

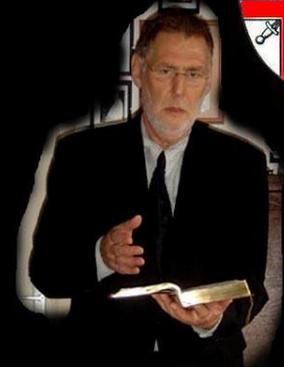


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet  
and a light unto my path.  
Psalm 119: 105**



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**Evangelical House Churches**

## **The Pauline Imprisonment Epistles and the short Philemon Letter**

**Research and Bible Study**

**by Rev. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.**

The last section of the Acts of the Apostles containing the account of Paul's imprisonment, trials, and voyage to Rome, seems almost like an anticlimax. About one quarter of the book is given to a discussion of events that seemingly had no bearing on the doctrinal or missionary advance of the church. Instead of showing how the church expanded into Rome and Spain, the account leaves Paul under custody in his own hired house and tells nothing of the hearing before the emperor or of Paul's subsequent ministry if the hearing ended in release. The story ends abruptly and, to the usual way of thinking unsatisfactorily.

After the five first books of the New Testaments Having finished, the historical books (the Gospels and Acts), we now come to the twenty-one epistles of the New Testament, twenty-two if one includes Revelation as an epistle (which in reality it is [see Revelation 1:4]). Because of its unique apocalyptic nature, however, in this survey we are distinguishing it as *The Prophetic Book* of the New Testament. The Epistles are generally divided into the Pauline Epistles and the Non-Pauline (General) Epistles. Paul's epistles fall into two categories: nine epistles written to churches (Romans to 2 Thessalonians) and four pastoral and personal epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon). This is then followed by eight Hebrew Christian epistles (Hebrews to Jude). Naturally, many questions would arise as to the meaning and application of the gospel for

Christians. Thus, the Epistles answer these questions, give the interpretation of the person and work of Christ, and apply the truth of the gospel to believers.

The abruptness of the Acts of the Apostles' ending may be accounted for by assuming that the author wrote all that he knew. If he were attempting to bring Theophilus up to date, he would want to inform him as quickly as possible and, having given him the latest developments in Paul's career, there would be nothing left to say. The disproportionate emphasis on the imprisonment may mean that Luke could write more freely and fully of what he himself had witnessed, but there is probably an even better reason for the detail concerning the period. Christianity had become increasingly separate from Judaism, and its independence was more and more apparent to the observant public. The view that Rome took of it would have a very important effect on its future, for if it were to be regarded as a dangerous revolutionary movement, immediate suppression would follow. In this account, written for Theophilus, who was possibly a Roman official, Luke desired to show that Christianity had no political pretensions and that its relations with the Roman power had always been friendly. Persecution had come from the Jews on religious grounds, but all charges that it was subversive of Roman authority, as at Philippi (Acts 16: 20-21), were false. Furthermore, these chapters of Acts have great biographical and theological value because they reveal more of the inner thought and teaching of the apostle Paul than do most of the other passages in Acts.

### **Short View on the Apostle Paul's Background**

Paul was known for many years as Saul of Tarsus. He was born of Jewish parentage in the city of Tarsus of Cilicia. He was not only a Jew, but by his own testimony, he was a Pharisee and a son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), was a Hebrew of Hebrews (spoke Hebrew or Aramaic), was of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:4-5), and had evidently been taught the trade of tent-making as a youth (Acts 18:3). Evidently at a young age, he went to Jerusalem, and according to his testimony, studied under the well know Gamaliel I, a noted teacher in the School of Hillel (Acts 22:3). In his studies, he had advanced in the religion of the Jews beyond many of his fellows as one extremely zealous for his ancestral traditions (Gal. 1:14).

His zeal as a religious Jew was carried over into the way he zealously sought to persecute the church. As a young Pharisee, he was present when Stephen was stoned and murdered (Acts 7:58-83). In his campaign against Christians, both men and women, he travelled with letters of arrest from the high priest and went to other cities to waste the church of Jesus Christ (Acts 26:10-11; Gal. 1:13). It

was on one of these missions that Saul was converted while on the road to Damascus.

Paul was also a Greek by culture having evidently received a Greek education (cf. Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). He shows acquaintance with Greek culture and their thinking. As such a student, he was familiar with many of the sayings of classical and contemporary writers. In addition, Paul was a Roman citizen, being Roman born (Acts 22:28). Because of this, he could appeal to Caesar as a citizen of Rome while imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:37-39).

Consequently, Paul was uniquely qualified to be the one chosen to carry the message of the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul could easily say, “I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22).

### **Conversion of Paul**

Having energetically and consistently persecuted the church of Jesus Christ, while on the road to Damascus, Paul had an encounter with the glorified resurrected Christ, which had revolutionary effects on his life.

He had denied the Christian claim that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. Further, he did not believe that He had risen from the dead as Stephen had proclaimed when he cried, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). “Liar!” they cried and stoned him. Saul stood by “consenting unto his death.” But when the Lord Jesus spoke to Saul on the day of the great experience outside Damascus, he knew that Stephen had been right and he had been wrong. Jesus was alive after all! And further, he must be the Son of God. Thus, in the synagogues of Damascus, he proclaimed Christ as Saviour.

... While the experience was sudden and dramatic, the effects were enduring. The impact must have necessitated great psychological and intellectual readjustments. This may well account for the period spent in Arabia and Damascus before his first visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:16-19). Then he went back to his home territory and for a period of eight to ten years little is known of his activities.

