Roman law, an estranged slave could appeal to an owner’s friend (*amicus domini*), asking that person to help resolve difficulties between the slave and owner. In fleeing to such an intercessor, a slave was not seen as a fugitive (*fugitivus*) liable to punishment. (C. Wansick) According to this interpretation, Onesimus is not a fugitive but, rather, a slave who had wronged his master and then, seeking to have better relationships with Philemon, deliberately sought out Paul to intercede on his behalf. (S. Bartchy) If Philemon had sent Onesimus either as a messenger or as an attendant to the imprisoned Paul, is it plausible that Paul would have felt a need to write an appeal to

retain the services of Onesimus? The appeal of another prisoner, for the services of another slave, might bring us closer to answering this question in the affirmative. But why would Philemon initially send Onesimus, a non-Christian slave, to the imprisoned apostle? Because he was available? Because he had a particular skill? Because he was a non-Christian and would not be under suspicion? Regardless, once Onesimus had completed his service, it would have been appropriate for Paul to return him to his owner. (C. Wansink)

Perhaps Onesimus was a runaway slave. Perhaps his conversion to the Christian faith was hollow, opportunistic and manipulative. Paul's letter gives us no reason to believe that Onesimus was sorry, regretful, or repentant of anything he may have done ... It seems most reasonable that Philemon sent Onesimus either to deliver support or to serve the imprisoned apostle. Paul appreciated such support. Epaphroditus and Onesimus understandably returned home as changed persons: Epaphroditus nearly died, risking his life (Phil. 2:26-30) to complete the Philippians' service to Paul; Onesimus returned "more useful" as a Christian. If the pagan slave Onesimus was sent by his owner to "refresh" the imprisoned, if he was no runaway looking for quick redemption and forgiveness, generations of Christian interpreters have cheated Onesimus out of the integrity of his faith. Onesimus deserves better. (C. Wansink) The story of Onesimus the runaway slave looks more and more to be a fiction of Pauline interpreters. (J. Harrill)

Summary

Christianity was born and grew up in a world in which slaveholders and slaves were part of the everyday landscape. In a context in which slaveholders treated slaves as bodies – available bodies, vulnerable bodies, compliant bodies, surrogate bodies. (J. Glancy) Paul saw many Jews and Gentiles in slavery throughout his travels. The fact that he says very little about the institution of slavery in his letters may seem strange to the modern reader, but it was not strange in his day. There were far more slaves in Rome than free men. And many of them became Christians and stayed in that position. So why did Paul address slavery in 1 Corinthians 7:21 by saying "Don't worry about it" if it were such an evil institution? Why didn't Paul draw the conclusions about slavery that the abolitionists did in 19th century America? Why was he so indifferent to the institution? There were no moral or ethical problems with slavery when Paul was alive because for the most part, slaves were treated well and there were laws and regulations protecting them when they weren't. (M. Finley) Paul's apparent lack of concern about legal slavery was by no means unique in the Greco-Roman world of the 1st century A.D. (W. Richter) Nor was it a matter of concern for the nation Israel in ancient times.

Owning and using men and women as slaves were such normal parts of daily life in the ancient world, that the institution of slavery, as a social, legal and economic phenomenon, seldom became an object of reflection. (W. Richter) No ancient government ever sought to abolish slavery. (M. Finley) All of the great slave-rebellions occurred in the brief period between 140-70 B.C. and in the cities where the slaves came to power, no revolutionary social programs were carried out in order to change the legal

or economic structures. (J. Vogt) So why the outrage over slavery in 19th century America? Slavery in America was not carried out in the same manner with the highly developed system that existed in the ancient world. The predominant number of slaves in America were captured in Africa and were brought here against their volition. They were not conquered in war. They did not sell themselves into slavery for a specific period of time. And there was often a racial dimension (prejudice) in the American practice of slavery that did not exist to any large degree in the ancient world. (LWB)

Slave owners in 19th century America that treated slaves well and incorporated them into the family had strong biblical support for doing so. Slave owners who treated their slaves roughly did not have biblical support, and would have been punished severely in the time in which Paul lived. Abolitionists in America would have found no audience for their rabble-rousing in ancient Israel, Greece or Rome. Neither would 20th century abolitionists have many listeners. “If someone in Greece or Rome in the middle of the 1st century A.D. had cried, “Slaves of the world unite!” he would have attracted only the curious. For neither the climate of unrest among those in slavery nor the kind of class-consciousness presupposed by Marxist theorists existed at that time. (S. Bartchy) The cases of cruelty they built their platform on were the exception, not the rule, in the ancient world. The vast majority of slaves were taken care of, taught well, fed, clothed, etc. because it was to the advantage of the owner to protect his investment. Many Greek and Roman sources attest to the friendly relations between slaves and their owners. “It was happier to be a rich man’s slave than to be a poor, freeborn citizen.” (Lauffer)

That there is no frontal attack on slavery was not due to fear of opposition, but such a method might well have prejudicial results then for the slaves themselves. (E. Ashby) Christianity does not annul nor confound the respective civil duties, but strengthens the obligation to them, and directs to a right discharge of them ... The communion of saints does not destroy distinction of property. Onesimus, now converted, and become a beloved brother, is yet Philemon’s servant still, and indebted to him for wrongs that he had done, and not to be discharged but by free and voluntary remission, or on preparation made by himself, or some other in his behalf, which part, rather than fail, the apostle undertakes for him. (M. Henry) The actual situation in which Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus stood at the moment when the runaway met the apostle may be illustrated from a document published in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Vol. 14 (1920), No. 1643 (dated 298 A.D.). Here one Aurelius Sarapammon writes to a friend, whose name has perished, as follows: “I commission you by this writ to journey for my slave, by name ..., about 35 years old, known to you. When you have found him you shall place him in custody, with authority to shut him up and whip him, and to lay a complaint before the proper authorities against any persons who have harbored him, with a demand for satisfaction.” (C. Dodd)

Paul makes the following points in his epistles: (a) slaves are involved in serving Christ, (b) owners have a master in heaven, (c) God deals impartially with master and slave, and (d) both are bond-servants of Christ ... He does not ask that Philemon should receive Onesimus back as a freed man or that he should free him immediately on his return ...

Although Onesimus' earthly freedom may be of positive value, finally it is of no ultimate significance to him as a Christian as to whether he is slave or free. (P. O'Brien) While slaves and free men can both be referred to as "servants," "helpers," and so on, the difference of legal status remains sharp. When a free servant is called a "doulos" the speaker is either abusing him or is mistaken. This clarity has been completely obscured by the Authorized and Revised Versions of the NT, which commonly translate "doulos" as "servant" or the like, as part of their attempt to make the Word of God suitable for good society. Once the texts are translated correctly, we can see that Jesus lived in a world where slavery was common. There were innumerable slaves of the emperor and the Roman state; the Jerusalem temple owned slaves; the High Priests owned slaves (one of them lost as ear in Jesus' arrest); all of the rich and many of the middle classes owned slaves. (M. Smith)

Slave-owning was the order of the day and, so far as we are told, Jesus never attacked the practice. He took the state of affairs for granted and shaped His parables accordingly. In these as in real life, the great men, whether they represent God or the devil, are usually slaveowners, and the main problem for the slaves, as Jesus presents things, is not to get free, but to win their master's approval ... If He had advocated liberation, His adherents would probably have followed His teaching. But the Gospels and Acts say nothing of this, and Paul, our earliest Christian writer, not only tolerates slavery but orders Christians to continue it ... Although he thinks these differences relatively unimportant (slave, free, male, female), he insists that they continue ... What this meant in practice was shown when one of the slaves of Philemon (a convert) ran away, came to Paul, and was converted by him. The conversion put Paul in a tight spot. To conceal a runaway slave was legally a theft, and the penalties were severe. So he sent the slave back to Philemon ... The whole letter is wonderfully tactful and careful, and this increases the significance of what it carefully *does not say*. It does *not* say, "Christians are not allowed to own slaves, least of all to own each other as slaves; therefore, by his conversion your slave has become free of you. Consequently you should recognize this state of affairs and make it legal by legally setting him free at once." On the contrary, it recognized the validity of Philemon's ownership of the slave and hopes that he will continue to own him forever. But it asks him, please, as a special favor, to treat *this* slave as a brother. Philemon's ownership and treatment of his other slaves, particularly those who are pagans, are not questioned. (M. Smith)

So what are we to conclude from Paul's letter to Philemon? Was Onesimus a runaway slave who had stolen money from his master? Had he been sent by his master to render service to Paul while he was in prison? Was Paul's phrase "charge it to my account" an offer to pay off any remaining debt that Onesimus owed to Philemon as a form of manumission price? Perhaps Paul was offering to buy Onesimus from Philemon in order to set him free! It is not as simple as some commentators believe. Rather than use his letter as a treatise for or against slavery, it is best to see the parallels between ourselves and Onesimus. In a very real way, whether we realize it or not, "we are all the Lord's Onesimuses." (M. Luther) How is that, you may ask? If you buy the negative portrayal of Onesimus as a runaway, then you could agree with Mathew Henry: "We, like Onesimus,

were revolters from God's service, and had injured Him in His rights. Jesus Christ finds us, and by His grace works a change in us, and then intercedes for us with the Father, that we may be received into His favor and family, and past offenses may be forgiven; and we are sure that the Father hears Him always - being confident that the intercession of Christ with the Father, like Paul with Philemon, is prevalent for the acceptance of all whose case He takes in hand and recommends to Him." If you adhere to the traditional view, this is perhaps the best thing you can take-away from our study of Philemon.

But there are other alternatives to this understanding of Philemon, including some options where Onesimus is a hardworking, honest, trustworthy slave who had no intentions whatsoever of running away from his master. The only way to see this possibility is by "attaining a better understanding of slavery in 1st century Greece and Rome" (S. Bartchy) and parallel that with discussions on slavery by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. "Owning and using men and women as slaves were such normal parts of daily life in the Mediterranean world of the 1st century that no one except the Essenes asked if the institution should exist or not. Paul apparently regarded slavery as a normal part of society in a world that was "passing away." So nowhere in Paul's writings can we find an attempt either to justify or to call in question the institution of slavery as such. Indeed, no New Testament writing gives any teaching or judgment regarding the origin of slavery. As far as we know, there were no anti-slavery tracts in the first century which Paul might have read. Indeed, none of the authors who had been in slavery ever attacked the status in which they had once lived." Being a slave or a freedman gave no advantage or disadvantage in Christ. "Neither social nor religious status nor spiritual achievement or wisdom were significant criteria for Christian existence, despite what men might think." So Paul could attempt to persuade Philemon to manumit his slave, while sending that same slave back to him.

There is no reasonable doubt that the New Testament, like the Old, not only tolerated chattel slavery (the form prevalent in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's time) but helped to perpetuate it by making the slaves' obedience to their masters a religious duty. This biblical morality was one of the great handicaps that the emancipation movement in the United States had to overcome. The opponents of abolition had clear biblical evidence on their side when they argued. As one said in 1857 (*Slavery Ordained of God*, F. Ross, 1857): "Slavery is of God." (M. Smith)

In conclusion, however much we may want to find a Biblical case for the abolition of slavery, it is simply not there, not even in the Epistle to Philemon. Paul has no word of criticism for the institution as such. In this sense, he was unconcerned about "social ethics" – the impact of the gospel on social structures. In fact, he admonishes slaves to be indifferent to their social status (1 Cor. 7:21), because a human slave is really a freedman of the Lord. (G. Ladd) None of this is to suggest that slavery is a good idea in the modern world. But the work slaves once performed, as a whole, was not that different from work I myself performed when growing up. For example, the tasks performed by domestic slaves in Rome were extremely varied: we find slaves as janitors, cooks, waiters, cleaners, couriers, child-minders, wet-nurses, and all-purpose personal attendants, not to

mention the various professionals one might find in the larger and wealthier houses. (J. O'Connor) I wasn't a slave when I performed many of these tasks, but I performed them nevertheless. Again, this doesn't mean slavery is a good idea. Absolutely not! (LWB) But as stated before, it is a requirement of scholarly integrity, and of any true understanding of the Bible, that we should refrain from importing our own modern political and social values into the text. That is a violation of sound isagogics, which is why I have labored more on the historical context of slavery for this epistle than for any topic in any other epistle I have exegeted thus far (2006).

CHAPTER 1

LWB **Phi. 1** Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus [not Nero], and Timothy [amanuensis], our brother, to Philemon, our beloved and fellow-worker,

^{KW} **Phi. 1:1** Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy the brother, to Philemon the beloved and our fellow worker,

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul introduces himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. He knows who is in control and it isn't Nero in Rome. He is a prisoner because the Lord wants him to be a prisoner. As a matter of fact, Paul is wearing the title "prisoner" as a badge of office. It's alright to be a prisoner if Christ is your jailer. He sends greetings from Timothy as well (Latin: 'frater' Eng. fraternity, meaning 'brother'), who is present and serving as Paul's amanuensis. The letter is addressed to a friend of Paul's named Philemon. Philemon is a beloved fellow-worker in Christ, one who is reaching towards the goal of supergrace status. Paul is going to encourage Philemon to do something rather bold to show those around him just how beloved and gracious he can be.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

Paul properly omits all reference to his official authority (apostle) or distinctive position of service (servant) as not fitting in a private and friendly letter. (D. Hiebert) And by his use of the word prisoner we may think of him as still living under house arrest in his lodgings, albeit handcuffed to his military guard. (F. Bruce) He styles himself a prisoner, (because one in bonds on behalf of the whole Church might better intercede than one in private bonds), on behalf of one in bonds in an ordinary household. (M. Sadler) This word also expresses solidarity with the slave Onesimus. (J. Koenig) How could Philemon resist an appeal which was penned within prison walls and by a manacled hand? (J.

