



The Epistle of Paul to
PHILEMON

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TO PHILEMON in Colossae

RE. Onesimus your runaway slave,
now a brother!

verses

1-3	Greetings
4-6	Thanksgiving in prayer
7	Refreshment of saints
8-10	Appeal for restoration
11-16	Onesimus
	before after
	useless useful
	brief parting united forever
	slave brother
	in the flesh in Christ
17-19	Receive him as me, Paul
	Debts will be repaid
20	Exchange benefits!
21-22	Prepare accommodation
	Paul's expected release
	through prayer
23	Salutations -
	Epaphras
	Mark
	Aristarchus
	Demas
	Luke
24	Prayer for Christ's favour

FROM the APOSTLE PAUL

Imprisoned in Rome

ABBREVIATIONS USED

AV	Authorised Version, King James edition.
cf.	compare.
CV	'Concordant Literal New Testament', (Saugus, California: The Concordant Publishing Concern, 1968).
EWB	E.W.Bullinger, 'A Critical Lexicon and Concordance', (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1957), 8th edition, p.469.
Gk.	Greek.
LXX	'Septuagint' Translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek about the 3rd century B.C. (LXX = 70, number of scholars thought to have worked on this translation).
mg.	see margin.
NEB	New English Bible.
Nestle	'The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament: The Nestle Greek Text with literal English Translation', (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1967).
RSV	American 'Revised Standard Version' (1952).
Stg.	James Strong, 'Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible'.
Vine	W.E.Vine, 'Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words'.
Yg.	Robert Young, 'Analytical Concordance', (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965).

PHILEMON

PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE

The letter of Paul to Philemon is a personal appeal by the apostle for the acceptance by Philemon of Onesimus, his runaway slave. Onesimus had become a convert to the Truth in the time since he left Philemon. It is important to see this appeal within the background of slavery as it existed in the society at that time.

SLAVERY IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

The population of Europe and Asia consisted of an immense number of slaves, outnumbering those who were free. In the province of Attica alone, there were 400,000 slaves, and only 31,000 freemen. In Corinth there were 460,000 slaves. It was not uncommon in Rome for a rich man to possess 10,000-20,000 slaves. The Greek colonies in Asia Minor were the major sources of the supply of slaves, chiefly obtained from the interior of Asia.

Slaves not only worked in the households and on the farms, but served as architects, sculptors, painters, poets, musicians and physicians. They were so numerous that it has been estimated that not a tenth part of the slaves knew their masters.¹ But no matter what his particular station in life, in the eye of the law, the slave was a chattel, a thing to be inventoried with the oxen, and to be sold, exchanged, or seized for debt.²

THE SLAVE-MASTER RELATIONSHIP

a) Secular Information:

There were two kinds of slaves:

- i. oiketēs (purchased)
- ii. oikotrips (born in the master's house)

Regardless of how the slave was obtained, he was entirely subject to the caprice of his master. In Phrygia, the area from which Onesimus had escaped, it was proverbial, "A Phrygian [slave] is the better and more serviceable for a beating."³ Punishment for disobedience could mean a scourging, branding in the forehead, or being forced to carry the 'furca', a frame shaped like a 'V' and placed over the back of the neck on the shoulders, the hands being bound to the thighs. He might even be crucified or thrown to wild beasts or voracious fish.⁴

It was contrary to the law to receive or assist a fugitive slave. He could not be legally sold by a new possessor, and to conceal him from pursuit was equivalent to theft.⁵

1 Petronius, referred to in C.Briggs (ed.), 'The International Critical Commentary', (Edinburgh: E.T.Clark, 1902), p.158.

2 *Ibid.*, p.163.

3 Suidas, quoted by Cicero, *ibid.*, p.158.

4 *Ibid.*, p.163.

5 Briggs, *ibid.*, p.iv.

b) Biblical Information:

Specific instructions were given to slaves and masters who were converts to the Truth. From these instructions, the general behaviour of each may be inferred:

- i. slaves
 - despised masters (I Tim.6:2),
 - insubordinate ('be obedient in all things', Tit.2:9),
 - insolent ('not answering again', Tit.2:9),
 - thieves ('not purloining', Tit.2:10),
 - worked with 'eye-service' as men-pleasers (Eph.6:6),
 - lacked goodwill from the heart (Eph.6:5-7).