Ending this overview, unlike the Gospels and Acts, the Pauline epistles hardly contain any narrative. These are primarily correspondence: Paul sends greetings, instructions, encouragement, and background information. Because of this, the epistles contain the majority of Christians’ theology. This is where the story of Jesus described in the Gospels is explained in greater detail. It’s also where we

learn how Christians should live in response to Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

## Paul's stay at Jerusalem



Paul's third and final missionary journey was launched from the same place as the other two: Antioch, Syria (Acts 18:23). The first leg of his third missionary trip was over land in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He visited cities in the regions of Galatia and Phrygia before settling for nearly three years in the city of

Ephesus (19:1–41), where he founded a church that would receive one of the letters that later would be included in the Bible.

Like many ancient cities of that time, Ephesus was rife with pagan religious worship and practices. But as Paul preached, taught, and performed miracles for all the people to see — including the healing of sick people and the casting out of demons — many people turned to Christ, including sorcerers who burned very expensive sorcery books (Acts 19:17–20).

Acts 20:7–12 gives the account of Paul doing what Jesus himself had done: raising a person from the dead. A young man named Eutychus fell three stories from a windowsill to his death. But Paul bent down and took the man in his arms: “Don't worry”; he said, “he's alive!” ; ” (20:10). As Paul had said, the young man lived.

While in Ephesus, Paul found himself in trouble from the local idol worshipers. This time, Paul had exposed the fraud of the pagan god Artemis and the craftsmen and artisans who were in the business of supplying the public with the idols. After Paul spoke out, a near riot broke out and he was nearly killed in the melee (Acts 19:28–41).

Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia and eventually arrived in Greece, where he stayed for three months before learning of a plot against his life (Acts 20:1–3). At that time he was preparing to sail back to Syria — most likely Antioch — but decided to return through Macedonia. After arriving in the city of Philippi, he sailed to Troas (20:6). From there, Paul traveled through Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos, and Miletus (20:13–16).

While in Miletus, Paul sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus and asked them to come meet him. They did, and Paul told them:

“You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now I have done the Lord's work humbly and with many tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike — the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus. (Acts 20:18–21)”

Paul then told them that he would be returning to Jerusalem and encouraged them in their work in their church. In the end, when Paul had finished speaking to the elders, “he knelt and prayed with them. They wept aloud as they embraced

him in farewell, sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they accompanied him down to the ship” (Acts 20:36–39).

Paul then finished the final leg of his voyage, stopping in the island of Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Cyprus, and then to Tyre, Syria. He then traveled through Ptolemais, Caesarea, and then finally to Jerusalem.

Paul is now arriving in Jerusalem was faced with an ominous prophecy from a man named Agabus. When this prophet visited Paul and his companions, he took Paul's belt and tied his own hands and feet with it, then told Paul that the owner of the belt would be bound likewise by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans (Acts 21:10–11).

His arrival in Jerusalem brought also an immediate clash within the Jewish Church in spite of the attempts at pacification. At the suggestion of James, Paul undertook the financial responsibility of helping some Jewish Christians to discharge the Nazarite vow (21:23-24). Paul himself had undertaken the vow on a previous occasion (18:18), and James thought that it would afford him a good means of demonstrating that he had no aversion to keeping the law voluntarily. By so doing he could stop the various rumours that were being circulated about him that he was teaching all the Jews of the Dispersion nor to circumcise their children nor to keep the customs of the law (21:21).

The Roman conquest of the land where Paul travelled was, in some ways, a blessing. The Roman Empire brought an enforced peace that made travel safer, and the construction of better roads made travel easier. Still, travel in Paul's day was much more difficult than it is today. Whether Paul travelled on foot or by sea, his journeys usually took weeks or even months, and his return trip to Jerusalem was no exception.

The project was well under way when the inevitable clash occurred. The Jews from Asia (20:19), who had been his bitter opponents at Ephesus and elsewhere, assuming that he had brought his Gentile companions into the forbidden sanctuary of the temple, accused him publicly of so doing and mobbed him. The ensuing riot took on such proportions that the Roman military tribune had to intervene with his armed cohorts. They rescued Paul from the fury of the mob and conducted him to the Castle of Antonia for further examination.

Agabus' prophecy words certainly came to pass. Paul was welcomed by the Christian church leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17), who listened as he told them of the things God had done during his travels and who later asked him to deal with some misunderstandings about his teachings among Jewish believers. It wasn't long, however, before he was beaten and nearly murdered in a mob scene

near the Temple that arose over the perception that Paul had broken Jewish law. It was only because he was taken into custody by a Roman authority that Paul survived (Acts 21:27–36).

It has been pointed out that this part of Paul's life is very similar to the final few days of Jesus' own life. What was to happen to both was foretold. Both were taken into custody in Jerusalem. Both were falsely accused, and both had to stand trial for crimes they didn't commit.

Some of those opposed to Paul's teachings wanted him dead on the spot, but it was only because of his knowledge of the law of that time that he survived. What followed was an arrest by the Roman authorities and a series of defenses on Paul's own part.

The book of Acts records many instances where Paul defended himself: in front of the crowd who wanted him dead (Acts 22:1–21), before the body of Jewish religious authorities (23:1–10), before Governor Felix, the Roman procurator of Judea at that time (24:10–21), and before King Agrippa (26:1–29).

### **Paul in Caesarea and finally Rome (Acts 24:10–28:10)**



There were plots afoot to have Paul killed, so he was sent away by the Roman authorities to Caesarea, where he stood before Felix, who, in an effort to win favor with the Jewish people, had Paul put in custody. Paul did have some limited freedoms and privileges, but he was left there for two years (Acts 24:22–27).

Two years after Paul's imprisonment there was a change in Roman leadership, and Paul, himself a Roman citizen, appealed his case to Caesar. He did that because there was a plan afoot to have him taken to Jerusalem so that he could be intercepted and killed on the way. For that reason, Paul was sent to Rome to be tried in a Roman court. It was because Paul was a Roman citizen that his appeal was heard.