Lightfoot) Note the skillful diplomacy with which Paul uses the term “slave” (desmios) to enforce his appeal for what must seem a trifling sacrifice in comparison to prison. (C. Moule)

However small may be our *capacity* or *sphere*, and however solitary we may feel, we may summon up before the eyes of our faith a mighty multitude of apostles, martyrs, toilers in every land and age as our - even our - work fellows. The field stretches far beyond our vision, and many are toiling in it for Him, whose work never comes near ours. There are differences of service, but the same Lord, and all who have the same master are companions in labor. (A. Maclaren) *Quality* of ministry is emphasized here rather than size. *Capacity* and *sphere* are not synonymous. (Don Williams) Himself a prisoner, he captures the runaway slave and gives him the freedom of Christ, yet sends him back to the master from whom he had escaped. (A. Knoch) Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon were carried to the Province of Asia at the same time ... by Tychicus and Onesimus. (A.T. Robertson)

Phi. 1 **Paul** (Subj. Nom.), **a prisoner** (Nom. Appos.; in bonds, my badge of office) **of Christ Jesus** (Poss. Gen.; Paul knows who is in control, and it isn't Nero in Rome), **and** (coordinative) **Timothy** (Subj. Nom.; acting as his amanuensis), **our** (ellipsis, pronoun supplied) **brother** (Nom. Appos.), **to Philemon** (Dat. Ind. Obj.; who is on the high ground of supergrace), **our** (Gen. Rel.) **beloved** (Dat. Ref.) **and** (connective) **fellow worker** (Dat. Ref.),

^{BGT} **Philemon 1:1** Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:1** Paulus vincetus Iesu Christi et Timotheus frater Philemoni dilecto et adiutori nostro

LWB **Phi. 2** **And to Apphia [his wife], our sister [in Christ], and to Archippus [their son], our fellow soldier [seasoned veteran in the ministry], and to the [local] assembly [at Colossia] which meets at your home:**

^{KW} **Phi. 1:2** And to Apphia our sister [in Christ], and to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the [local] assembly which meets in your home.

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul includes others in his address - namely Apphia (Latin: ‘soror’ Eng. sorority, meaning our sister), Philemon’s wife, and their son, Archippus, who was a veteran (Greek: ‘stratos’ Eng. strategic, Latin: militos) in the ministry, i.e. Christian warfare. I doubt Paul would mention Apphia’s name if she were not a model of Christian, feminine pulchritude. Nor would he greet her in a private letter if she were a nag or a witch. Then

he extends his greetings to all the Colossians who meet in Philemon's home as their place of worship. Before churches were built, Bible studies were held in private homes large enough to accommodate a group of neighboring believers. The whole body of the faithful does not apply to this verse, only those who would comfortably fit in Philemon's house. The addition of the word "meets" is dependent on the word "home." As far as Philemon's family is concerned, it is their home, so they don't have to "assemble" per se.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

Because her name is mentioned in such a fashion, Apphia was certainly a wife whose interests with her husband were one, and whose affections and actions also corresponded. (M. Henry) Most frequently the word "ekklesia" designates a circle of believers in some definite locality, irrespective of the question whether these believers are or are not 'assembled' for worship. Some passages contain the added idea that they are assembled (Acts 5:11, 11:26; I Cor. 11:18, 14:19, 28, 35), while others do not (Romans 16:4; I Cor. 16:1; Gal. 1:2; I Thess. 2:14), etc. The word in its most comprehensive meaning signifies the whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or in earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Savior. (L. Berkof) The practice of churches meeting in private homes for worship was common up to A.D. 200. Not until the 3rd century did churches meet in separate buildings. (E. Deibler)

In large cities there would be several meeting places, with a pastor representing each. Before the 3rd century there is no certain evidence of special church buildings for worship. (A.T. Robertson) Philemon's sphere may be restricted, and Paul's much wider, but for Paul they are equally fellow workers for the same Lord. (H. McDonald) Paul greets his family and friends out of courtesy. (P. O'Brien) Since Paul greets Philemon's family in such a way, they most definitely did not fit the old proverb: "Wicked families are nurseries for hell" (M. Henry), assuming Apphia and Archippus are Philemon's family. (LWB) I have preferred "te adelphe" because the preponderance of ancient authority is very decidedly in its favour. (J. Lightfoot) Apphia had day-to-day responsibility for the slaves. (A. Rupprecht) If the number of believers in any town was small, one house-church might be sufficient; if large or widely separated, more than one would be necessary. (W. Hendriksen)

The letter is skillfully designed to constrain Philemon to accept Paul's request, and yet, at the same time, it is extremely unclear what precisely Paul is requesting! This peculiarity deserves investigation. There is plenty of evidence here of Paul's diplomatic skill, exerting authority while appearing to leave the matter entirely in Philemon's hands. Pressure is applied in all sorts of subtle but significant ways. For a start, the letter is addressed not just to Philemon but to the whole church in his house, so that Philemon will feel himself answerable not only to the distant Paul but also to the Christians who come regularly to his house. (N. Petersen) Westminster Abbey in England, for example, was never intended for public services. It was built in the shape of a cross as a monument to Jesus Christ. Although I think they had the wrong idea – instead of spending all that money on a cathedral, they should have used it to send out missionaries – that was their

way of expressing their devotion. The idea of putting the emphasis on a building and on a building program is a little out of line with the example of the early church. (J. McGee)

Phi. 2 And (connective) to Apphia (Dat. Ind. Obj.; his wife) our (ellipsis, pronoun supplied) sister (Dat. Ref.), and (connective) to Archippus (Dat. Ind. Obj.; his son), our (Gen. Rel.) fellow soldier (Dat. Appos.; a grizzled veteran officer in the ministry, under discipline), and (connective) to the assembly (Dat. Ind. Obj.; at Colossia; called-out ones) which (Dat. Ref.) meets (ellipsis, verb supplied) at your (Poss. Gen.) home (Acc. Place):

^{BGT} **Philemon 1:2** καὶ Ἀπφία τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ,

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:2** et Appiae sorori et Archippo commilitoni nostro et ecclesiae quae in domo tua est

LWB Phi. 3 **Grace [experiential sanctification] to you and prosperity [supergrace blessings] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

^{KW} **Phi. 3** [Sanctifying] grace to you and [tranquilizing] peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

In this greeting, “grace to you” is Paul’s desire that they make significant progress in the spiritual life, i.e., experiential sanctification. “Peace” or “prosperity” refers to the supergrace blessings they will receive if they are successful in executing the spiritual life. Paul desires nothing else than that believers will grow spiritually and bear such fruit.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

The peace of God is an experiential condition resulting from the infilling ministry of the Holy Spirit. (E. Deibler) Actually, the filling of the Spirit is only *one* spiritual skill, as well as a problem solving device. It doesn't result in prosperity by itself, (D. Williams) however, if peace is the intended meaning, a person could not be filled with the Spirit and not have peace of mind; an agitated mind (fear, worry, anxiety) would represent unconfessed sin, which would preclude one's being filled with the Spirit - mutual exclusivity. (LWB)

Phi. 3 Grace (Subj. Nom.; experiential sanctification) to you (Dat. Adv.) and (connective) prosperity (Subj. Nom.; supergrace blessings) from God (Abl. Source) our (Gen. Rel.) Father (Descr. Gen.) and (connective) the Lord (Descr. Gen.) Jesus Christ (Abl. Source).

^{BGT} **Philemon 1:3** χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:3** gratia vobis et pax a Deo Patre nostro et Domino Iesu Christo

LWB **Phi. 4** I keep thanking my God always [on a continual basis], making mention of you [remembering Philemon] during the time of my prayers,

^{KW} **Phi. 4** I thank my God always, remembering you on the occasions of my seasons of prayer,

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Every time Paul prays (Iterative Present tense) he thanks God (Iterative Present tense) for his relationship with Philemon. Paul has the greatest respect and concern for his dear friend. He thinks about him (Latin: *memoriam*) all the time.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

“I thank God every time your name comes to my lips.” (C. Moule) Remembrance of Philemon meant thanksgiving for him. (D. Guthrie) Paul follows the custom of other ancient letters, which often include a “remembrance” motif, that is, a section in which the writer describes how vividly he remembers the recipient ... Paul embeds the remembrance motif in thanksgiving to God ... One of the prerequisites of a letter is distance between writer and recipient. Such distance threatens an established friendship, and, according to ancient epistolary theoreticians, one of the bases of friendship is proximity; one defeated this threat with letters, which are substitutes for personal dialogue. Thus one could compensate for physical absence by spiritual presence. (W. Stenger) Here the “mention” involves the use of intercession on behalf of Philemon. (J. Lightfoot)

Phil. 4 I keep thanking (εὐχαριστέω, PAI1S, Iterative) my (Gen. Rel.) God (Dat. Ind. Obj.) always (Adv. Time; on a continual basis, with the frequency of a hacking cough), making (ποιέω, PMPTc.NSM, Iterative, Circumstantial) mention (Adv. Acc.) of you (Obj. Gen.; remembering Philemon, *Auld Lang Syne*; Philemon has the respect of the greatest man who ever lived) during the time of my (Poss. Gen.) prayers (Adv. Gen. Time),

^{BGT} **Philemon 1:4** Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε μνησίαν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου,

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:4** gratias ago Deo meo semper memoriam tui faciens in orationibus meis

LWB **Phi. 5** (because from time-to-time [recurring reports] I hear about your [Philemon’s] virtue love [as fruit of the Spirit] and the doctrine which you have [in

your soul] by way of application face-to-face with the Lord Jesus [in spiritual self-esteem] and toward all the saints [in spiritual autonomy]),

^{KW} **Phi. 5** Hearing constantly of your love and faith, your faith which you have in the Lord Jesus and the divine and self-sacrificial love which you show towards all the saints,

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul hears (Latin: audio) reports from time-to-time (Iterative Present tense) about Philemon. They are such wonderful reports that he is motivated to pray for him because of these reports. What he hears is quite well rounded. He is growing in doctrine, so the function of his priesthood is being fulfilled. He is also growing in virtue love, so the function of his ambassadorship is being fulfilled. Both of these functions are empowered by the filling of the Holy Spirit, but not just occasional fillings. The durative present tense points to a continuous walking according to the Spirit over an extended period of time.

Philemon has a balance of residency – both metabolizing Bible doctrine and applying it to daily life. Paul also says he is living his Christian life face-to-face with the Lord Jesus, which means he has probably attained the status of spiritual self-esteem. Jesus Christ, therefore, is his best friend. Doctrine is his number one priority in life. But while the object of faith, i.e. Bible doctrine, may be in mind, it is the *application* of this doctrine that Paul has heard about; he wasn't reading Philemon's mind for its doctrinal content. He was also executing advanced impersonal love as a problem-solving device toward his fellow believers, which means he has probably reached the status of spiritual autonomy.

Personal love for Jesus Christ (category 1 love) motivates us to love the saints (category 3 love) and our spouse (category 2 love); understanding doctrines about the Lord motivates us to *apply* doctrine (such as *impersonal love*) towards the saints and our spouse. *Personal love* for God is the foundation for *impersonal love* towards mankind. It is *acquired* in Gate 5 and is *tested* in Gate 6. The proper *application* of both doctrine and love upon (eis) the saints in daily life requires a prior *application* of both doctrine and love towards (pros) Christ. Why separate the two? They work together as a tag-team.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

It is of no use to say: "Let us love one another." That would be unreal, mawkish, histrionic. The faith [doctrine] which you have toward the Lord Jesus is the *productive cause*, as it is the *measure*, of your love toward all the saints. (A. Maclaren) This requires a reference to the object of faith [Bible doctrine], from which love springs. (J. Lightfoot) Love is placed before faith in this unusual instance, because the situation focuses on Philemon's love, which is the basis for his greeting his runaway slave. (P. O'Brien)

There may be a propriety in which faith is towards (pros) Christ and love is exerted upon (eis) the saints (J. Lightfoot), called *chiasm* or *reverted parallelism* (A.T. Robertson). The love and doctrine he *applies* towards the Lord carries over to the saints by a sort of *momentum* (M. Vincent). They belong together; consequently, a loveless faith is cruel, and a faithless love is sentimental. (W. Scroggie) Paul had received up-to-date information about Philemon from more than one source, or even that he was getting regular reports about him. (P. O'Brien)

Phil. 5 [because from time-to-time (recurring reports) I hear (ἀκούω, PAPtc.NSM, Iterative, Causal, Circumstantial) about your (Poss. Gen.) love (Acc. Dir. Obj.; *virtue love* as a fruit of the Spirit) and (connective) the doctrine (Acc. Dir. Obj.; πίστις, the content of Bible doctrine in your soul; faithfulness, reliability) which (Acc. Gen. Ref.) you continue to have by way of application (ἔχω, PAI2P, Durative; poised with readiness, possess, have within oneself - application of doctrine from the balance of residency), face-to-face with the Lord Jesus (Acc. Rel.; category 1 love as a motivator in *spiritual self-esteem*) and (connective) toward all (Acc. Spec.) the saints (Acc. Rel.; category 3 love in *spiritual autonomy*)],

^{BGT} **Philemon 1:5** ἀκούων σου τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν, ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους,

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:5** audiens caritatem tuam et fidem quam habes in Domino Iesu et in omnes sanctos

LWB Phi. 6 In order that our association [fellowship], with reference to your doctrine [fruits of your Bible study], might be operational [produce continual spiritual momentum] towards Christ [category 1 love in spiritual self-esteem] by means of the full knowledge of every good of intrinsic value thing [divine good] in you;

^{KW} **Phi. 6** Remembering you in my prayer times praying that the contribution of your faith which faith you share in common with other believers may [through the resultant love which you have for all the saints] become effective in the sphere of a full and perfect experiential knowledge of every good thing in us with a view to [the glory of] Christ.