It can be seen that even when emancipation was achieved, a slave often carried with him the habits, deportment and morality of the slave.

- ii. masters
 - threatened (Eph.6:9),
 - defrauded ('give unto your servants that which is just and equal knowing that you have a master in heaven', Col.4:1).

PAUL AND SLAVERY

The letter to Philemon has been variously regarded as committing Paul to the rightfulness and divine sanction of slavery. Or it has been read as a condemnation of slavery, since Paul, it is claimed, deliberately undermined the institution of slavery by fostering 'Christian sentiment'. An analysis of Paul's statements regarding slavery indicates that neither of these positions is wholly accurate. Consider the following:

1. If slavery were regarded as morally wrong for believers, then it would have been classified with fornication, murder, theft, etc. (Gal.5:19-21; 1 Cor.5:9-11), but slavery is never once mentioned in these comprehensive lists of evil.

2. Slavery was 'accepted' by the apostle as part of the fabric of society. As such it is set out having opportunities for discipleship similar to other occupations. Note the following instructions:

- a) Slaves were required to serve their masters as if serving God (Eph.6:5-8; Col.3:22-23; Tit.2:9-10).
- b) Freedom may be obtained by a slave-convert if offered (I Cor.7:21), but freedom was not considered to be essential for service to God (I Cor.7:24).
- c) Even when both slave and master became converts, Paul did not demand freedom for the slave, but rather instructed: "Let them [slaves] not despise them [masters], because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit." (I Tim.6:2).

"And have put on the new man...where there is neither Jew nor Greek,...bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (Col.3:10-13).

But there is also instruction for Onesimus:

"Servants [Gk. 'doulos', slave, Yg.] obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service as men-pleasers; but in singleness of

heart, fearing God...But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." (Col.3:22,25).

The relationship between the slave, Onesimus, and his master, Philemon, would certainly be open to ecclesial scrutiny, since instructions were ecclesially given which directly governed the conduct of each.

<u>THE TACTFUL APPEAL</u>	
1.	<p>'GRACIOUS SPEECH' (Col.4:6, RSV)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FAMILY "beloved", "dearly beloved" - apostle - "fellowsoldier" <li style="padding-left: 2em;">yet <li style="padding-left: 2em;">an equal - "fellowlabourer", v.1-2 - the ECCLESIA
2.	<p>THOUGHTFULNESS (Col.3:12-13)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - prayers for ecclesia, v.4 - concern for progress, v.5-6
3.	<p>APPEAL, NOT A 'CHARGE' (Col.3:14)</p> <p>WILLINGLY, NOT OF NECESSITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "for love's sake", v.8,14.
4.	<p>LOWLINESS, KINDNESS, MEEKNESS (Col.3:12)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an apostle, yet regarded himself as a slave - a prisoner, yet appealed "receive as myself"

The master-slave relationship in the Truth may be summarised in this way :

IN THE FLESH

master
|
slave

1. GOD
|
master-slave
2. IN
master-slave
CHRIST
3. CHRIST
|
master-slave

IN THE TRUTH

The master-slave distinction is unimportant before God since with Him there is no respect of persons (Col.3:25)

Neither the master nor the slave is a 'slave' in Christ. In him there is neither bond, nor free, "but Christ is all, and in all." (Col.3:11, cf. Gal.3:28)

Both masters and slaves are 'slaves' of Christ (eg., Tit.1:1)

DATE OF WRITING

A LETTER FROM PRISON

Philemon is a prison epistle along with others (eg., Colossians, Col.4:18; Philippians, Phil.1:7,13,14; 4:22) written by Paul while in the custody of the Roman authorities. This is proven by the following:

a) v.22 - "I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you." The verse implies circumstances beyond Paul's control, which kept him from visiting Philemon. Also implied is the expectation of imminent deliverance through prayer.

b) Note the allusions to prison in the letter:

- "Paul, a prisoner of ['for', RSV] Jesus Christ," (v.1).
- "In my bonds" [Gk. 'desmios', 'band, ligament, shackle', Stg.]. (v.10).
- Epaphras "my fellow prisoner", (v.23).

PAUL'S FIRST IMPRISONMENT IN ROME - Approximately A.D.63

There are three recorded imprisonments of Paul:

a) Caesarea - (for two years) while Paul was in transit to Rome for trial there (Acts 23:23-26:32).

b) Rome - First imprisonment - upon arrival from Caesarea (Acts 28:14-31).

c) Rome - Second imprisonment (II Tim.4:6-18).