Paul's voyage by sea to Rome was a long and perilous one. At one point, they fought through a long and terrible storm, and no one on the ship had eaten in a long time. Paul, however, received assurance from God in a dream that he would eventually arrive safely in Rome and stand trial before Caesar and bear witness to the gospel (Acts 27:19–25). But that would happen only after the ship was torn apart by a storm off the shore of the Mediterranean island of Malta. Miraculously, everyone on the ship was able to make it to shore, where they stayed for three months and where Paul was able to perform some miracles for some of the locals.

Paul finally made it to Rome, where he was put under what could be considered house arrest. He was allowed to have his own private lodging, but he was under constant guard by a Roman soldier (Acts 28:16). Three days after his arrival, Paul met with the local Jewish leaders and pleaded his case with them, telling them, “Brothers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman government, even though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors” (Acts 28:17). He went on to explain how the Romans had tried him and acquitted him of any wrongdoing but that when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, he felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar for his own safety. He finished by telling them that he called them together to tell them that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus Christ (28:18–20).

From that time on, Paul preached the gospel message, telling everyone who would listen that salvation had come to the Jews and to the Gentiles alike. For the next two years he lived in his own rented home, where he welcomed everyone who came to visit him and told them about Jesus Christ. And no one, the final verse of Acts tells us, did anything to stop him.

It was during Paul's time as a prisoner in Rome that he wrote his epistles to the Colossians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, and to Philemon. Also, if he is the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews (as many believe he is), it was most likely that he wrote that while in Rome as well.

# **The Apostle Paul's Epistles and Teaching**

The Epistles of Apostle Paul carries great importance in the composition of the New Testament, because it is in them that we find a deep and all-encompassing revelation and elucidation of the mysteries of the Gospel's teachings. Apart from Apostle Paul's individual, especially-loved mysteries of Christ's faith, for example: the meaning of the Old Testament law in relation to the New Testament, the corruption and decay of human nature, the only means of justification before God is through faith in Jesus Christ, it can be said that there is not one point in the whole of Christian dogma that did not have its beginnings and affirmation in his Epistles. The bulk of the Epistles are structured on the one and only plan. They begin with a greeting to the readers and expression of gratitude to God for His providential activity about the place it is addressed to. Further on, the Epistle is usually divided into two parts - religious instructions (doctrinal) and moral directives. In conclusion, the Apostle touches upon private matters, charges persons with commissions, discusses his personal circumstances, expresses his kind wishes and sends greetings of peace and love. His language is lively and bright - reminiscent of the ancient Prophets, and reflects a profound understanding of the Old Testament.

## **List of his Epistles or Letters**

On the basis of credible witnesses, the common voice of the Church attributes fourteen Epistles to Apostle Paul's authorship, which appear in the Bible in the following order:

- Epistle to the Romans,
- First Epistle to the Corinthians,
- Second Epistle to the Corinthians,
- Epistle to the Galatians,
- Epistle to the Ephesians,
- Epistle to the Philippians,
- Epistle to the Colossians,
- First Epistle to the Thessalonians,

Second Epistle to the Thessalonians,

First Epistle to Timothy,

Second Epistle to Timothy,

Epistle to Titus,

Epistle to Philemon,

Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Epistles are not in any chronological order, but are arranged according to their significance and magnitude of their circulation, and by the relative importance of the Church and its people to whom they are addressed. The Epistles to the three individuals follow those Epistles to the seven Churches. The Epistle to the Hebrews is last because it was the last to be authenticated. Usually, Apostle Paul's Epistles are separated into two uneven groups: 1) Epistles of a general Christian nature and 2) Pastoral Epistles. The Epistles to Timothy and Titus belong to the second category, because they indicate the basis and rules of good pastorship.

Certain sections of Apostle Paul's Epistles gave rise to thoughts that he had written other Epistles that have not reached us eg. 1 Cor. 5:9, also Col. 4:16. While the correspondence with an unknown philosopher Seneka, brother of pro-consul Gallio (as mentioned in Acts 18:12) was attributed to Paul, this could not be authenticated.

### **The Significance of the Pauline Epistles or Letters**

The Apostle Paul's Epistles emerge as a profound source of spiritual wisdom and inspiration. It would appear that there is not one religious truth that has not been illuminated and elucidated by his works. Moreover, these truths are presented not as some abstract, theological perception, but as a reality of faith that stimulates a person toward righteous living. Responding to the actual problems that confronted the early Christians of the first century, Apostle Paul's Epistles serve as valuable additions to the New Testament. They explain in practical terms how to master the unavoidable ordeals in life, how to realize high Christian ideals, and what constitutes the essence of Christian endeavor. They describe in a living voice, the way of life and endeavors of the first Christians, the establishment of Christian communities, gives the characteristics of the purpose of Christ's Church in Apostolic times.

Apostle Paul's Epistles are equally valuable in their autobiographical notations. They show how in his own personal life, the Apostle applied these high Christian principles that he preached. As a consequence, this assisted him in his missionary work from which he drew his spiritual strength. The first element of success in Apostle Paul's missionary activity was his capability to concentrate his enormous talents, his spiritual and physical powers toward one goal - serving Christ. The second element was his total commitment to Christ's directive grace, which inspirited him and gave him strength to overcome all outward obstacles and personal weaknesses. God's grace helped him to convert a significant part of the Roman Empire to Christ.

### **Selected Texts from his Epistles (letters or writings)**

Because the opportunity to give a more detailed account of St. Paul's many faceted Christian teachings is constrained by time and space, we will limit ourselves to citing extracts from his Epistles, which are essentially of a moral nature. As we will see in them, the Apostle explains what constitutes a true spiritual life - that what every Christian should strive for. For convenience sake, we bring these excerpts by subject order - in alphabetical sequence - so that the reader may easily refer to them in Apostle Paul's Epistles.

#### **The grace of God and spiritual gifts**

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:14-16). "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit...But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:4-11). "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying of godliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:11-13).