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul prays that his association with Philemon is more than just a friendly one. He prays that their association is centered on Bible doctrine, sharing the fruits of the Word of God with each other. He prays that the doctrine in Philemon's soul might become operational (Constative Aorist tense; Latin: evidence) towards Christ. Notice a couple of things here.

Paul's association with Philemon is based on doctrine, which is what the true meaning of the Greek work "koinonia" really means – fellowship. True fellowship is not just social life; true fellowship is in the Word – listening, studying and sharing the Word with each other.

Paul also hopes the application of the doctrine in Philemon's soul reaches toward Christ, which is category 1 love attained in spiritual self-esteem. If you haven't caught on by now, Paul is praying for the spiritual life of Philemon to be fruitful. He prays that the doctrine he has taught him will lead him closer to Christ. Also note that this doesn't happen by reading an occasional verse and attending an occasional Bible study. The only way to attain this stage in the spiritual life is by means of the "full knowledge" (Greek: *epignosis*) of every intrinsically good thing. This application of Bible doctrine is what is elsewhere called "doing the Word."

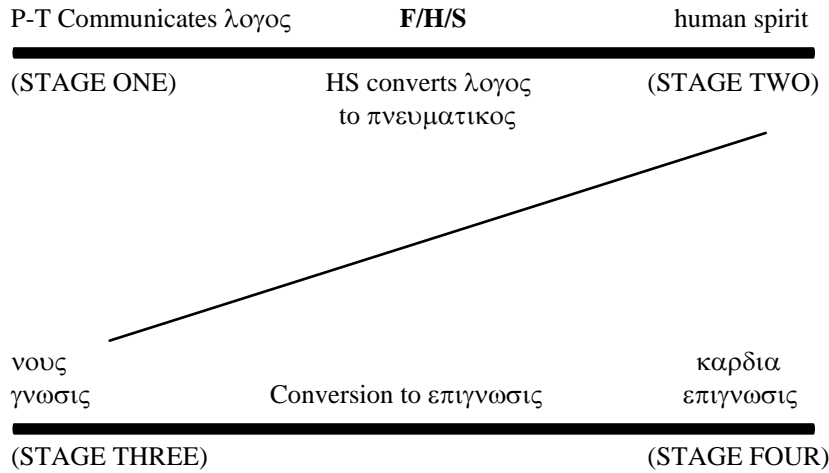
First comes the intake and metabolization of doctrine, then comes the application of that doctrine to your life. This application could be with regard to something monumental in life, or it could be with regard to the little, every day things. True application of doctrine is first recognized when it brings you closer to Jesus Christ. This is exercising "all the fullness" which Christ has given us by returning it back to Him. He is both the Source and the Goal of our spiritual life. In addition, the possession of "every good thing" positionally does not guarantee the enjoyment of these "good things" experientially.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

Philemon's faith [perception] puts him into *fellowship* with all the saints. The faith [perception] of some lets this *fellowship* remain rather passive [invisible impact] ... Paul prays that Philemon's *fellowship* may be constant [Constative] rather than to begin for the first time [Ingressive]. One's exercise of *fellowship* must not be ignorant; so much of it is. (R. Lenski) The Biblical meaning of fellowship does not require "meeting" or "assembly" in a particular geographical area. Believers in any part of the world can be in *fellowship* at any time by being filled with the Spirit (in union with both Christ and the saints) and by punching in a tape or turning on the TV to hear their right pastor-teacher. (R.B. Thieme, Jr.) The complete appropriation of all truth and the unreserved identification with God's will is the goal and crown of the believer's course (J. Lightfoot), the outcome of faith being a clear grasp of spiritual realities. (D. Carson)

Paul is emphasizing their participation in Philemon's loyal faith (E. Scott), finding out and doing God's will (Lohmeyer), or a collective sense of sharing the benefits of his faithfulness (P. O'Brien), which is "at their disposal" as the people of Christ. (F. Bruce) There is very much land to be possessed. God has more light to break forth from His Word, (A. Maclaren) and this sharing of the Word may be the (objective) fellowship of a shared confession. (J. Dunn) Maybe there is no need to opt between faith [doctrine] and love, one against the other, for the one who truly participates in faith [doctrine] will have sincere fellowship in love. (H. McDonald) How do you participate? You advance in the spiritual life by one method only: the four stages of Operation Z. (R.B. Thieme, Jr.)

OPERATION Z



Paul's great desire for Philemon is that he may increase in knowledge as he grows in grace, that in the active and effectual exercise of the fellowship of his faith, he may apprehend more clearly and possess more fully and richly the full knowledge of every good thing which is the possession of the believer by virtue of his union with Christ. (D. Hiebert) This "epignosis," involving as it does the complete appropriation of all truth and the unreserved identification with God's will, is the goal and crown of the believer's course. The Apostle does not say "in the performance of" but "in the knowledge of" every good thing, for in this higher sense of knowledge, to know is both to possess and to perform. In all the epistles of the Roman captivity Paul's prayer for his correspondents culminates in this word "epignosis." (J. Lightfoot) This parallels the true meaning of "being a doer of the Word" in James - not performing good deeds outwardly, but the function of Operation Z in the diagram above. [LWB]

Such a knowledge of every good thing that is in reality the present possession of the believer certainly implies an extraordinary advance in his spiritual life. It is the goal of full-orbed spiritual maturity. (D. Hiebert) Perhaps Paul is preparing Philemon to examine his "knowledge," because he wants it to grow in his dealings with Onesimus. In this case "knowledge of all the good" will mean a fuller understanding of the good in Christ, an understanding of the blessings which Christ brings. (D. Guthrie) "Epignosis" conveys both the ideas of understanding and experience. (P. O'Brien) Knowledge precedes good works, i.e. Colossians 1:9, 10. (A. Rupprecht) Thayer says that "epignosis" means correct and precise knowledge. The better translation is "full understanding." (R. Earle)

This "epignosis," involving as it does the complete appropriation of all truth, and the unreserved identification with God's will, is the crown of the believer's course. In all of Paul's prison epistles, his prayer culminates on this same apprehension of "full knowledge", i.e., Eph. 1:17, Phil. 1:9, Col. 1:9. (J. Lightfoot) In a sense where sharing is

emphasized the collective sense is more probable, i.e., sharing *freely* the fruits of your study. (P. O'Brien) Some manuscripts have "en umin," "in us," rather than "en emin," "in you." (B. Metzger) If it is "in us" rather than "in you," it would be looking forward to the future fruit which could be theirs if they receive the benefits of his (Philemon's) teaching. But while Philemon is the communicator, Paul always has his eyes on the *knowledge* [Bible doctrine] which is being taught, (A. Maclaren) the content of Christian belief. (D. Guthrie)

Phi. 6 In order that (Purpose conj.) our (Gen. Rel.) association (Subj. Nom.; partnership, fellowship), with reference to your (Poss. Gen.) doctrine (Adv. Gen. Ref.; πίστις - Bible doctrine in your soul; share with us the fruits of your Bible study), might be (γίνομαι, AMSubj.3S, Constative, Purpose Clause, Deponent) operational (Pred. Nom.; effective, power in exercise, proper application; producing momentum in the spiritual life) towards Christ (Acc. Rel.; category 1 love; exercise all the fullness which Christ has given us; leading to Him as the goal) by means of the full knowledge (Instr. Means; ἐπιγνώσις, "doing" the Word, the complete cycle of Christian truth) of every (Gen. Spec.) good of intrinsic value thing (Obj. Gen.; ἀγαθός - divine good, the whole range of spiritual blessings) in you (Loc. Sph.);

^{BGT} **Philemon 1:6** ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργῆς γένηται ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν.

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:6** ut communicatio fidei tuae evidens fiat in agnitione omnis boni in nobis in Christo Iesu

LWB Phi. 7 For I have come to have great inner happiness and encouragement due to your virtue love [category 3 friendship], because the deep and tender affections [emotional response] of the saints [royal family] have been repeatedly refreshed through you [blessing by association], my brother [Philemon].

^{KW} **Phi. 7** I thank my God always, for I had much joy and encouragement on account of your divine and self-sacrificial love, because the hearts of the saints have been cheered and revived through you, brother, and the results of your love are still in evidence.

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul's category 3 friendship towards Philemon has grown from their initial friendship (Ingressive Aorist tense), because he has heard many reports on how well he has been applying the doctrine of refreshment (Latin: consolation) to the saints (Iterative Perfect tense). Paul is full of inner happiness and encouragement due to Philemon's progress in the spiritual life. Philemon has been giving everything he has to those members of his

home church, and they have been responding emotionally with great affection. Paul couldn't be more pleased with Philemon's application of Bible doctrine. Those in his periphery are blessed by being associated with Philemon now (Consummative) and are continuing to be blessed by him (Iterative) every day. Paul's use of "splaugna" is the ultimate in deep, emotional affection. This is a profound, reciprocal relationship that is transpiring in Philemon's household and immediate community.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

It implies relaxation, refreshment as a preparation for the renewal of labor or suffering. (J. Lightfoot) Refreshment and rest issuing in fresh energy ... fittingly used of the rest of soldiers on the march. (Don Williams) Lightning of troubles, so that they may rest with minds free from all sorrow and annoyance. (J. Calvin) This fellowship of refreshment is probably to be understood as Philemon's sharing his resources (the fruits of his Bible study) with others in a spirit of liberality which springs from Christ, (F. Bruce) his communication of the faith, i.e. Bible doctrine, (M. Vincent) or the share which others have in your doctrine (J. Moffatt). "Splaugna" refers to the whole person as having experienced refreshment at the deepest emotional level. (M. Harris)

Phi. 7 **For** (illative conj.) **I have come to have** (ἐχῶ, AAI1S, Ingressive) **great** (Acc. Spec.) **inner happiness** (Acc. Dir. Obj.; joy, contributory +H) **and** (connective) **encouragement** (Acc. Dir. Obj.; comfort, consolation) **due to your** (Poss. Gen.) **virtue love** (Instr. Cause; category 3 love for the brethren), **because** (causal conj.) **the deep and tender affections** (Subj. Nom.; σπλάγχνον - hearts, innermost being, emotional response) **of the saints** (Poss. Gen.; royal family) **have been repeatedly refreshed** (ἀναπαύω, Perf.PI3S, Consummative & Iterative) **through you** (Abl. Agency; blessing by association), **my** (ellipsis) **brother** (Voc. Address; Philemon).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:7** χαρὰν γὰρ πολλὴν ἔσχον καὶ παράκλησιν ἐπὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου ὅτι τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἁγίων ἀναπέπαιται διὰ σοῦ ἀδελφέ

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:7** gaudium enim magnum habui et consolationem in caritate tua quia viscera sanctorum requieverunt per te frater

LWB Phi. 8 **Therefore, though I have maximum authority [as an apostle] by means of Christ to command you to do what is fitting and proper under the given circumstances [apply virtue love as a problem-solving device],**

^{KW} **Phi. 8** For this reason, though I have much boldness in Christ to be commanding you [to do] your duty,

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul has the delegated authority (Static Present tense) by means of Jesus Christ to pull rank on Philemon (Conceived Result), but he doesn't have to use his authority as apostle in this situation. He is close friends with Philemon and Philemon is making superb progress in the spiritual life, so a simple agreement will suffice. Even though he has delegated authority from the Lord (Concessive Participle), he does not have to command Philemon to do what is fitting and proper (Latin: pertinent) in the given circumstances surrounding his slave, Onesimus (Aoristic Present tense). What duty is Paul referring to? There are a few commentators who think Paul wants Philemon to manumit his slave, Onesimus. The majority of commentators think this refers to Philemon treating Onesimus well when he returns, but in the dual role as both slave and Christian brother.