Which imprisonment does Paul refer to in his letter to Philemon? The evidence supports b) - Paul's first imprisonment. Note the following reasons:

i) Paul expected imminent release (v.22), but there is no indication of such an expectation while he was detained at Caesarea. Nor did Paul expect deliverance from his second imprisonment: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." (II Tim.4:6).

ii) Onesimus, a runaway slave, would have far easier access to Paul in Rome than at Caesarea, where he was confined ("let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him." Acts 24,23), and during the latter part of his detention was under heavy guard in Herod's praetorium (Acts 23:35; 24:27). Paul at Rome was given freedom to receive "all that came in unto him...preaching the kingdom of God...with all confidence, no man forbidding him." (Acts 28:30-31).

iii) Since Timothy shared Paul's greetings to Philemon (v.1), this suggests that he was present with Paul at the time of writing. It is known that Timothy was with Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome (Phil.1:1 cf. v.13; 4:21-22), but there is no Biblical evidence that he was with Paul at Caesarea.

PHILEMON - A MEMBER OF THE COLOSSIAN ECCLESIA

There is strong evidence to suggest that Philemon and Onesimus belonged to the Colossian ecclesia. Consider the following:

a) Onesimus is identified with the ecclesia at Colossae: "With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you." (Col.4:9). Since Onesimus the runaway slave, was sent back by Paul to Philemon (Phile.12), therefore Philemon must also have been a member of the Colossian ecclesia.

b) Archippus, who met with the same ecclesia as Philemon ("and to the ecclesia in thy house", Phile.2), had a ministry at Colossae (Col.4:17), therefore the Colossian brethren must have met in the house of Philemon.

[There is, however, a possibility that the ministry of Archippus related to Laodicea (cf. Col.4:15)].

The Colossian epistle was almost certainly carried from Rome to Colossæ by Tychicus (Col.4:7-8) accompanied by Onesimus (Col.4:9). The latter would no doubt carry the personal letter of Paul to Philemon - a personal letter, not then intended for the general ecclesia. It should be remembered that at about the same time as Philemon received his personal letter, he would also be hearing the Colossian epistle addressed to the whole ecclesia. Notice the relevant contents in the epistle to the Colossians to the master-slave relationship of Philemon and Onesimus:

Instruction for Philemon:

"Masters, give unto your servants [Gk. 'douloi', 'slaves', Yg.] that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master In heaven." (Col.4:1).

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THE LETTER OF PAUL TO PHILEMON

V.1-3 SALUTATION

V.1 "Paul," - His name means 'little' (Yg), (because he was short?). His hebrew name was 'Saul' (Acts 13:9) and his gentile name 'Paul'. Since Paul was addressing a personal letter to Philemon, he did not include reference to his apostolic office as he did in his other epistles (eg., I Cor.1:1; II Cor.1:1). The evident close friendship between Paul and Philemon (eg., v.7, 22) would not require Paul to state his apostolic authority. This would be known and recognised by Philemon.

"a prisoner of Jesus Christ," - 'Prisoner' - Gk. 'desmios', 'one bound', (Yg), 'a captive' (Stg). Paul wrote during his first imprisonment in Rome (see background analysis). Although Paul was literally a prisoner of Rome, it was because of his stewardship as Messiah's deputy ('under-rower', Gk. 'huperetes', I Cor.4:1) that he was imprisoned - "for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." (Acts 23:11). Hence the RSV: "a prisoner for Christ Jesus." The RSV makes it clear that Paul was a literal prisoner 'for' Christ and not a 'prisoner' figuratively 'of' Christ, by virtue of being a believer.

"Jesus", Gk. 'Iêsous', 'from the Heb. Y^ehowshua, (Jehoshua, Joshua)' (Stg) = Saviour - "he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt.1:21).

"and Timothy our brother," - 'Timothy' - Gk. 'Timotheus', 'honoured of God' (Yg); 'dear to God' (Stg). Greek text - 'the brother' (Nestle), not 'our brother'. Timothy was Paul's "beloved child in the faith" (I Tim.1:2; I Cor.4:17), replacing Mark who joined his cousin Barnabas (Acts 15:33-40, 16:1-3). He was a cherished fellow-worker in proclaiming the gospel and building up the new ecclesias (I Cor.4:14-17; Phil.2:19-22). He shared Paul's greetings in II Cor., Phil., Col., and I & II Thess. Timothy may have known Philemon and the Colossian ecclesia, if the ecclesia was founded during Paul's 3-year residence in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:22).