See also: Rom. 5:2; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; 2 Cor. 3:5; 4:7; 6:1-2; 8:9; Gal. 3:5; Ephes. 4:7-12; Philip. 2:13; Heb. 4:16; 12:15.

**About attitudes toward riches:** "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" (Heb. 13:5). See also: 1 Tim. 6:9-11.

**Life is spiritual warfare:** "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on a breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephes. 6:11-17). See also: 1 Thes. 5:4-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Colos. 2:14-15.

**Faith and its meaning:** "through Whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2). "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10). "For we walk by faith not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). See also: Rom. 3:28-30, 14:23; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:16, 3:26; Eph. 6:16; Heb. 11:1.

**On resurrection of the dead:** 1 Cor. 15:12-57; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; Phil. 3:10-11, 3:20-21; Heb. 2:14-15, 4:1-11.

**On the Second Coming of Christ:** 1 Thes. 5:1-3; 2 Thes. 1:6-10.

**On celibacy and marriage:** 1 Cor. 7:1-17.

**On good deeds:** "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:9-10). "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in

them" (Ephes. 2:10). "But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:16). See also: Ephes. 6:8; Phil. 2:4; Col. 4:17; 1 Thes. 5:15; Titus 3:14; Heb. 13:1-3.

**On gratefulness to God:** "Now godliness with contentment IS GREAT GAIN. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:6-10). "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim 6:17-19).

**Spiritual renovation and Christian life:** "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise".... "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 3:27-29; 5:16). "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ Who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, unseemliness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of

God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him"

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things, The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:4-9).

"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thes. 5:14-22).

**Baptism is death to sin:** "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Jesus Christ, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1-2). "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:5-10). See also: Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 5:7-8; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:27-29, 5:16-26, 6:8, 6:15; Ephes. 2:1-6, 2:14-15, 3:16-17, 4:22-5:11, 5:14; Col. 3:1-17, 3:23-24; Phil. 2:14-15, 3:8-15, 3:17, 3:20-21, 4:4-9, 4:11-13; Thess. 5:14-22. About death to sin and baptism, see also Rom. 6:1-7, 8:1-17, 8:32-34; Gal. 2:19-20 and 3:27; Col. 2:11-14; 2 Tim. 2:11-13.

**Singularity of the faithful:** "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). "Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:1-5). "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another" (Gal. 5:15). "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). See also Ephes. 4:1-5, 4:13; Phil. 1:27.

**Deeds of the law does not justify a person:** Rom. 3:19-5:2 and the Epistle to the Galatians.

**Life and death:** Phil. 1:21-24.

**Redemption through Christ and about the Cross:** 1 Cor. 1:18-24, 2:2; Gal. 6:14; Phi. 3:18-19; Rom. 5\_10; Col. 1;20\_23; Heb. 5:1-9; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Gal. 3:13-14; Ephes. 1:7, 2:16; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:11-28, 10:5, 10:14-22.

**Qualifications and responsibilities of the God's servants:** Bishops (1 Tim.3:1-7), Priest (Titus 1:5-9) and Deacon (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

**Meekness and forgiveness:** "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:18-21). "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5). See also: Gal. 6:1; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:25.

**Love towards God:** "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter' (Psalm 43:23). Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor Angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing,

shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39).

**Love toward your neighbour:** "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of Angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails, but whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away" (1 Cor. 13:1-8). "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' 9Gal. 5:14). See also 1 Thes. 4:9; 1 Tim. 1:5-6.

**Prayer:** "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2) See also: Rom. 8:26-27; Ephes. 5:19-20, 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:1-3; Heb. 13:15.

**God's wisdom in man's salvation:** 1 Cor. 2:4-16, 3:18-21; Ephes. 1:17-19, 3:18-19, 5:15-17; Col. 1:9, 2:3, 3:16.

**Manhood:** "And not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God" (Phil. 1:28). See also: 1 Cor. 16:13.

**On worthlessness of those who live idle lives:** Heb. 6:4-8, 10:26-31.

**Reward for good deeds:** Romans 2:6-17.

**Justification by faith and grace:** Gal. 2:16-21, 3:18-26; Titus 3:4-7.

**Responsibility:** Romans 2:6-17.

**Christ and His two natures:** Col. 1:15-20, 2:9; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-4; Heb. 2:7-11.

**Last days and antichrist:** 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:1-5.

**Ordeals, Lent and the deadening of sinful flesh:** "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2). "Do you know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:24-27). "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24).

**Holy Gospel Divinely inspired:** 2 Tim. 3:15-16; Heb. 4; 12.

**Knowing God:** Rom. 1:19-32.

**Help for the needy:** "But this I say: he who sows sparingly (donates sparingly) will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever' (Psalm 111:9). Now may he who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the Saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God" (2 Cor. 9:6-12). See also: 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:11-15.

**Examples of faith of past righteous fathers:** Heb. 11:1 - 12:3.

**On happiness:** "For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace" (Gal. 5:22). "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 3:1, 4:4; 1 Thes. 5:16).

**Christian freedom:** "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.....For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity

for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:1, 5:13). "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak" (1 Cor. 8:9-13). See also Rom. 14:13.

**Piety:** "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people' (Lev. 26:12). Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you (Isa. 52:11) I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Mighty' (Jer. 3:19, Hos. 52:11). Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 6:16 - 7:1). "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour" (1 Thess. 4:3-4). See also: 1 Cor. 6:15-20; 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1; Ephes. 1:4; Col. 1:22-23; 1 Thess. 4:3-4; Heb. 10:10, 10:14, 12:14-15.

**Family and about the responsibilities of its members:** Ephes. 5:22-23, 6:1-4; Col. 3:18-21; 1 Tim. 2:9-15.

**Tribulations and temptations:** "Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:2-4). "For consider Him Who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives' (Proverbs 3:11-12). If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed" (Heb.