If you understand the societal norms that existed at this time, where perhaps ½ or more of the population were slaves, do you think Paul is asking Philemon to turn the tables upside down by releasing a runaway slave? There is no way the word "duty" can be stretched to mean releasing a slave as a Christian principle unless you are prepared to discard dozens of verses in both the OT and NT that support slave ownership. This theoretical leap does not come from the exegesis of the epistle to Philemon, but rather from a historically inaccurate understanding of the institution of slavery in the time in which Paul lived. It is a form of crusader arrogance which has crept into our text from the back door. It is illegitimate to apply Paul's meaning of the word "duty" or "fitting and proper" as if he lived in post-Civil War America.

Paul does not want to detain Onesimus any longer, even though he wishes he could keep him there as a trusted friend and confidant. He does not want Philemon to think he encourages slaves to runaway. He does not want to turn Greek and Roman society upside-down by starting a slave rebellion. He does not want Philemon to think he is stealing his slave. Paul is not an abolitionist; he is not subtly demanding manumission. He knows freeing a runaway slave would be a foolhardy precedent when Philemon had many other slaves that had not runaway. He doesn't know what Philemon should do about Onesimus, other than treat him like a beloved brother. So he appeals to his exercise of virtue love in the situation and trusts him to make a good decision. Anything beyond that understanding of the situation Paul faced is mere speculation.

Paul knows Philemon has grown spiritually because of the wonderful reports he has heard in the prior verse. He knows that Philemon understands how to apply virtue love as a problem-solving device. Even though he has the authority as apostle to command Philemon to exercise virtue love in this delicate situation with Onesimus, whatever it was, he doesn't need to pull rank on him because he knows he will do the spiritually correct thing. This is a touching letter about category 3 friendship and exercising virtue love in a difficult situation, not a hint that Philemon should start a crusade against slavery by manumitting Onesimus. If I haven't labored that point enough, please read the resources I have listed for Philemon and continue research on your own. You do not need to know Greek and Latin to understand historical context (isagogics).

RELEVANT OPINIONS

You have cheered the hearts of others, now cheer my heart by granting the request I am making in this letter. (G. Buttrick) Let me see you apply that same doctrine to this situation! (R.B. Thieme, Jr.) It would have been perfectly proper to have held the runaway slave for his own comfort and service without consulting his master in the matter. Yet grace does not demand its rights, or stand upon its privileges, but, led by love, entreats. (A. Knoch) Paul has the freedom to speak authoritatively ... but he refrains. (C. Moule)

Phi. 8 Therefore (inferential), though I have (ἔχω, PAPtc.NSM, Statis, Concessive, Articular) maximum (Acc. Spec.) authority (Acc. Dir. Obj.; boldness, confidence) by means of Christ (Instr. Means) to command (ἐπιτάσσω, PAInf., Aoristic, Conceived Result, Inf. as Dir. Obj.; pull rank) you (Dat. Ind. Obj.; Philemon) to do what is fitting and proper under the given circumstances (ἀνῆκω, PAPtc.ASN, Aoristic, Adverbial; convenient, duty),

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:8** Διό πολλήν ἐν Χριστῷ παρρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν σοι τὸ ἀνῆκον

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:8** propter quod multam fiduciam habentes in Christo Iesu imperandi tibi quod ad rem pertinet

LWB **Phi. 9** **Instead, because of your virtue love [category 3 friendship], I encourage you [grace orientation] even more [allowing him to make his own decision], being such a person as Paul, an ambassador and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.**

^{KW} **Phi. 9** Because of [the Christian principle of] love I am rather [saying], I beg of you, please; being such a one as Paul an ambassador but now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Instead of pulling rank on Philemon and telling him what to do next, Paul encourages him (Aoristic Present tense) in the right direction. There's a big difference between a command and an encouragement. And because their friendship is so strong (superlative: even more), he extends his grace orientation even farther than normal – allowing him the freedom to exercise virtue love from his own volition. And this comes from Paul, who is at this time both an ambassador and a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Even though he is behind bars, he is still an ambassador for Christ. Even though men put him in prison, he acknowledges God's will in the matter by calling himself not a prisoner of man, but a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

It is difficult not to compare Paul being a prisoner and Onesimus being a slave. Both would be considered an unsatisfactory condition! But instead of concentrating on his unfavorable circumstances, he sees the hand of God in the matter. This requires divine perspective. If human viewpoint was in control, Paul would encourage Onesimus to stay away from Philemon and never return. If human viewpoint was in control, Paul would have a pity party because he was in prison and he would cease his ambassadorial activities. Neither is the case. Paul remains a prisoner, Onesimus remains a slave, but both continue their ambassadorial ministries in their respective spheres.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

Paul is not prone to seek pity from fellow believers, so more recent versions which use the word "ambassador" are probably better than "old man." (F. Bruce) Besides, prisoner and ambassador go well together. One relates to his person, the other to his role. (J. Houlden) "Presbuteros" means "old age" but usually carries with it the connotation of authority. (A. Rupprecht) For the third time Philemon is made to hear the clanking of the prisoner's chains. (J. Beet) A request coming from a prison, from a man who was ready to sacrifice his life for the gospel of Christ, cannot be lightly refused. (J. Muller)

The Christian's second royal warrant operates not toward God (priestly warrant) but toward man. As a royal ambassador every Church Age believer represents the Lord Jesus Christ to mankind on earth ... God appoints the royal ambassador to be His representative on earth. God supplies all the logistical grace necessary to perpetuate the believer's physical and spiritual life in the devil's world. The royal ambassador operates according to the written mystery doctrines of the New Testament ... The ambassador of Jesus Christ has his citizenship in heaven. The royal ambassador lives to glorify Christ and personally benefits not by following his own agenda but through fulfilling his royal warrant. (R.B. Thieme, Jr.)

Phi. 9 Instead (ellipsis, conj. supplied), because of your virtue love (Acc. Rel.; category 3 friendship), I encourage (παρακαλέω, PAI1S, Aoristic; allowing you to make your own decision) you (ellipsis, Acc. Dir. Obj. supplied; to be grace oriented) even more (Comparative Adv.), being (είμι, PAPtc.NSM, Descriptive, Predicative) such a person (Subj. Nom.; correlative demonstrative) as (relative pronoun; idiom for "speaking to you as") Paul (Nom. Appos.), an ambassador (Nom. Appos.; setting aside my apostolic authority as an example to you) and (connective) now (Adv. Time) also (adjunctive) a prisoner (Nom. Appos.) of Christ Jesus (Poss. Gen.).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:9** διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μᾶλλον παρακαλῶ τοιοῦτος ὢν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης
 νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ·

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:9** propter caritatem magis obsecro cum sis talis ut Paulus senex nunc autem et
 vinctus Iesu Christi

LWB **Phi. 10** I am appealing to you [to be grace oriented] on behalf of my theological student, Onesimus, concerning whom I have fathered [spiritually] while in chains [to a Roman Praetorian Guard],

^{KW} **Phi. 10** I am imploring you concerning my child [my born-one, my bairn], of whom I became the [spiritual] father while in prison – Onesimus,

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul now begins the thrust of his letter – to appeal to Philemon on behalf of his theological student, Onesimus. “Teknon” does mean child, but that doesn’t accurately portray the relationship between Paul and Onesimus, two grown men. “Student” is a legitimate translation of “teknon.” Paul is the Bible teacher, Onesimus is the theological student. Paul not only preached the gospel to him, leading him to believe in Christ, but he has also been teaching him sound theology. He is proud of Onesimus because of his progress. Even though Paul is chained to a Roman Praetorian Guard under house arrest, he is still able to be the spiritual father (“begetting a convert”) of Onesimus (Constativ Aorist tense). And because of the unusual circumstances around Onesimus, Paul now ends his greetings and gets to the heart of his message.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

It could also be argued that instead of being a runaway, Onesimus' master had sent him to fulfill some commission, and that he had overstayed his leave and required a note of excuse from Paul begging pardon for his unduly long absence. (F. Bruce) That is not to say that Paul’s acting on behalf of Onesimus was a kind of trade-off for Onesimus becoming Christian; there is no hint of any such manipulation in the warmth of Paul’s account. (J. Dunn) Tracking fugitive slaves was a trade. Recovered slaves were branded on the forehead, condemned to double labor, and sometimes thrown to the beasts in the amphitheatre. The slave population was enormous. Some proprietors had as many as twenty thousand. (M. Vincent)

Colossae was a city of Greater Phrygia, and the name of “Phrygian” was long a synonym for “slave.” Its population had the reputation of being sullen and intractable, only to be governed by blows ... For a long time, the ownership of slaves was not, in the Christian church, held to be unlawful. As late as the time of Theodosius, as we learn from Chrysostom, there were wealthy persons who held as many as two or three thousand slaves. (S. Eales) Paul persuades without alienating, and wins his correspondent to obedience without seeming to demand it. At once the reverend senior, the confiding friend, and the persuasive suppliant, he requests on behalf of his protégé a favour which we can hardly doubt was as willingly and gladly granted as it was gratefully received. (ibid)

Phi. 10 I am appealing (παρακαλέω, PAI1S, Descriptive; urging, imploring, asking for clemency) to you (Acc.

Address; to be grace oriented) on behalf of my (Gen. Rel.) theological student (Obj. Gen.; spiritual child), Onesimus (indeclinable; his name means "profitable, useful", parallel to the Prodigal Son; he is now on the same high ground of supergrace as his slaveowner, Philemon), concerning whom (Acc. Gen. Ref.) I have fathered (γεννάω, AAIIS, Constative; Paul is proud of him) while in chains (Loc. Time; chained to a Roman Praetorian Guard),

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:10** παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς Ὀνήσιμον

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:10** obsecro te de meo filio quem genui in vinculis Onesimo

LWB Phi. 11 The one formerly useless [in spite of his name which means “useful”] to you [as a runaway slave], but now [after regeneration] highly useful both to you [as an improved slave] and to me [as a friend and ambassador for Christ],

^{KW} **Phi. 11** The one who was once useless to you, but now useful both to you and to me,

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:11** Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Onesimus was initially considered a useless slave, even though his name meant “useful.” Wansink and others also note that he was only useless when he was “a-christos” or without Christ – a play on the word “achrestos” which means useless. Now that he is a believer, he is, as the paronomasia shows - no longer useless (Latin: non-utility), but is useful (Latin: utility). If you accept the runaway theory, that would explain why he was considered “useless” by his master, Philemon. But now that he is a believer and is under Paul’s tutelage, he is useful to both Philemon and Paul. He is useful to Philemon because as a believer he will be a better quality slave. He is useful to Paul because he not only ministers to Paul in prison, but has the potential of being a witness to other slaves and masters in his home town when he returns. A believer who attains supergrace, whether slave or free, is a blessing to all those in his periphery.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

It is important to recognize that the name “Onesimus” literally means “useful.” The reference to Onesimus as having been “useless” (akrestos) would have sounded ironic to the original reader of this epistle. The wordplay is even more notable when we look at the Greek word “akrestos.” Before Onesimus met Paul he was not a Christian. He was “a-kristos,” without Christ. Because “eta” and “iota” were often pronounced the same (and often interchanged in inscriptions), Paul here exploits the homonymous side of “a-christos” and “achrestos.” Thus

Paul is saying: Before Onesimus was a Christian, he was named Onesimus (or “useful”). At that time, however, he was not truly useful (euchrestos), because he was “achrestos” (that is “a-christos”). Now that he is in Christ, however, he is truly “useful.” (S. Wansink)

The usual understanding of the story behind the letter is that Onesimus has run away from his master’s house, has been converted by Paul whom he met somehow in prison, and is now returning to Philemon with this letter from Paul. That Onesimus was converted by Paul in prison is clearly implied by the metaphor “whose father I have become in my imprisonment.” However, it is intriguing to observe that the letter nowhere states that Onesimus had run away. Thus Knox describes the runaway hypothesis as “a tentative theory” and suggests that Onesimus had been sent by his owner with a message or gift for Paul. (J. Barclay) He is profitable to Philemon, for instead of the slave who formerly gave the grudging service of those who obeyed “with eyeservice, as menpleasers,” now he has learned as a Christian to serve “in singleness of heart, fearing God.” (H. Carson)

Paul acknowledges that Philemon once regarded Onesimus as “useless,” while immediately assuring him that he is now “very useful” to both of them. (J. Barclay) This is a *meiosis*, or a belittling of one thing to magnify another, because Onesimus was definitely guilty of injury. (E. Bullinger) Paul may be delicately letting Philemon know that what he would really like him to do is to send Onesimus back to him to continue the personal service that he has already begun to render to Paul. (F. Bruce) There is also the possibility that since Paul and Philemon were both “business partners” in the gospel, they could both reap a profit from a formerly useless person in their employment who has now become useful. (G. Buttrick)

Phi. 11 The one (Acc. Appos.) formerly (enclitic particle, “in times past”) useless (Uncompl. Acc.; “good for nothing”, a pun on the meaning of Onesimus’ name) to you (Dat. Disadv.; as a runaway slave), but (contrast) now (Temporal Adv.) highly useful (Compl. Acc.; a further pun on Onesimus’ name) both (adjunctive) to you (Dat. Adv.) and (connective) to me (Dat. Adv.; because of his regeneration leading to his supergrace maturity),

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:11** τὸν ποτέ σοι ἄχρηστον νυνὶ δὲ σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ εὐχρηστον

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:11** qui tibi aliquando inutilis fuit nunc autem et tibi et mihi utilis

LWB Phi. 12 Whom I am sending back [to resume his duties] to you [along with Tychicus], that same one who has my very own tender affections [Paul loves Onesimus as if he were his own son],

^{KW} **Phi. 12** Whom I am sending back to you; it is he himself, that is, [in sending him back to you I am sending] my very heart;

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Rather than encourage Onesimus to seek refuge from the “evil institution of slavery,” Paul is sending him back to his master, Philemon. Paul is sending him with Tychicus, as envoys delivering this letter and others (Epistolary Aorist tense). Paul seems to anticipate Philemon reading this letter for the first time and being in a state of disbelief. “What, you can’t be talking about the same Onesimus I know. He’s a useless slave!” Paul uses an immediate demonstrative and an intensive pronoun to say, “Yes, this very same Onesimus, in person, that we both know is the one I’m talking about. Believe it or not, Onesimus has my very own tender affections. He has served me well, learned Bible doctrine on a consistent basis, and is now a spiritual asset for the Lord. I love him as if he were my own son.” If Onesimus was a runaway slave, then this would explain why he had the courage to return to his master. What a compliment from the apostle Paul!