"unto Philemon" - (pronounced Phil^o'mon). His name means 'friendly' (Stg). Although he is not referred to elsewhere in the New Testament, Philemon was converted by Paul (v.17-19) and was a man of some means - a slave owner, possessor of a home sufficiently large to serve as an ecclesial meeting place (v.2), and to accommodate overnight visitors (v.22).

"our dearly beloved," - Gk. 'agapētos', from 'agapaō' (Vine), an affectionate greeting used also of Quartus (Rom.16:23), Sosthenes (I Cor.1:1) and Apollos (I Cor.16:12), as well as ecclesias (Rom.1:7).

"and fellow-labourer," - Gk. 'sunergos', 'joint-worker' (Yg), from 'sun' - 'together, with' and 'ergo' - 'to work'.

V.2 "And to our [the', Gk. text] beloved Apphia," - "And Apphia our sister" (RSV). The Greek text has 'adelphē', not 'agapētos' as the AV infers, hence RSV rendering 'adelphē' - 'a sister' (Yg). 'Adelphē' is the fem. of 'adelphos' (brother). Probably Apphia was the wife of Philemon and Archippus their son. This is suggested by the fact that an official ecclesial letter was received at the same time as the personal one, and delivered by the same messengers. It would seem appropriate that in a matter so personal to Philemon, that salutations be confined just to his own family.

"and Archippus" - His name means 'chief groom' (Yg). Archippus had a special ministry (Gk. 'diakonia') at Colossae: "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it." (Col.4:17).

"our [the', Gk. text] fellow-soldier," - Gk. 'sustratotes', 'from "sun", "together, with", and "stratotes", "soldier"' (Vine); also used of Epaphroditus (Phil.2:25). This is a figurative use of the word. The believer is regarded as a soldier of Jesus Christ on active duty, prepared to give absolute obedience and resist entanglements with civilian pursuits - the world (II Tim.2:3-4).

"and to the church" - 'Church' - Gk. 'ekklēsia', 'that which is called out', (Yg), from 'ek' - 'out of' and 'kaleō' - 'to call'. 'Ekklēsia' is used of a body of citizens gathered together to discuss the affairs of the State (Acts 19:39), and of the nation of Israel in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). The LXX uses 'ekklēsia' for the Hebrew word 'qahal' translated 'company' in Eze.38:4, 7,13,15. The Gogian confederacy is an ecclesia called out for a sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel (Eze.39). It is GOD who will put hooks into their jaws to bring the northern power into the land of Israel.

It is important to stress that 'church' usually conveys the idea of a building or religious denomination, which does not accurately represent the force of 'ekklēsia' when used of those called out by one Gospel. Christadelphians have historically rejected the use of 'church' to describe their halls or communities, and rightly so! The 'Concordant Version' (for the above mentioned verses) retains 'ecclesia' untranslated.

"in thy house:" - 'Thy' - Gk. 'sou' is singular, which poses a problem. Whose house is intended? Archippus'? or Philemon's? It is likely that the antecedent referred to Philemon, since the letter was addressed to him. Likewise, v.4-24 use the singular 'thy' or 'thee', suggesting that the house belonged to Philemon since it is certainly he who was being addressed in these verses.

Right of assembly was granted to the Jews by Julius Caesar and Augustus [Josephus, Antiquities xiv, 10,8]. At this time the Truth was viewed by Rome as a Jewish sect. But there is no mention of ecclesial halls in the literature extant until A.D.202. Prior to this (outside Jerusalem) it appears that the ecclesial meetings were held in homes, eg., Priscilla and Aquila (Rom.16:5; I Cor.16:19); Nymphas (Col.4:15).

V.3 "Grace to you," - Gk. 'charis', a request for Divine favour. The secular greeting was 'chairein', 'greetings' (Acts 23:26), but Paul's greetings were:

- a) "grace, mercy and peace" (I Tim.1:2; II Tim.1:2; Tit.1:4).
- b) "grace to you and peace" (Rom.1:7; I Cor.1:3; Gal.1:3).