12:3-13). See also: Rom. 5:2-4; 2 Cor. 4:8-18, 1:3-6, 7:10, 12:10; 1Thes. 3:3-4; 2 Thes. 1:6-7; 2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 2:18, 4:15, 12:3-13.

**Humility:** "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Phil. 2:3). See also: Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:26-31; Col. 3:12.

**Condescension and help one another:** "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2).

**Conscience:** "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck" (1 Tim. 1:18-19). See also: Heb. 9:14, 10:22.

**Do not litigate or altercate:** 1 Cor. 6:1-7.

**Christians - sons of God:** Gal. 4:7; Ephes. 2:18.

**Patience:** "But as for you brethren, do not grow weary in doing good" (2 Thes. 3:13). "But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11). "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Heb. 10:36, 12:1; Rom. 5:3).

**Industriousness:** "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thes. 3:8-12). See also: 1 Thess. 4:10-12; 1 Tim. 5:8).

## **Letter (Epistle) to Philemon**

### **The Christian Fellowship in Action**

#### **Writer and date**

The apostle Paul is the author of this personal letter, written probably in A.D. 61 or 62. As we already know, the letter is one of the so-called prison epistles. It was despatched by Paul from his prison in Rome by Tychicus, as were Ephesians and Colossians. Onesimus, a slave of Philemon who was also a businessman of Colosse, had absconded with some of his master's property and

had gone to Rome to lose himself in the crowds of that large city. In some way he came in contact with the apostle Paul and was converted (Philemon 10).

Realising the necessity of making right the wrong that Onesimus had done, Paul sent him back to his former master with this remark, requesting that he be received and forgiven. Paul agreed to pay for the financial loss that Onesimus had caused (18-19). He said also that he hoped for release in a short time, after which he planned to visit the churches again.



*The magnificent bronze menorah or seven-branched candlestick which stands outside the Knesset, Jerusalem.*

### **Theme**

Philemon was a Christian of Colossae, a small city in Asia Minor SE of Laodicea and S of Hierapolis. His slave Onesimus had apparently robbed him (see further) and consequently fled to Rome. There the renegade slave came in

contact with Paul and was saved by grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. The apostle sent him back to his master with the priceless letter preserved for us.

## **Content and Outline**

Although this letter is absolutely personal rather than theological, it contains the finest picture of the meaning of forgiveness that can be found in the New Testament. Furthermore, it is an example of Paul's adeptness in dealing with a touchy social problem. The outline is as such:

### **Verses 1 – 3**

#### **Paul's greeting to Philemon**

##### **The Greeting.**

Paul identified himself as the writer of the letter, referring to himself as a "prisoner of Christ Jesus." His being in confinement had resulted from faithfully advancing Christ's interests in discharging his commission as an apostle to the non-Jewish peoples. So he could speak of himself as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, for he found himself confined for his sake. At the time, Timothy was with him, and so he associated his trusted companion with himself when addressing Philemon and other believers in Colossae. In speaking of Timothy as "the brother," Paul may have been identifying his fellow worker as outstandingly being such. (Verse 1)

Paul must have regarded Philemon as a dear and trusted fellow believer, for he addressed him as "the beloved and our fellow worker" (or, "our beloved [dear friend] and fellow worker"). In view of the mention of Timothy, the "our" may be understood as meaning Paul and Timothy. (Verse 1; see the Notes section.)

Whereas the letter is primarily directed to Philemon, others are also addressed. "Apphia the sister" may have been Philemon's believing wife, and "Archippus our fellow soldier" may have been their son. Their being singled out by name from the congregation in Philemon's house suggests that they had a closer relationship to him than other fellow believers. As a fellow soldier of Paul, Archippus would have been devoted to the defence of Christ's cause and the message about him. (Verse 2)

### **3. The benediction.**

Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and all the other believers in Colossae are included in Paul's prayerful expression, "Favor to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The gracious favor or unmerited kindest would include all the guidance and help believers would receive from the

heavenly Father and his Son. “Peace” is the inward sense of well-being and security resulting from the approved relationship with God and Christ that believers enjoy, assuring them of continuing to be recipients of divine compassionate concern and care regardless of the circumstances they may be facing. Believers acknowledge Jesus as their Lord by living in harmony with his example and teaching. (Verse 3)

#### **Verses 4-7**

#### **Paul’s commendation of Philemon**

Always when remembering Philemon in his prayers, Paul thanked God. The apostle’s gratitude appears to have been based on the evidence of God’s working, by means of his spirit, in the case of Philemon as was apparent from the kind of life he lived.

#### **4-5. Philemon’s love and faith.**

Paul continued to “hear” about Philemon’s “love and the faith, which [he had] toward the Lord Jesus and for all the holy ones.” The Greek participle for “hear” is in the present tense, indicating that the good reports about Philemon were continuing. According to the letter to the Colossians (1:7, 8), Epaphras had faithfully laboured in Colossae, and he may have been the source of the more recent news about Philemon. (Verses 4 and 5)

The pronoun “which” is singular, and grammatically applies to faith. There are, however, a number of manuscripts that read “faith and love,” pointing to Philemon’s love “toward the Lord Jesus and for all the holy ones.” The Greek word for “faith” (*pístis*) can also denote “faithfulness,” “dependability,” “fidelity,” “trust,” or “confidence.” While believers would commonly be regarded as having “faith toward” or in Christ, individually they are less likely to have been linked with having the same kind of faith in fellow “holy ones” or fellow believers. Translators, therefore, have at times chosen renderings for the word “faith” that either apply to both Christ and the holy ones or have rearranged the order of the words to apply love to the holy ones and faith to Christ. (Verse 5) “I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus.” (NRSV) “I hear about the love you have for all God’s holy people and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus.” (NCV) “I have heard how you love and trust both the Lord Jesus himself and those who believe in him.” (J. B. Phillips)