RELEVANT OPINIONS

His willingness to return to his offended master shows the genuineness of his conversion. (D. Hiebert) According to Rabbinical teaching a runaway slave who is recaptured must make good the time of his absence; this may, in part, have been the reason for Paul's insistence on the return of Onesimus to his master. Also, Paul was prepared to undertake in order to make up for the time lost by Onesimus in verses 18 & 19. (W. Oesterley) Not only a slave, but subject to torture and death for stealing from his master, he is first reconciled to God through Paul’s preaching, and then is reconciled to his master through Paul’s pleading. (A. Knoch) Although Paul eventually returns him to his master Philemon, he nowhere suggests that the presence of Onesimus was inappropriate. Paul clearly wishes to have Onesimus back. He even hints that Philemon might exceed Paul’s desire (vs. 21), perhaps by freeing Onesimus from his service so that he would be free to assist Paul. (R. Banks)

Paul is not intending Philemon to retain Onesimus, but is referring the matter to him for a decision in the hope that he will be allowed to return to Paul. (D. Guthrie) Philemon has sometimes been quite wrongly treated as a tract on slavery. It is hardly necessary to point out that no question of principle regarding that institution is even raised. What Paul had to say on slavery in theory is to be found in Colossians, and even there he does not raise the question whether or no the institution as such should or should not exist ... All that he says is steeped in obviously genuine affection for the runaway, and he expects that the Christian master will treat the slave as a beloved brother. What will ultimately become of slavery on that basis he does not stop to ask. (C. Dodd)

Phi. 12 **Whom** (Acc. Appos.) **I am sending back** (ἀναπέμπω, AAIIS, Epistolary; to resume his neglected duties) **to you** (Dat. Adv.; along with Tychicus, as envoys with this accompanying letter), **that same** (immediate demonstrative) **one** (Intensive pronoun, Acc. Appos.) **who**

(Subj. Nom.) **has** (εἰμί, PAI3S, Descriptive) **my very own**
 (Poss. Acc.) **tender affections** (Acc. Dir. Obj.; inner
 happiness; Paul loves Onesimus as if he were his own
 son),

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:12** ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι αὐτόν τοῦτ ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα·

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:12** quem remisi tu autem illum id est mea viscera suscipe

LWB Phi. 13 Whom I wish [would have liked] to detain for myself [I've procrastinated in returning him to you], so that on your behalf [instead of you being here in person], he might keep on ministering to me in my chains [imprisonment] for the sake of the gospel.

^{KW} **Phi. 13** Whom, as for myself, after mature consideration, I was of a mind to retain with me as a companion in order that in your stead he might keep on ministering to me in my imprisonment for the sake of the good news.

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

If Paul had his choice (Voluntative Imperfect tense), he would not return Onesimus to his master, Philemon. He would like to keep him for himself! But he understands how the institution of slavery works, and he knows he cannot keep him under these circumstances (Unattainable Potential Indicative mood). Paul is admitting that he has procrastinated in sending Onesimus home. He liked him so much that he wanted him to remain and continue ministering to him. The iterative present tense means Onesimus had already been doing a great job of keeping Paul company and assisting him in whatever needs he might have – in effect, serving as a proxy for Philemon.

In a very real manner, Onesimus was acting as a surrogate Philemon. Since Philemon couldn't be there himself, his slave could (and did) extend his desired service to Paul in his time of need. Paul wasn't looking for a personal slave. The phrase “for the sake of the gospel” means Onesimus was assisting him in work for the Lord that he was unable to do because he was in prison. It was a very successful partnership in the gospel and Paul wished it didn't have to end – but a slave is a slave and he could not break the law by holding Onesimus back any longer. In a way, Paul is saying, “Don't blame Onesimus for coming back so late. It was my fault. I didn't want him to go!”

RELEVANT OPINIONS

Paul goes out of his way to stress how precious Onesimus has become to him so as to be able to portray Philemon's reception of his slave as a sign of his relationship to Paul. (J. Barclay) They were not the shackles which self had riveted, but a chain with which Christ had invested him. Thus they were as a badge of office or a decoration of honor. (J. Lightfoot) Onesimus, the vagabond slave, has become so precious to the apostle that

sending him away is like tearing the heart out of his own breast. What an amazing impression this must have made upon Philemon! (C. Erdman) With a delicate tact the Apostle assumes that Philemon would have wished to perform these friendly offices in person, if it had been possible. (J. Lightfoot) Philemon could hardly fail to think more favorably of Onesimus, when he saw how much importance the apostle attached to his services. (S. Eales)

The implication cannot be that Onesimus had been sent to Paul as a gift from Philemon, to serve Paul as he served Philemon; in that case a letter full of such trepidation and pleading would have been unnecessary (J. Dunn) If Paul wished to keep Onesimus rather than send him back, and even offered Philemon monetary remuneration, that would explain the "trepidation and pleading." No doubt Onesimus was expected to return to Philemon at some specific date and he was quite late in arrival. While I don't necessarily agree with Dunn's argument here, I do agree with this next statement. (LWB) The language may also suggest that Paul had reviewed other possible courses of action open to him, but in the end realized that without Philemon's agreement, nothing that Paul decided with regard to Onesimus would be satisfactory or right. (J. Dunn)

The apostle here expresses as a wish that he hopes Philemon will concede – that Onesimus might serve him with Philemon's consent. (D. Guthrie) By virtue of his family background and Roman citizenship, Paul was a person of some status and thus would normally be expected to have his own slaves with him on extensive travels. (R. Banks) The imperfect implies a tentative, inchoate process; while the aorist describes a definite and complete act. The will stepped in and put an end to the inclinations of the mind ... The wish is stopped at the outset by some antecedent consideration which renders it impossible, and thus practically it is not entertained at all. (J. Lightfoot)

Phi. 13 Whom (Acc. Appos.) I wish (βούλομαι, Imperf.MI1S, Voluntative, Unattainable Potential, Deponent, "would have liked") to detain (κατέχω, PAInf., Static, Inf. as Dir. Obj. of Verb) for myself (Acc. Rel., reflexive pronoun; "I've procrastinated in returning him to you", rationalization), so that (Final clause) on your behalf (Gen. Substitution; serving as a proxy, "instead of you being present"), he might keep on ministering (διακονέω, PASubj.3S, Iterative, Purpose) to me (Dat. Adv.) in my (Poss. Gen.) chains (Loc. Sph.; imprisonment) for the sake of the gospel (Partitive. Gen.).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:13** ὃν ἐγὼ ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἑμαυτὸν κατέχειν ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῆ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:13** quem ego volueram mecum detinere ut pro te mihi ministraret in vinculis evangelii

LWB **Phi. 14** However, I did not want to do anything without your consent, in order that your intrinsic good [produced by doctrine in your soul] should not have to

manifest itself by means of compulsion [not through Paul’s compelling arguments or legal action regarding runaway slaves], but rather voluntarily.

^{KW} **Phi. 14** But I came to a decision in my heart to do nothing without your consent, in order that your goodness [to me] might not be as it were by compulsion but of your own free will.

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul did not take matters into his own hands. Out of courtesy and friendship to Philemon, he sent Onesimus back to him. He did not want to do anything (Constative Aorist tense) with Onesimus without complete agreement from Philemon. Paul did not want to stir up trouble. He did not want to get into any legal wrangling with a good friend over the ownership of a slave. He did not want to browbeat Philemon into letting Onesimus stay with him (Potential Subjunctive mood). He wanted to give Philemon the opportunity of showing himself and the world that he knew what to do on a voluntary basis. Paul could continue arguing with Philemon, using his authority to “throw his weight around,” but that was not the *modus operandi* he wanted to engage in.

Philemon would not receive as great a spiritual blessing if he merely followed Paul’s orders (Latin: necessity) without question. But if allowed to apply Bible doctrine and make the correct decision using his own volition, there would most assuredly be a greater reward for his wisdom in this matter. If his motivation to send Onesimus back to Paul (or to release him for alternate duties) came from an application of doctrine in the filling of the Spirit, it would be classified as divine good and a reward would accrue to his account. If Paul forced him into a decision, he might acquiesce to apostolic authority and receive perhaps a small reward for obedience, but a self-generated decision in the right direction is much better for his sustained spiritual growth.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

This still leaves open many questions about the conditions of Onesimus’ service for Paul. Is he to remain as Philemon’s slave but now “seconded” to work for Paul? Or is Philemon expected to manumit him, presumably under terms of continuing obligation to work for Paul? And for how long is he intended to help Paul? (J. Barclay) Onesimus had repented, but he had not made restitution. He could only do this by submitting again to the servitude from which he escaped. (J. Lightfoot) To have harbored and detained a fugitive slave would have been a violation of Roman law. Paul was keenly sensitive to the scandal which Christianity might create if slaves should thus be encouraged to become fugitives. (D. Hiebert) Retaining a slave could be done only with the owner’s consent. (E. Deibler) Did Philemon send Onesimus back to Paul? Again, that is something we don’t know. I think he did. I would imagine that on the next boat going to Rome, there was Onesimus with a lot of things to add to Paul’s comfort. (J. McGee)

This is drawn from the general rule that no sacrifices are acceptable to God but those which are freely offered; willingness is contrasted with constraint, for that duty which is happily performed, and not through influence exercised by others, is alone entitled to full praise. (J. Calvin) The will stepped in and put an end to the inclinations of the mind. (J. Lightfoot) The allusion is to Philemon's generous act, not yet specified, of welcoming Onesimus back into his household – without punishment – as though he were welcoming Paul himself. (M. Harris) He does not request Onesimus' emancipation; but, on the other hand, he does hint that if it were to occur to Philemon to send Onesimus back to him, it would be greatly appreciated. Philemon would doubtless like to be of use to his friend. He cannot be with him in prison; perhaps he would like Onesimus to act as his deputy. (C. Dodd)

Phi. 14 However (adversative; "out of courtesy"), I did not (neg. split from Acc.) want (θέλω, AAI1S, Constative) to do (ποιέω, AAInf., Constative, Inf. as Dir. Obj. of Verb) anything (Acc. Dir. Obj.; resolved to do nothing) without (Adv. Separation) your (Poss. Gen.) consent (Gen. Attend. Circum.; permission, agreement), in order that (Purpose clause) your (Poss. Gen.) intrinsic good (Subj. Nom.; divine good produced by doctrine in your soul) should not (neg. particle) have to manifest (εἰμί, PASubj.3S, Static, Potential, Result) itself (Dat. Ind. Obj.) by means of (Correlative Adv., according to, "in such a way as") legal compulsion (Adv. Acc.; involuntary, not through Paul's compelling and authoritative arguments), but rather (contrast) voluntarily (Adv. Acc.; free will).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:14** χωρὶς δὲ τῆς σῆς γνώμης οὐδὲν ἠθέλησα ποιῆσαι ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθὸν σου ἦ ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἑκούσιον

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:14** sine consilio autem tuo nihil volui facere uti ne velut ex necessitate bonum tuum esset sed voluntarium

LWB Phi. 15 Perhaps for this purpose [by divine design] he was separated from you [by God] for an hour [short vacation], in order that you might have him [Onesimus] back forever [lifelong service],

^{KW} **Phi. 15** For perhaps on this account he was parted [from you] for a brief time in order that you might be possessing him fully and forever,

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

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul switches perspective from human viewpoint to divine viewpoint. Jesus Christ controls history and nothing is an accident. Nothing sneaks up on God's blind side,

because He has no blind side. He orders all events according to His sovereign will. Paul understands this truth and now poses a very likely hypothetical situation. Is it possible that Onesimus was supposed to runaway? Is it possible that he was supposed to remain with Paul long enough to become a believer in Christ Jesus? With humble uncertainty, but an understanding that historical as well as personal events are under God's control, Paul posits the idea that Onesimus was separated from Philemon (Constative Aorist tense) for a divine reason (purpose clause). The passive voice points to God instigating the departure, not Onesimus.