"and peace," - Gk. 'eirēnē', refers to the harmony between God and man that is effected by a belief and obedience to the Gospel. It is a promised blessing in this life: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you..." (Jn.14:27). This peace "surpasseth understanding" (Phll.4:7) and is the special possession of those who are spiritually minded (Rom.8:6 cf. Num.6:24-26 where grace and peace are first associated).

"from God our Father" - God is the source of grace and peace made available through the sacrificial work of His Son.

"and the Lord Jesus Christ." - The Son was the willing manifestation of the Father (eg., Matt.26:39,42). 'Lord' - Gk, 'Kurlos', 'lord, sir, master' (Yg). 'Jesus' - see v.1. 'Christ' - 'Anointed' (Yg). Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Acts 10:38; Matt.3:16) when he was declared to be the Son of God. The word 'Christ' is equivalent to the Hebrew word 'Messiah' (Dan.9:25,28 cf. Jn.1:41, 4:25).

V.4-7 TACTFUL PRELUDE

V.4 "I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers." - The word order in the Greek text is ambiguous, allowing the following two interpretations:

i) Whenever Paul prayed he always remembered Philemon.

ii) When Paul remembered Philemon, he always thanked God.

The latter appears to be the most likely interpretation, since Paul instructed: "pray without ceasing". Many other persons and circumstances would have preoccupied his mind periodically. Hence, 'I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers'.

'Thank' - Gk. 'eucharisteō', 'to thank, be thankful' (Yg), 'to be grateful, express gratitude' (Stg). 'Prayers' - Gk. 'proseuche', 'a prayer pouring out' (Yg), 'use of prayer in general' (Vine).

Paul customarily began his letters on a note of thanksgiving and with the assurance that his prayers were for them (eg., Col.1:3). His prayers included remembrance of the Romans (Rom.1:9), Ephesians (Eph.1:16), and the Thessalonians (1 Thess.1:2).

V.5 "Hearing of thy love" - 'Love' - Gk. 'agape', 'denotes the love which springs from admiration, and which chooses its object with decision of will, and devotes a self-denying and compassionate devotion to it' (EWB).

"and faith," - Gk. 'pistis', 'primarily, firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing (akin to "peitho", "to persuade")' (Vine). Faith works by love and love exercised toward the saints is a work of faith.

"which thou hast toward [pros', accusative] the Lord Jesus, and toward [eis'] all [the', Gk. text] saints;" - How did Paul know this? Possibly through Epaphras, the founder of the Colossian ecclesia, who was with Paul in Rome (Col.1:7-8, 4:12), or possibly from Onesimus. So great was Paul's identification with spiritual things that faithful discipleship was for him a cause of joyous thanksgiving to the Father.

'Saints' - Gk. 'hagios', 'set apart, separate, holy' (Yg). The word is usually used of living believers separated from the world by the Truth. It relates to those 'washed, sanctified and justified' (1 Cor.6:9-11) at baptism, upon an intelligent, repentant belief of the Gospel. 'Saint' is never used in the New Testament as a special designation for writers of Biblical books (eg., as 'St. Matthew' - deleted in the RSV), nor is the word used to designate

persons of exceptional holiness, or those thought by men to be meritorious after their death (as is done by the Roman Church).

V.6 "That the communication ['sharing', RSV] of thy faith ['pistis']" - 'And I pray', RSV, is not in the Gk. text. 'Communication' - Gk. 'kionōnia', 'act of using as common' (Yg); 'partnership, participation' (Stg); 'fellowship', (CV, Nestle).

"may become effectual" - Gk. 'energēs', 'in working' (Yg); 'active, operative' (Stg). Another proof that faith cannot merely be quiescent or theoretical (Jm.2:24).

"by the acknowledging of every good thing" - 'Acknowledging' - Gk. 'epignōsis', 'full knowledge' (Yg); 'full discernment' (Stg); 'to know thoroughly' ("epi", intensive, "ginōskō", to know): to recognise a thing to be what it really is' (Vine). 'Good thing' - 'agathos', 'describes that which, being good in its character and constitution, is beneficial in its effect, as distinct from "kalos", intrinsically good' (Vine).

"which is in you in ['eis', 'for', CV] Christ Jesus." - These words are full of significance in terms of Paul's appeal to Philemon. Will the love and faith of Philemon now be expended to Onesimus as one of the saints? Will Philemon's full discernment include and encompass the good in Onesimus in Christ Jesus?