## 6-7. Paul's prayer for Philemon.

The thought Paul expressed in his prayer for Philemon is somewhat obscure. Verse 6 literally reads, “that the fellowship of your faith may become active in knowledge of every good [work, according to a number of manuscripts] of the [tou] in [en] us in [eis] Christ.” “The fellowship of your faith” could mean the faith in Christ that Philemon had in common with all other believers. This would be an active faith, which would manifest itself in his knowing or recognizing “every good thing” or “all the good.” A number of translations convey this basic sense. “I pray that your fellowship in faith may come to expression in full knowledge of all the good we can do for Christ.” (NJB) “I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.” (ESV) “So that your partnership in the faith may become effective in recognizing every good there is in us that leads to Christ.” (NAB)

In the masculine and the neuter cases, the Greek article *tou* is the genitive form of the word for “the.” Certain translators have rendered it as “which” or “that,” representing “every good thing” as being “in” us, that is, in believers. The preposition *eis* may point to the purpose every “good thing” should serve and thus could signify that every good thing in believers would be for Christ or for his sake. In the Latin Vulgate (the revision by Robertus Weber, published by the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft) no rendering for the Greek *tou* appears, but this ancient translation reads *in agnitione omnis boni in nobis in Christo Isu* (in recognition of all good in us in Christ Jesus). Some Greek manuscripts, including fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus, do support the omission of *tou*. According to the Latin translation, all the good is in believers who are in or at one with Christ Jesus or because of their relationship of oneness with him. (Verse 6; see the Notes section for additional comments.)

The love Philemon had shown brought much joy and encouragement or comfort to Paul. He had demonstrated this love by causing the tender feelings (literally, bowels or inward parts) of the holy ones or fellow believers to be refreshed. This doubtless included his welcoming them into his home, treating them as beloved guests, and doing whatever he could to care for their needs. Philemon had proved himself to be a real “brother” in the faith. (Verse 7)

## **Verses 8-13**

### **Paul's plea for Onesimus**

#### **8-10. The Plea.**

“In Christ,” probably meaning on the basis of the authority Christ had granted him as an apostle, Paul had “much boldness,” feeling completely free to direct Philemon to do what was proper regarding the matter he was about to mention. (Verse 8) Instead of commanding, however, the apostle chose to appeal to Philemon on the basis of love, being as he was “an old man” but then “also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.” Having faithfully carried out his commission as an apostle, the aged Paul found himself in confinement for the sake of the Son of God. (Verse 9; see the Notes section.)

As a man of advanced years and a prisoner because of his devoted service in advancing Christ's interests among the non-Jewish peoples, Paul made his appeal regarding his child, the child he had fathered while in bonds, Onesimus. While in confinement, he had aided Onesimus to become a believer, and so had become like a father to him. Affectionately, he referred to Onesimus as his “child.” (Verse 10)

#### **11-13. Paul's defence of Onesimus**

In the past, Onesimus had been useless to Philemon, evidently because of failing to care properly for his duties as a slave in the household. Upon becoming a believer, Onesimus had ceased to be useless. Doubtless based on his close association with Onesimus and the aid he willingly and diligently rendered, Paul could say to Philemon regarding him, “but now [also (not in all manuscripts)] to you and to me useful.” This suggests that Onesimus, although sent by the apostle, willingly returned to his believing master with the intention of rendering loyal service. (Verse 11)

Paul did not send a useless slave to Philemon but a brother or a believer for whom he had deep affection. The apostle referred to Onesimus as his own tender feelings (literally, bowels or inward parts). (Verse 12)

On account of the aid Onesimus had rendered to him, Paul would have preferred having him stay. Considering the affectionate manner in which the apostle spoke about Onesimus, he was not referring to having him as a slave or servant but as a free fellow worker who would be a loyal friend and helper. Onesimus would have been able to render the service Paul knew that Philemon, if it had been possible, would have gladly performed for him while he was “in the bonds of the evangel.” These “bonds” are linked to the evangel or the good news about

Christ because Paul's proclaiming of the message had resulted in his imprisonment. (Verse 13)

### **Verses 14-16**

#### **Not as a servant but as a brother**

##### **14. Paul's courteous tact.**

Without Philemon's consent, the apostle did not wish to act. He wanted Philemon's good deed to be voluntary, not forced. (Verse 14)

##### **15-16. Paul's skilful analysis**

In view of the way in which matters had developed, Paul suggested that perhaps Onesimus had parted from Philemon "for an hour," or a short time, so that he might have him back forever. The circumstances into which Onesimus came to be because of leaving Philemon led to his putting faith in Jesus Christ. (Verse 15)

Consequently, Philemon would be getting Onesimus back "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, [as] a beloved brother," especially to Paul but even much more to him, "both in the flesh and in the Lord." "In the flesh," or in the then-existing social relationship involving masters and slaves, Philemon would have a trusted and loyal servant. "In the Lord," he would have a beloved brother, a fellow member of God's family of children who are at one with the Lord Jesus Christ as part of his body. (Verse 16)

### **Verses 17-19**

#### **Reckon to my account.**

##### **17. Welcome him as me.**

Strongly encouraging Philemon to accept Onesimus back kindly, Paul continued, "If, therefore, you are having me as a partner, receive him as [you would] me." This partnership or fellowship would refer to the loving relationship of brothers and fellow laborers in the advancement of Christ's cause. The apostle was confident that Philemon did consider him as a beloved partner and would welcome him in a loving manner. This is the kind of acceptance that Paul wanted Philemon to extend to Onesimus. (Verse 17)

### **18-19. Put any demerit on my account.**

If Onesimus had wronged Philemon or owed him anything, Paul asked that this be charged to his account. This may indicate that, as a useless slave, Onesimus may have worked against the interests of Philemon. He may even have committed theft in order to have the needed funds to travel to Rome and to purchase food and other supplies. Paul was so sure of the genuineness of the faith of Onesimus and had such great affection for him that he was willing to be regarded as the one accountable for any injury. (Verse 18)