Perhaps the time that Onesimus has been gone is only one hour compared to a lifetime of continued service to his master. Suppose he left as a useless unbeliever and returns a useful believer. The good news is that he will return to Philemon (Futuristic Present tense) after this short interlude for a lifetime of honorable service. In effect, Paul wants him to count these two years that Onesimus has been gone as if they were only two hours. The apostle Paul is going to return him in better condition than he received him! Divine viewpoint and an accurate understanding of divine sovereignty and omnipotence, sees the hand of God behind human events – even the seemingly insignificant events in our own lives.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

In reviewing Onesimus' flight, Paul chooses his words very carefully ... The passive verb "he was separated from" plainly intimates that God's hidden purpose may have been behind this incident which has caused Philemon so much annoyance. (E. Lohse) In itself, the verb indicates only that Onesimus was "separated" from the household in which he served. That does not necessarily mean that he ran away. It just means that for some reason he was not there. Slaves were often separated from their owners, conducting business for them elsewhere, delivering letters, administering projects, or simply working where labor was needed. (D. Martin) He departed a reprobate, he returns a saved man. He departed for a few months; he returns to be with you for all time and eternity. (J. Lightfoot) Permanently (C. Moule) for good (J. Moffatt), for all time (Sasse), compares the expression "slave for life" in Deut. 15:17 and Exodus 21:6 with "permanent slave" in Job 40:28. In this case, Paul is envisaging the real possibility that, as a result of Philemon's decision, Onesimus might always remain a slave in Philemon's household, albeit a beloved brother. (M. Harris)

The passive denotes that God's hidden purpose was employed to signify the hidden action of God as the person responsible for what was done ... God may have been behind this incident ... Paul was not assuming an acquaintance with God's hidden designs. (P. O'Brien) However, he permits (and in some ways compels) believers to search for God's working in their lives. (J. Koenig) There is a divine purpose which can be discerned as shining even through a questionable human act. Behind the slave's mutiny and flight there was another Will working, of which, in some sense, Onesimus was but the instrument. A divine purpose is always dimly visible to the one with discernment. God, in the sweep of His wise providence, utilizes men's evil, and works it in, to the accomplishment of great purposes far beyond their ken, as nature, in her patient

chemistry, takes the rubbish and filth of the dunghill and turns them into beauty and food. How little any of us know where we are going, and what strange results may evolve themselves from our actions! But the intricate web of circumstances is being woven by a loving, wise Hand according to His pattern, which will vindicate itself when it is finished. (A. Maclaren)

Paul suggests that Onesimus was sent to him by providential overruling. The providential purposes of God are veiled to men and even Paul can speak of them only tentatively. (D. Hiebert) Certainly a beginning which appeared so unpromising looked like the very path which found Paul. Had not Paul been imprisoned, Onesimus might never have believed, or have rendered service to Paul's needs, or returned to Philemon ... The passive voice refers to the permissive hand of God's providence, such as in other cases: Noah's drunkenness, David's adultery, Peter's denial, Onesimus' running away. Paul sees a higher hand in what seemed to be only the act of Onesimus. (J. Exell) God has indeed used Onesimus' waywardness for his own good, as in His overall purpose He can utilize every man's evil for the fulfillment of His grand design which is beyond our comprehension. (H. McDonald) *Forever* is used with a limited signification, called a *synecdoche* of the whole; time is put for a portion of time. "Serving him forever" means as long as he lives. (E. Bullinger)

"It might well be", writes Paul in effect, "that I should have been defeating God's purpose in allowing your slave to leave you, had I retained him in Rome." Paul was quite certain as to the general principle of God's eternal purpose, even when he was most modest in the application of it. (W. Thomas) It is soul teaching, and soul strengthening, when we discern that things are "of the Lord" and are not accidental circumstances. (J. Exell) Forever could also mean that Onesimus will remain in slave status when he returns. (G. Caird) That Paul hinted at the possibility of Philemon returning Onesimus to Paul depends on what the final clause of verse 15 has in view. (J. Dunn) The passive voice intimates that Onesimus' flight was divinely ordained for good. (M. Vincent) I think the reason why in God's Providence he was separated from you for a time was that he might come back as something more than a slave – a dear brother – dear to me, surely dearer to you, with whom he has both earthly and spiritual ties. (C. Dodd)

The "tacha gar," following what is said in verse 14, makes it difficult to interpret the present verse otherwise than as a reference to the possibility of its NOT being his master's intention to part with Onesimus ... When a slave became a "brother" to his master, there were bound to be problems, as indicated by 1 Timothy 6:2: Christian slaves are not to take liberties with Christian masters. (C. Moule) While he was fully aware that Onesimus' departure from Philemon had been deliberate, he sees the hand of God in it, and speaks of him as having been parted. The AV misses this point by translating it as an active (he departed) though the verb is in the passive. Onesimus with all his willfulness had been, unknown to himself, in the hand of the sovereign God. To appreciate fully the reality of divine providence, it is essential to look at events from the eternal standpoint. To dwell only on the present situation is to fail to see how what is apparently adverse is being moulded by God to His purposes. (H. Carson) Although the idea of restitution is

prominent here, that of complete possession seems also to be present in view of “aionion” and “adelphon agape.” (W. Nicoll)

Phi. 15 Perhaps (adv.; humble uncertainty) for this (Acc. Spec.) purpose (Acc. Purpose) he was separated (χωρίζω, API3S, Constative) from you (ellipsis, Abl. Sep. supplied) for an hour (Acc. Extent of Time; a short vacation, for a season; "count these two years as an hour"), in order that (Purpose clause) you might have (ἀπέχω, PASubj.2S, Futuristic, Purpose & Result) him (Acc. Dir. Obj.; Onesimus) back forever (Acc. Extent of Time; eternal fellowship, perpetual or lifelong service, permanently),

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:15** τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχης

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:15** forsitan enim ideo discessit ad horam a te ut aeternum illum reciperes

LWB Phi. 16 No longer as a mere slave, but more than a slave, a beloved [exhibiting spiritual momentum] brother [Christian], most of all to me, but now much more to you, both in the flesh [Onesimus continues to be a slave of Philemon in the human realm] and in the Lord [Onesimus and Philemon are equals in the spiritual realm].

^{KW} **Phi. 16** No longer in the capacity of a slave, but above a slave, a brother [in Christ], a beloved one, beloved most of all by me, how much more than that by you, both in his human relationship [to you as your slave] and in [his spiritual relationship to] the Lord.

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:16** Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

If Philemon decides to keep Onesimus as a slave, he will no longer be a mere slave. The correlative metaphor instructs us to add the word “mere” as a comparison or contrast to the “much more” in this reference to his being a slave. Please read the exegetical comments by Murray Harris below. This is not a proof-text for manumission! We don’t know if Philemon released Onesimus or not. We don’t even know if Onesimus wanted to be released when he returned. The nature of their relationship had changed so much since Onesimus had become a Christian that it is quite possible that he remained in Philemon’s service for the rest of his life. Anything to the contrary is mere speculation. I repeat: this is not a proof-text for manumission; that is eisegesis, not exegesis. The contrast between the two spheres of existence, physical and spiritual, adds emphasis to this fact.

In the flesh, Onesimus is beloved; in the Lord, Onesimus is beloved. “In the flesh” points to his continual service to his master in the capacity of a slave – if Philemon desired to keep him in that capacity, and if Onesimus desired to be a free man with its attendant responsibilities. But now they are spiritual equals in a sense, because they are both believers in Christ; that is what “in the Lord” refers to. Philemon should be particularly

beloved by Philemon, both as a slave and as a Christian. But becoming a Christian did not erase the social status of the master/slave relationship. Even the attainment of supergrace status did not erase the master/slave relationship. Let the verse speak for itself without adding abolitionist notions that were not there historically.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

Some commentators think this verse means Paul wants Philemon to free Onesimus from slavery. (LWB) But it is just as possible to read the request as a plea for a transformed relationship between master and slave – still between a master and slave, but transformed by the faith they shared in common. This possibility is strengthened by a possibly deliberate allusion to Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17, with the implication that their relationship will continue to have a double dimension (“in the flesh and in the Lord”), and by the broader implication of such passages as Galatians 3:28 that relationship “in Christ” transcended even if they did not abolish distinctions of race, status, and gender. Whether manumission or forgiveness was in view, it is clear that Paul was much more hopeful that the new relationship between Philemon and Onesimus, since they were both Christians, would be the determinative relationship, “more than a slave” and “a beloved brother.” (J. Dunn)

Even if Philemon freed Onesimus, the latter would almost certainly have had to remain in a state of financial dependence on Philemon as his client (“have back forever”): under Greek law freedom might be only partial and limited with regard to employment and movement; and economically there might be little difference between the secure relationship of the slave of a good master and the subservient client relationship of the impoverished freedman. Either way, and this is the important point, whether as master or slave or as patron to client, the relationship of “beloved brother” should be paramount. That would not change the social relationship of Onesimus’ dependence on Philemon, but it would relativize it, infuse it with a family warmth, and make for heightened respect and consideration on both sides. (J. Dunn; Bartchy) Throughout verses 15-16 Paul is entertaining the possibility that, having forgiven and reinstated Onesimus, Philemon will retain him as a slave. Nowhere in the letter does Paul demand the release of Onesimus or even assume that Philemon will set him free. (M. Harris)

The elect of God are sometimes brought to salvation by a method that could not have been believed, contrary to general expectation, by circuitous windings, and even by labyrinths. Onesimus lived in a religious and holy family, and, being banished from it by his own evil actions, he deliberately, as it were, withdraws far from God and from eternal life. Yet God, by hidden providence, wonderfully directs his pernicious flight, so that he meets with Paul. (J. Calvin) This phrase has suggested to some readers that there was a blood relationship between the two men. Such a state of affairs would not be unusual, if, for example, Onesimus were the son of Philemon's father by a slave girl; then Onesimus and Philemon would be half-brothers, but Onesimus (unless emancipated) would still be a slave. Of course, this may not be the case, and it may merely refer to their earthly relationship as opposed to their future heavenly one, (F. Bruce) in both spheres: in the affairs of the world, and in the affairs of the higher life. (J. Lightfoot)

A simple “ouketi doulon” would mean “no longer a slave,” implying manumission. The final “a” of “alla” is elided before the initial vowel of “huper” (Col. 3:22). “Huper” plus the accusative, “over” or “above,” is used metaphorically of what excels or surpasses: “as one who is more than a slave.” After “hos,” “huper” functions as a correlative: “no longer viewed as a mere slave but as more than a slave – as a dearly beloved brother.” If Philemon decided to retain the services of Onesimus, the outward master-slave relation would remain unaltered, but a new inward relation would obtain – that of brothers in Christ ... Onesimus would be an even dearer brother to Philemon than to Paul, perhaps because their dual relationship as slave and master (in the flesh) and as Christian brothers (in the Lord) would be experienced within the intimacy of a single household. (M. Harris)

Paul does not condemn slave masters for possessing bondmen, but he warns them that they will be held accountable for the manner in which they treat their slaves. (H. Carson) The apostle recognized Philemon’s right to the restored services of his fugitive slave. The conversion of Onesimus did not secure his manumission. (T. Croskery) Note that Paul does not deny that Onesimus is still a slave. He does not say, “not now a servant,” but “not now as a servant.” He still is a slave; but he is no longer to be treated as one, for the old relationship of master and slave is absorbed into the new one of brethren. The brother stands on a higher level for he is above a servant. (H. Carson) The question arises why Paul did not take the opportunity of pointing out in a more direct manner the evils of the whole system. (D. Guthrie)

The phrase “no longer as a slave” is not stating that Philemon is to receive Onesimus back as a freed man and no longer a slave, or that he is to free himself immediately on his return ... Had Paul wished to describe the latter and therefore suggest that the runaway slave was to be freed, he would have simply written “doulon,” a slave, instead of “hos doulon,” as a slave ... In other words, whether Onesimus remained a slave or not, he could no longer be regarded AS a slave. A change had been effected in him independent of his possible manumission. (P. O’Brien) No longer a mere slave (though still that), but above a servant, so that thou shalt have not merely the services of a slave, but higher benefits. (R. Jamieson) He next brings forward another advantage of the flight, that Onesimus has not only been corrected by means of it, so as to become a useful slave, but that he has become the “brother” of his master. (J. Calvin)

Phi. 16 No longer (Adv. Time) as a mere (correlative metaphor) slave (Acc. Gen. Ref.; the shadow of reversionism has been removed), but (contrast) more than (Comparative Acc. with a Superlative.; greater than) a slave (Acc. Gen. Ref.), a beloved (Compl. Acc.) brother (Acc. Dir. Obj.; Christian), most of all (Superlative Adv.; especially) to me (Dat. Adv.), but now (Contrast & Temporal particle) much (Correlative pronoun) more (Comparative Acc.; "beloved") to you (Dat. Adv.), both (adjunctive) in the flesh (Loc. Sph.; Onesimus continues to be the slave of Philemon

according to human social status) **and** (connective) **in the Lord** (Loc. Sph.; Onesimus and Philemon are equals according to divine spiritual status).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:16** οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ δοῦλον ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν μάλιστα ἐμοί πόσω δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:16** iam non ut servum sed plus servo carissimum fratrem maxime mihi quanto autem magis tibi et in carne et in Domino

LWB Phi. 17 Therefore, if you continue to have me as a partner [close spiritual relationship], then please receive him [Onesimus] as you would receive me [as a grace partner].