Solemnly, the apostle backed up his words, saying, “I, Paul, am writing with my [own] hand; I will repay.” At the same time, he called attention to Philemon’s indebtedness to him, adding, “not to be telling you that also you owe your [very] self to me.” Although the apostle had not ministered in Colossae (Colossians 1:3-8), his activity in Ephesus resulted in spreading the message to other parts of the Roman province of Asia. So it may be that Philemon became a believer on account of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. Therefore, to Paul, Philemon owed his very self — the life he enjoyed because of the precious relationship to God and Christ he came to have. (Verse 19)

### **Verses 20-21**

#### **Paul’s confidence in Philemon**

##### **20. The request.**

With apparent reference to the good reception Philemon would extend to Onesimus, the apostle wrote, “Yes, brother, may I benefit [*onínemi*] from you in the Lord. Refresh my tender feelings [literally, bowels or inward parts] in Christ.” On the basis of their common bond as fellow believers “in” or at one with the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul wanted to be the recipient of a benefit or a favor from Philemon. That benefit would be for Philemon to welcome Onesimus (meaning “profitable” or “useful”) as his brother in Christ. This would bring refreshment to Paul’s tender feelings for a dear brother on whose behalf he had made his earnest plea. The apostle had no doubt that, instead of being “useless” as he had been formerly, Onesimus would live up to his name, proving himself to be “useful” or “profitable.” (Verse 20)

##### **21. The confidence.**

Paul was confident that Philemon would comply with his request respecting Onesimus. In fact, he wrote with the assurance that Philemon would do even more than he had said in his letter. (Verse 21)

## **22-25**

### **A request and closing greetings**

#### **22. The request.**

The apostle hoped that, in answer to the prayers of Philemon and other fellow believers, he would be “restored” to them or released from imprisonment. So he asked that Philemon prepare a guest room for him. (Verse 22)

#### **23-25. The greetings.**

In concluding, Paul extended the greetings of Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. The apostle referred to Epaphras as “my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus.” This does not necessarily mean that Epaphras was actually imprisoned but could simply mean that he chose to share the apostle’s confinement in order to be of aid to him. (Verses 23, 24) Evidence for this may be Paul’s reference to Aristarchus among his fellow workers (verse 24), whereas he called him his “fellow prisoner” in Colossians 4:10.

Paul highly valued Epaphras as a devoted fellow worker in the advancement of Christ’s interest. Primarily through the activity of Epaphras, communities of believers came to exist in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. (Colossians 1:4-8; 4:12, 13)

Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, had in earlier years disappointed Paul when he did not continue to accompany him and Barnabas in making known the good news about Christ after they left Cyprus. Later, this caused a rift between Barnabas and Paul, with Barnabas choosing to work with Mark and Paul deciding to have Silas as his companion. (Acts 12:25; 13:13, 14; 15:37-41) With the passage of years, however, Paul came to appreciate Mark as a fellow laborer. (Colossians 4:10, 11; 2 Timothy 4:11) Though not named in the gospel account, Mark has from early times been regarded as the writer, drawing his material largely from what Peter shared.

In his letter to the Colossians (4:10, 11), Paul identified Aristarchus, Mark and Justus as Jewish fellow workers who had proved to be a source of comfort to him. Aristarchus was a Macedonian from Thessalonica. (Acts 20:4; 27:2) He was with Paul in Ephesus at the time the silversmith Demetrius incited his fellow silversmiths against Paul, with the result that many others in the city were swept up into an emotional frenzy. As the Ephesians rushed to the theater, they seized Aristarchus and Gaius and forcibly dragged them along. There the mob, on seeing the Jewish Alexander who tried to make a defense (probably to distance the Jews of the city from Paul), shouted for about two hours, “Great is

Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19:23-34) Years later, when Paul was sent as a prisoner to Rome, Aristarchus accompanied him, perhaps gaining permission to do so by representing himself as the apostle’s slave or servant. During the period of the apostle’s imprisonment, Aristarchus aided and encouraged him. (Acts 27:2; Colossians 4:10, 11)

Demas, one of Paul’s fellow workers at this time, abandoned him during his final imprisonment in Rome. In his second letter to Timothy (4:10), the apostle mentioned that Demas had gone to Thessalonica because he loved the present “age.” He likely feared the possibility of losing his freedom or even his life. Demas must have been more concerned about his own safety and welfare than about Paul, demonstrating greater love for the existing age in relation to his life than he did for an apostle and a brother in need.

Luke, a physician by profession, had traveled extensively with Paul in making known the good news about Jesus Christ. (Colossians 4:14) From very ancient times, he is considered to have been the writer of Acts and of the gospel account. In Acts, the passages that use the first person plural pronouns are commonly understood to mean that Luke was an eyewitness. (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16) This means that he would have accompanied Paul as a prisoner to Rome, possibly being allowed to do so as the apostle’s slave or servant.

The letter ends with the same prayerful expression as does the letter to the Philippians, “The favor of the Lord Jesus Christ [be] with your spirit.” These words are intended for Philemon and the entire community of believers meeting in his home, for the “your” is plural. The spirit of the believers refers to the commendable disposition of their inner life that had been transformed through the operation of God’s spirit. Paul’s desire was that the gracious favor of the Lord Jesus Christ would continue to be on the spirit or disposition of all the believers who would read or hear what he had written. (Verse 25; see the Notes section.)

## **The Purpose of Bible Study and is a Way of Praying**

Studying the Bible and meditating on its Words of Life is meditation and is praying, in doing so your whole being becomes flooded with peace. Then, no matter what other people do or say, you will just feel that they are your own children playing in front of you. You will think, “These are all children. What more can I expect from them?” But, because they are grown up in terms of years, you may at times become angry and upset instead. If you pray and meditate on the Word of God daily, you will soon feel that your inner peace is

infinitely stronger, more fulfilling and more energising than the unfortunate situation that others may create.

Over the years, I have come to the Bible for many reasons: for devotions, leisure reading, to prove to myself someone wrong, for homework, simply to know what it means, and for ministry purposes. But I feared, in the end, I have missed the true purpose of Bible study and saturation. There is simply one main purpose for getting into the Word of God – knowing Jesus. No, not knowing *about* Jesus. Actually knowing Him, the Person.

Jesus often encountered the Pharisees over a variety of issues. In John 5.39, He makes an interesting statement to them: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”

What I find so startling about this passage is that if we ran into anyone like these Pharisees in the church and others today, we would celebrate them! Here they are searching and looking for eternal life in the Holy Scripture. Way to go Pharisees! Way to go Christian! Keep studying, keep reading, keep memorizing, keep praying and meditating

Yet Jesus rebukes them. The Pharisees were getting into the Word looking for life, yet Jesus declared that everything in Scripture points to Him (who *is* Life – see John 14.6). They were in the right place, but missed it entirely.

Everything in the Holy Scripture points to Jesus the Christ; yes, even the Old Testament portrays Him. He is called the Living Word – the fullness, culmination, and lived-out expression of the Written Word. And everything throughout the Old and New Testaments point to Him.

There is an interaction between the Written and Living Word. Getting into the Written Word leads us, by the Holy Spirit, into the Living Word. As you get to know the Written Word, you get to know the Living Word. Think of it like this: if I came up to you and shook your hand, I’d be shaking you. But if we were to cut off your arm, you are not any less you – you may be armless but you are still fully you. In a similar manner (though I realise the illustration breaks down), when you “shake” (get into) the Written Word, you are getting into the Living Word. We realize that the Written Word is not Jesus – Jesus is still fully Jesus even if you cut off the Written Word – but there is such an interaction between the two of them that as you get into one, it is as if you are getting into the other.

Do you want a greater level of intimacy with Jesus? You must be in the Word! Want to know Him better? Then you better be soaked and saturated within the

pages of the Holy Scripture – not because you are after eternal life apart from Christ, but because you are after a Person who is Life itself.

When we come to the Word, Jesus is not interested in us just knowing about the Word, He wants us to know Him. He wants intimacy. And the tremendous thing about the Word is that no matter where we dive into, it will lead us to Jesus. If you come to the Word for any other reason than intimacy and oneness with Jesus, you will soon find yourself fizzled, disappointed, and quit. Sure, we can work ourselves up for an academic study of one more lesson or sermon, but unless we see the Word as living, active, and sharper than a double-edged sword that wants to do its work in our lives (see Hebrews 4.12), we will be approaching the Word out of duty and obligation, rather than delight, passion, and hunger.

Do you see that the Bible is *not* boring, dull, or old? The pages are still wet with ink as if God just spoke them. They are living and active. They are focused on the Person of Jesus, the Christ. Why do you not spend some time not learning about Him but getting to know Him as you would a good friend?

Indeed, the primary purpose of the Scriptures is to point people to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27, 32, 44-48).

“The Father who sent Me has Himself testified concerning Me . . . . These are the Scriptures that testify about Me . . .” (John 5:37-39).

We can trust the Bible as the Word of God because God is the divine author. Yes, men wrote, but God stood behind the written word. Men used their own vocabulary and style of writing, but God guided over them in their choice of words. Men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Peter expressed this clearly, “No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21). It was not thought up by the prophets, but rather inspired by God.

The word Peter uses for “moved” is used for “blown by a violent wind” (Acts 2:2), and a ship that is carried along by a wind (27:15, 17). The metaphor Peter uses here is that of the prophets raised their sails and the Holy Spirit filled them and carried their craft along in the direction He wished. The Holy Spirit carried them along and they spoke His message.

The Holy Spirit “moved” the writers of the Bible along in their writing to produce the words that God intended them to write. They wrote as men moved by the Holy Spirit. They were “being borne along” by the Spirit. The New English Bible translates, “Men they were, but, impelled by the Holy Spirit, they

spoke the words of God.” The result is the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God in the original manuscripts.

Jesus believed in the full inspiration and divine authority of the Old Testament Scriptures (the Tanakh). Since my sixteenth’s I, too, fully accept the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible. It is fully inspired of God. God gave us His Word and since it is His Word it is without error.

Because we have a fully trustworthy Bible we can accept its message without reservation. The message of the Scriptures is the good news in Jesus Christ. Its purpose is to reveal Christ and His atoning work of salvation of sinners. The Scriptures, Jesus said, “bear witness of Me” (John 5:39).

The two men on the road to Emmaus discovered this great truth as they walked with Jesus on the day of His resurrection (Luke 24:32). Jesus opened their hearts and their eyes to see that He was the fulfilment of all the Scriptures. He listened to them discuss the events of His own crucifixion and the rumors of His resurrection and then He said, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” (v. 25). He admonished them to “believe in all that the prophets have spoken” because it is God’s word and it is fully inspired. What was it He wanted them to accept? It was the teaching about His suffering and His entering into His glory. What did He teach as they walked down the road? “And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (v. 27). Jesus explained, opened up completely, thoroughly and intensively the Scriptures to them (v. 32). If you want to know more of what He taught them along the road go to Christ in the Old Testament. As Jesus spoke to them their minds were opened, and their hearts burned within them. That is what should happen to us as we look for Christ in both the Old and the New Testaments (vv. 44-45).

The Holy Spirit has to open the eyes of the mind so we can understand the great truths of the gospel (v. 45). When He opens our spiritual eyes we can recognize Him and worship Him. However, just like those two disciples, we cannot see Him spiritually until He opens our eyes to see Him.

God gave the scriptures so that you and I might come to Jesus Christ and receive eternal life. In the Son of God we have a true knowledge of the Father. God has spoken in His word about Christ so there is therefore now no excuse for not putting your faith in Christ as your Saviour.

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