^{KW} **Phi. 17** In view, therefore, of the fact that you hold me as a comrade and friend, one who has the same interests, feelings, and work, receive him into your fellowship as you would receive me.

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:17** If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul uses a 1st class conditional clause (and it's true) to ask Philemon a rhetorical question. If Philemon is still his close spiritual friend and confidant (Durative Present tense), then he asks him to receive Onesimus (Imperative of Entreaty) as if it were him. Paul is using consummate tact in a grace crisis. Instead of telling Philemon what to do, he begs him to treat Onesimus as if he were his best friend, Paul. In other words, "Regard him as me." The word "partner" refers to spiritual fellowship, not mere human social life, and does not negate Onesimus' status as a slave. But there is a hint of "business dealings" in the choice of this word.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

It is very difficult to know if Paul imagined that the status of brother should supercede that of slave or simply be superimposed on it ... Whereas some scholars consider that Paul is clearly suggesting that Philemon should manumit his slave (Lohmeyer, Bruce), others insist that Paul is not at all concerned with the question of Onesimus' legal status and is not even hinting at manumission. (Wright, Lightfoot, Scott, Lohse) I would like to suggest that there is in fact another important reason for Paul's vagueness in this letter and that is that *he did not know what to recommend*. If we think about the situation in practical terms we will see that there were immense difficulties in either of the two main options open to Philemon – to retain Onesimus as a slave or to manumit him – and it was, perhaps, his awareness of these problems which prevented Paul from being able to give a clear recommendation to Philemon. (J. Barclay)

With his own hand Paul wrote a few words of eager affectionate entreaty, identifying himself with the cause of Onesimus. (J. Lightfoot) Paul makes half-playful but very effective use of business terms in writing of the spiritual relationship between Philemon,

himself and Onesimus. This does not mean that they were mere "business partners," but now that Onesimus has become a Christian, they are all partners in fellowship with Christ. (P. O'Brien) Roman law, more cruel than Athenian, practically imposed no limits to the power of the master over his slave. The alternative of life or death rested solely with Philemon, and slaves were constantly crucified, scourged, mutilated, thrown to wild beasts, filleted inch by inch, fed to huge conger eels in the garden tank, (H. Moule) for far lighter offenses than his. As a thief and runaway, he had no claim to forgiveness. (J. Lightfoot)

There was inescapably a commercial dimension to the whole affair, so that the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus could not be restored without the question of financial recompense being dealt with. The fact that Paul delayed raising the issue till this point in his letter suggests a degree of uncertainty as to Philemon's likely attitude. Would it be Philemon the brother "in the Lord" or Philemon the defrauded businessman who would respond? "If then you have me as a partner" has the echo of legal contracts, (J. Dunn) which might mean since Paul and Philemon are spiritual partners, maybe they could share the benefits of Onesimus' skills as business partners. (LWB) And now Philemon should receive Onesimus into his house as he would Paul his partner ... an appeal to one partner to accept the good faith and judgment of the other ... and to call confidently on his investment in Onesimus. (J. Dunn)

In a Christian context this term implies more than mere friendship or similarity of outlook. It betokens spiritual unity in Christ and common loyalty to Christ, partnership in believing and working for the gospel ... Paul is indirectly requesting not only the forgiveness of Onesimus but also his reinstatement into the household of Philemon. (M. Harris) Although Philemon was a Christian he may still have considered it advisable to administer punishment. The letter is a plea for leniency. Armed with so potent a petition, Onesimus would have a weapon of defence which Philemon as a true Christian man would find it difficult to resist. (D. Guthrie) The relevant Deuteronomic law (23:15-16) ran as follows: "You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you; he shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place which he shall choose within one of your towns, where it pleases him best; you shall not oppress him. (P. O'Brien)

Phi. 17 **Therefore** (resumptive), **if** (protasis, 1st class condition, "and you do") **you continue to have** (ἔχω, PAI2S, Durative; "still regard me as") **me** (Dat. Ind. Obj.) **as a partner** (Compl. Acc.; close relationship, spiritual fellowship), **then** (apodosis supplied) **please receive** (προσλαμβάνω, AMImp.2S, Constative, Entreaty) **him** (Acc. Dir. Obj.; Onesimus) **as** (Comparative Adv.) **you would receive** (ellipsis, verb repeated) **me** (Acc. Dir. Obj.; receive him as a partner, too - the function of grace in a grace crisis; consummate tact).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:17** Εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:17** si ergo habes me socium suscipe illum sicut me

LWB **Phi. 18** And if he has wronged you [by running away or staying with Paul too long] or if he owes you anything [due to indebtedness, theft or over-spending], then charge it to my account [a grace-oriented business transaction].

^{KW} **Phi. 18** If, as is the case, he wronged you in anything, or owes you something, be charging this to my account.

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:18** If he hath wronged thee, or oweth *thee* ought, put that on mine account;

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul uses another 1st class conditional clause because he knows there is some financial transaction between Philemon and Onesimus that is not in harmony. He also knows that either Philemon ran away or has stayed too long with Paul. If he has done either of these things, and he has, then Paul commands him (Imperative mood) to charge it to his account. Paul is prepared to take over any debt, any theft or any expenditure that Onesimus owes Philemon. Some say Onesimus put himself in voluntary slavery due to a debt he could not pay. Some say he took enough money for the trip, but has run out of funds and cannot make it back home. Others say he ran away from Philemon and stole some money for traveling expenses. Even others say he has merely stayed with Paul too long and has run up a healthy expense account. Whatever the financial was about, Paul offers to pay for it (Static Present tense). He says, "Debit my account for the full amount."

RELEVANT OPINIONS

The sentence is hypothetical only in form. Paul knows very well that Onesimus has wronged his master and owes him a considerable sum of money. (G. Caird) This is an astonishing guarantee for someone with as little independent means as Paul, not to mention that he was in prison at the time. It can only mean that he would be able to call on wealthy backers who presumably knew both Paul and Onesimus, should the IOU be called in. (J. Dunn) Paul does not necessarily imply that the slave, in running away, had pilfered something from his master. For he had already caused injury to Philemon's property solely by running away, even if he did not steal anything. (E. Lohse)

Just as there is no need to assume that Onesimus ran away, so there is no need to assume that Onesimus had stolen anything. (C. Wansink) Onesimus cannot make the monetary restitution which Philemon might feel was his due, so Paul voluntarily assumes the debt incurred by him. It is a beautiful picture of what Christ on an infinitely higher plane has done for us all. (D. Hiebert) It is clear that Onesimus had wronged his master in some way ... but it remains tantalizingly obscure. (J. Dunn)

Phi. 18 And (continuative) if (protasis, 1st class condition, "and he did because he ran away") he has wronged (ἀδικέω, AAI3S, Constative; to do injury without

justice) **you** (Dat. Disadv) **or** (conjunctive, assumes it is a fact) **if** (ellipsis, repetition of 1st class condition) **he owes you** (Dat. Disadv.) **anything** (ὀφείλω, PAI3S, Static; financial indebtedness, "delicate way of saying he stole a large sum of money from you"), **then** (apodosis supplied) **charge it** (immediate demonstrative, "this") **to my** (Poss. Gen.) **account** (ἐλλογέω, PAImp.2S, Static, Command; a grace-oriented business transaction, imputation).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:18** εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:18** si autem aliquid nocuit tibi aut debet hoc mihi inputa

LWB Phi. 19 “I, Paul,” have written by my own hand [binding legal signature]: “I will compensate [promissory note or IOU] you,” so that I do not have to mention to you that you owe, even yourself, to me [Paul led him to Christ and taught him Bible doctrine].

^{KW} **Phi. 19** As for myself, I, Paul, append my own signature to this; as for myself, I will pay the damages; not to say to you [though you cannot fairly claim repayment from me] that you owe yourself also to me in addition [since I am your spiritual father in Christ].

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:19** I Paul have written *it* with mine own hand, I will repay *it*: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul signs this letter with his own personal signature (Epistolary Aorist tense) so Philemon can use it as a promissory note if required. He actually takes the pen from Timothy, his amanuensis, and writes the words: “I will compensate you.” He doesn’t care how large the debt and additional expenses are related to Onesimus – he offers to pay it in full. He does this so that he doesn’t have to remind (Aoristic Present tense) Philemon that he himself is in debt to Paul. This is sanctified sarcasm, to be sure, since Paul is in the process of reminding Philemon that he owes him for his spiritual life while at the same time telling him that he doesn’t want to mention it. But as a matter of fact, Philemon does owe Paul, but not monetarily. He owes Paul an even greater debt (Static Present tense), which is a delicate reminder that Paul led him to Christ and taught him Bible doctrine. His relationship with Christ is far more valuable than money.

Nobody knows for a fact that Onesimus was a runaway slave. Nobody knows for a fact that Onesimus stole money from Philemon. This is all speculation. I think it’s a good speculative theory, and one that has been around for quite some time. But it’s still just a speculative theory. What do I think happened? I’ll give you my theory, but it’s just speculation, too. I think when Paul signed this letter, it was a valid business offer to buy Onesimus from Philemon. It was a blank check, allowing Philemon to put any monetary figure in the blank space and cash it in.

Philemon would not have manumitted Onesimus, if you believe he was a runaway and thief. That would be a financially disastrous example for slaveowners everywhere and encourage disobedience by other slaves. But Philemon could sell Onesimus and put him on the next ship back to Paul. That way he doesn't reward a runaway slave and thief (allegedly) by giving him his freedom. Instead, it allows the apostle Paul to manumit Onesimus on his return, which I believe he did.

Paul's sending Onesimus back to Philemon was a fulfillment of the law of his day on such matters. Paul did not disregard the law, he fulfilled the requirements of the law by sending Onesimus back to his lawful master. In the same manner, Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law when He was on earth. He did not preach a gospel of social reform; He preached a gospel of grace and peace while being obedient to the establishment principles then in existence. Paul's purchase of Onesimus as a slave would also parallel his own purchase from the slave market of sin by Christ Jesus. And Paul's manumission of Onesimus would parallel his own freedom from sin and spiritual death bequeathed to him by Christ Jesus. Can I support any of this theory by Scripture? No, I cannot. But I think it is as plausible as the other theories I have recently read in many commentaries.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

Paul candidly admits the possibility that Onesimus may have wronged Philemon or may owe him something, though he is willing to take responsibility for that debt himself. (J. Barclay) Quite possibly, Paul could also have come up with the money to purchase Onesimus' freedom from slavery, if needed. (M. Sadler). But beneath the playfulness there lies the implied exhortation to forgive the money wrong as well as the others which Onesimus had done him. (A. Maclaren) True love never recounts services rendered nor presses claims, and yet there is a sense in which there can and should be a voluntary recognition and reward. (W. Thomas) And how could Philemon's debt be repaid? Very simply, if one reads between the lines: by his sending Onesimus back to continue his usefulness to Paul in the service of the gospel. (F. Bruce) His ability to pay it back may have come from the gifts sent to him from Philippi. (E. Deibler)

This is an *apophasis*, or the addition of *insinuation* (implied) by way of reasoning. It is used when the author wishes to suppress certain negative matters or ideas, but goes ahead and adds the insinuation anyway. (E. Bullinger) In an unusual step, Paul evidently took the stylus in his own hand at this point and both signed his name and wrote out his personal guarantee. The legal character of the procedure is put beyond doubt by Paul's use of "apotino," which occurs only here in the NT, but, once again, is common in the papyri as a legal technical term meaning "make compensation, pay the damages." Paul is prepared to undertake formal legal responsibility to make good whatever wrong Onesimus has done Philemon. (J. Dunn) The runaway hypothesis is still the most likely explanation of the facts. (J. Barclay)

Paul was his spiritual father, who had begotten him in the faith, and to whom therefore he owed his being. (J. Lightfoot) Philemon owed to the apostle that debt of which the

obligation outweighed every other – the help by which he had been led out of spiritual darkness and brought to the knowledge of the truth. (S. Eales) Paul offers to guarantee Philemon against any loss incurred through Onesimus. To give his guarantee legal validity he signs it in proper form. At the same time he would obviously have been bitterly disappointed if Philemon had accepted this offer from the man who had brought him to Christ. (C. Dodd) Signatures fulfilled a different function in antiquity. They were used particularly in legal contexts and thus served to validate documents. In the letter to Philemon Paul's signature validates a declaration of compensation. (W. Stenger)

Phi. 19 I (Subj. Nom.), Paul (Nom. Appos.), have written (γράφω, AAI1S, Epistolary) by my own (Poss. Gen., used instead of a reflexive pronoun) hand (Instr. Means; not an amanuensis): "I (Subj. Nom.) will compensate (ἀποτίνω, FAI1S, Predictive, Gnostic; Paul's legal promissory note or IOU) you (ellipsis), "so that (Final clause, "as a result") I do not (neg. particle) have to mention (λέγω, PAI1S, Aoristic) to you (Dat. Ind. Obj.) that (introductory) you owe (προσοφείλω, PAI2S, Static, Gnostic; Paul delicately reminds Philemon that he led him to Christ and taught him Bible doctrine), even (ascensive) yourself (Acc. Dir. Obj.), to me (Dat. Ind. Obj.; sanctified sarcasm).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:19** ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω· ἵνα μὴ λέγω σοι ὅτι καὶ σεαυτὸν μοι προσοφείλεις

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:19** ego Paulus scripsi mea manu ego reddam ut non dicam tibi quod et te ipsum mihi debes

LWB Phi. 20 Okay, brother, let me benefit [as a return on doctrinal investment] from you [in this matter] because of the Lord. Refresh my deep affections [inner happiness] for you in Christ.

^{KW} **Phi. 20** Yes, [my] brother [in Christ], as for myself, grant me profit and joy from you in the Lord. Cheer my heart in Christ.

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:20** Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

If Philemon wants to have a satisfactory return on investment (ROI) from his financing of Onesimus' debts, then Paul is justified in obtaining a satisfactory ROI on his spiritual investment in Philemon. Paul wants to benefit from Philemon, but spiritually not monetarily (Voluntative Optative mood). The sword cuts three ways in this matter. Onesimus received financial benefits from Philemon. Paul received personal service benefits from Onesimus. Philemon received doctrinal benefits from Paul. The triangle is solid and reciprocal. Nevertheless, Paul encourages Philemon (Imperative of Entreaty) to refresh his

deep affections (Constative Aorist tense) for him in Christ. Paul wants him to do the right thing so he can be proud of his doctrinal foundation and continual growth in grace.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

Like Onesimus, we have all wronged our merciful Lord and Master. We have misused His mercies, trampled on His grace, and robbed Him by applying for our own selfish purposes that which He has entrusted to us to be used for His honor and glory. (H. Ironside) And now it was for Philemon to prove the ground of his heart and the simplicity of his faith. Love me, love my dog, say men. Even more so, Onesimus the slave. (W. Kelly) While personally guaranteeing to pay all Onesimus' debts, Paul "casually" drops in a reference to the vast spiritual debt Philemon owes to Paul – "not to mention that you owe me your very self." (J. Barclay) Philemon's generosity toward Onesimus would bring as much pleasure and benefit to Paul as it would to Onesimus himself. (M. Harris)

Phi. 20 Okay (Affirmative particle), brother (Voc. Address), let me (Dat. Adv.) benefit (ὀνίναμαι, AMOpt.1S, Constative, Voluntative, Deponent, *hapax legomena*; Philemon received benefits from Paul's doctrine, now Paul seeks a return on his investment) from you (Subj. Gen.; "in this matter") because of the Lord (Instr. Cause). Refresh (ἀναπαύω, AAImp.2S, Constative, Entreaty or Command) my (Poss. Gen.) deep affections (Acc. Dir. Obj.; inner happiness) for you (ellipsis, Obj. Gen. supplied) in Christ (Loc. Sph.).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:20** ναί ἀδελφέ ἐγώ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ· ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:20** ita frater ego te fruar in Domino refice viscera mea in Domino

LWB Phi. 21 Because I have confidence in your obedience [proper application of Bible doctrine], I have written to you, knowing that you will do even more [reading between the lines] than what I am suggesting [treat Onesimus well and setting an example to others].

^{KW} **Phi. 21** Having come to a settled persuasion that you will grant my request, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even beyond the things I say.

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:21** Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul has complete confidence (Consummative Perfect tense) in Philemon's spiritual obedience. Philemon will comply with Paul's suggestions because of the doctrine in his soul. He can be trusted to do the right thing in the sphere of the Lord. Because he knows

this, he has written this letter to him (Epistolary Aorist tense) knowing beforehand (Complementary Participle) that Philemon will go beyond even his suggestions (Predictive Future tense). Philemon is a spiritual over-achiever; he can be trusted to do far more than is required. That might mean he will figure out a way to manumit Onesimus. It might also mean that he will send him back to Paul with his blessings. He might even adopt him as a member of the family. Whatever he decides to do with Onesimus, Paul knows it will be a magnificent example to other Christians.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

The Lord does not count constrained service as service at all. He has only volunteers in His army. So we should find delight in our service to the Lord, in whatever form or sphere it is manifested, even in a responsive heart in the tiny town of Colossia. (A. Maclaren) Paul has walked a difficult tightrope between covering the legal aspects of the affair and treating it as an in-house issue to be determined by other than the rules of the marketplace and law court. The effect has been to give Philemon the maximum amount of room to make his own decision, to act graciously precisely by discarding the legal option which has been put to him. (J. Dunn) It is significant that the nearest approach to a request for manumission comes only as a hint. At this point, if Paul were going to insist on slavery being wrong, and on Philemon's duty to free Onesimus, he would surely have done so. But he does not attack the institution. (H. Carson)

There are several possible identifications of this undefined and climactic "more:" (1) an even more generous reception than Paul has proposed, (2) forgiveness and reinstatement of Onesimus in Philemon's household, (3) manumission of Onesimus for Christian service either at Colossae or at Rome with Paul ... Although he assumes Philemon's compliance with this basic request, he leaves him free, beyond this, to follow the dictates of his Christian conscience in determining how his agape should be expressed, and seriously entertains the possibility that Philemon might decide to retain the services of Onesimus (vs. 15-16) as a slave permanently. (M. Harris)

Phi. 21 **Because I have confidence** (πείθω, Perf.APtC.NSM, Consummative, Causal) **in your** (Poss. Gen.) **obedience** (Loc. Sph.; compliance, obedience to the command post in your soul), **I have written** (γράφω, AAI1S, Epistolary) **to you** (Dat. Ind. Obj.), **knowing** (οἶδα, Perf.APtC.NSM, Aoristic, Complementary, Circumstantial) **that you will do** (ποιέω, FAI2S, Predictive) **even** (ascensive) **more than** (Prep., above; reading between the lines) **what** (Acc. Gen. Ref.) **I am suggesting** (λέγω, PAI1S, Descriptive; Paul knows he will treat Onesimus well; subtly reminds him of his responsibility to set an example for others).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:21** Πεπειθώς τῇ ὑπακοῇ σου ἔγραψά σοι εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω ποιήσεις

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:21** confidens oboedientia tua scripsi tibi sciens quoniam et super id quod dico facies

LWB Phi. 22 And at the same time [along with your reception of Onesimus], also prepare for me a lodging [guest room], for I anticipate that through your prayers, I shall be graciously given back to you [just like Onesimus].

^{KW} **Phi. 22** And at the same time also, be putting in readiness a guest room for me, for I am expecting through your prayers to be granted to you.

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:22** But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

While Philemon is receiving his slave Onesimus back into his home (Latin: simultaneously), Paul asks him to also prepare a guest room (Imperative of Entreaty) for him (Latin: hospitality). Paul anticipates (Futuristic Present tense) that he will be at Philemon's house soon - in person, because they have been praying to that effect. He hopes to be graciously given back to Philemon (Predictive Future tense) by the Lord just like he is graciously returning Onesimus to Philemon. The underlying hint is that Philemon is about to get a double blessing: the return of his runaway slave who is now a Christian and the return of his best friend and Bible teacher, the Apostle Paul. He had better get the guest rooms prepared and the dinner table set for some wonderful company!

RELEVANT OPINIONS

It would appear extraordinarily lenient treatment of a runaway if, far from being whipped or branded, he was actually presented with his manumission on the spot! Philemon would be aware here not only of his reputation among other slave-owners but also of the effect this might have on any other slaves he owned. How outraged they would be that they should have to remain in slavery while their delinquent fellow-slave got his freedom! Manumission was meant to be a reward for hard work, not for running away. And if they were told that Onesimus was to be manumitted because he had become a Christian, then any who were not Christian would soon make sure they got "converted" and any who were would justifiably demand equal treatment. (J. Barclay)

Implicit is the thought that Paul would visit Philemon's household, where he would no doubt expect to enjoy the company of both Philemon and Onesimus, on good relations with each other as Christian brothers. (J. Dunn) Paul suggests that he will not be absent for long. His request that Philemon prepare a guest room for him is surely designed to make Philemon take this letter seriously: Paul will soon be on the spot to see how Philemon has responded! (J. Barclay) At this time Paul still hoped to be released and return to his itinerant ministry. But the very spiritual character of his latest ministry did not demand his physical presence. It was more

in keeping to convey it by epistles. We have no evidence to show that he ever went to Colossae. (A. Knoch)

Phi. 22 And (continuative) at the same time (Adv. Time; "along with your brotherly reception of Onesimus"), also (adjunctive) prepare (ἐτοιμάζω, PAImp.2S, Aoristic, Entreaty) for me (Dat. Adv.) a lodging (Acc. Dir. Obj., "keep a guest room ready", or perhaps just hospitality), for (Causal conj.) I anticipate (ἐλπίζω, PAI1S, Futuristic; hope) that (introductory) through your (Abl. Agency) prayers (Abl. Means), I shall be graciously given back (χαρισθήσομαι, FPI1S, Predictive, Deponent; along with Onesimus) to you (Acc. Dir. Obj.).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:22** ἄμα δὲ καὶ ἐτοιμάζέ μοι ξενίαν· ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:22** simul autem et para mihi hospitium nam spero per orationes vestras donari me vobis

LWB **Phi. 23** Epaphrus, my fellow prisoner [inmate], salutes you in Christ Jesus;

^{KW} **Phi. 23** There greet you Epaphrus, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus;

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:23** There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul begins his salutation by calling his prison inmate (Latin: captive) by name, Epaphrus. Epaphrus gives a crisp salute to Philemon (Static Present tense) for a job well done. This is no ordinary salute, but a spiritual salute in the sphere of Christ Jesus. This is a salute from one Christian soldier (in the ministry) to another. Essentially, Paul and Epaphrus are POW's while Onesimus is AWOL.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

Epaphrus was the Colossian preacher who apparently started the work in Colossia, Hierapolis, and Laodicea, and who had come to Rome to enlist Paul's help in the fight against incipient Gnosticism in the Lycus Valley. (A.T. Robertson)

Phi. 23 Epaphrus (Subj. Nom., perhaps an abbreviation for Epaphroditus), my (Gen. Rel.) fellow prisoner (Nom. Appos.; prison inmate), salutes (ἀσπάζομαι, PMI3S, Static, Deponent) you (Dat. Ind. Obj.) in Christ Jesus (Loc. Sph.);

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:23** Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:23** salutat te Epaphras concaptivus meus in Christo Iesu

LWB **Phi. 24** Also Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke: my co-workers.

^{KW} **Phi. 24** Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:24** Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul adds four names to his salutation, all fellow workers in the spreading of the gospel and teaching of doctrine. All of them salute Philemon for a job well done. Demas might have been an abbreviation for Demetrius.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

The implication is that they share Paul's views on the matter of Onesimus. (J. Dunn) Later, all except Luke left him (2 Tim. 4:11). Demas abandoned him. (A. Knoch) Paul delivers greetings from five fellow workers, all mentioned by name. He thus tells the letter's recipient that the matter discussed in the letter is also known to the Christians with Paul. Now Philemon cannot easily ignore the letter. (W. Stenger)

Phi. 24 **Also** (ellipsis, adjunctive) **Mark** (Subj. Nom.), **Aristarchus** (Subj. Nom.), **Demas** (Subj. Nom.; perhaps an abbreviation for Demetrius), **and** (ellipsis) **Luke** (Subj. Nom.): **my** (Gen. Rel.) **co-workers** (Nom. Appos.).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:24** Μάρκος Ἀρίσταρχος Δημᾶς Λουκᾶς οἱ συνεργοί μου

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:24** Marcus Aristarchus Demas Lucas adiutores mei

LWB **Phi. 25** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your [human] spirit.

^{KW} **Phi. 25** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

^{KJV} **Philemon 1:25** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen. <Written from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a servant.>

TRANSLATION HIGHLIGHTS

Paul closes with a familiar benediction (elliptical, Optative mood) that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with their human spirits. If the genitive is possessive, it is referring to the grace "belonging to" the Lord; if it is subjective, it is referring to the grace "given by" the Lord. Either will work. This is sanctifying grace, not justifying grace, since Philemon is already a believer. The use of the plural "your" points not only to Philemon's spirit, but the spirit of all the members of his home church.

RELEVANT OPINIONS

This is the only use of “pneuma” in the letter, and it clearly refers to the human spirit ... you as spiritual persons ... by virtue of the fact that you function as persons in a spiritual dimension as well as in the material and everyday dimension of reality. (J. Dunn) “May it be” may be understood with “charis.” (M. Harris) Paul’s dealing with the institution of slavery displayed the profoundest Christian sagacity. To have attacked the institution as such would have been worse than useless ... He accepts the social condition as a fact, and even as a law. He sends Onesimus back to his legal owner. He does not bid Philemon emancipate him, but he puts the Christian slave on his true footing of a Christian brother beside his master. (M. Vincent)

Phi. 25 The grace (Subj. Nom.) of our (Gen. Rel.; copyists may have added this pronoun) Lord Jesus Christ (Poss. Gen., Subj. Gen.) be (ellipsis) with your (Poss. Gen.) spirit (Gen. Assoc.; human).

^{WHO} **Philemon 1:25** Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν

^{VUL} **Philemon 1:25** gratia Domini nostri Iesu Christi cum spiritu vestro amen

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