V.7 "For we have great joy and consolation in thy love ['agapē']," - 'Joy' - Gk. 'chara', 'joy, delight (akin to "chairn", "to rejoice")' (Vine). 'Consolation' - Gk. 'paraklēsis', "'calling to one's side" ("para", beside, "kaleō", to call) as distinct from "paramuthia" ("para", near, "muthos", speech) merely "speaking closely to anyone"' (Vine).

"because the bowels of the saints ['hagios']" - 'Bowels' - Gk. 'splağchnon', 'always in the plural, properly denotes the physical organs of the intestines (used this way in Acts 1:18)' (Vine); 'pity or sympathy' (Stg).

"are refreshed through thee, brother." - 'Refreshed' - Gk. 'anapaō', 'to give rest again' (Yg); 'repose' (Stg); 'to give intermission from labour ("ana", back, "pauō", to cause to cease)' (Vine). Paul's commitment to the Truth was so complete that the great joy and consolation which he received came from Philemon's service to others.

V.8-9 THE APPEAL OF LOVE, NOT COMPULSION BY COMMANDMENT

V.8 "Wherefore, though I might be bold in Christ" - 'Might' is not in the Gk. text. The RSV is too abrupt, "According though I am bold enough in Christ". CV is to be preferred, "Wherefore, having much boldness in Christ to be enjoining you". 'Boldness' - Gk. 'echo pollen parrhēsia', 'to have much free utterance' (Yg); 'parrhēsia', 'outspokenness, frankness' (Stg); ('"pas", all, "rhesis", speech) denotes primarily "unreservedness of utterance" (Vine). The stress here is that Paul could command Philemon on the basis of apostolic authority.

"to enjoin thee" - 'Enjoin' - Gk. 'epitassō', 'to arrange over or about' (Yg); 'charge', (Nestle); 'command' (Vine).

"that which is convenient," - 'Convenient' (or 'fitting') - Gk. 'anēkō', 'to have come up to, be becoming' (Yg); 'befitting' (Nestle); 'ana - up, and hēkō - to arrive' (Vine).

V.9 "Yet for love's ['agapē'] sake" - There are two interpretations -

i) 'Yet for the love which our personal relationship (ie., Paul and Philemon) has engendered'.

ii) 'Yet for the principles inherent in an act of love rather than compulsion out of duty.

The latter is to be preferred.

"I rather beseech thee" - 'Beseech' - Gk. 'parakaleō', "'para" - with, "kaleō" - to call' (Vine); 'to call to one's side' (Yg).

"being such an one as Paul the aged," - 'Aged' - Gk. 'presbutēs', 'aged, advanced in years' (Yg). The NEB, RSV (mg. 'an old man') translate 'ambassador' (cf. Eph.6:20, "For which I am an ambassador ['presbeuo'] in bonds", see also II Cor.5:20). This rendering, however, is unlikely, since it is not appropriate to Paul's attitude of entreaty, which had been carefully developed apart from recourse to his apostolic office.

[According to Hippocrates, a man was called 'presbutēs' from the age of 49-56, and after that a 'geron'. See C.Briggs (ed.), 'The International Commentary', (Edinburgh: E.T.Clark, 1902) p.184. It might be thought that if Archippus was the son of Philemon, the age of Paul and Philemon would be about the same, and there would be no point in Paul appealing to his age. But this assumes what we do not know - how old Archippus was when he received his ministry. He might have been a very young man like Timothy, in which case Philemon might only be 40 years old, whereas Paul around 50-60 years old].

"and now also a prisoner of [for', RSV] Jesus Christ." - 'Prisoner' - Gk. 'desmino', 'one bound' (Yg), as in v.1, relates to Paul's imprisonment in Rome. In this verse Paul appealed on three grounds:

- i) Paul's person - ('I, Paul'),
- ii) his age,
- iii) his position - a prisoner.

V.10 THE ISSUE

V.10 "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus," - 'Beseech' - Gk. 'parakaleō', 'to call to one's side' (Yg). 'Son' - Gk. 'tekon', 'child, dependant' (Yg). 'Onesimus', 'from "onēsis" - profit' (Vine) - a common name for slaves. Paul implored Philemon for his child Onesimus. Imagine Philemon's reaction to this. [It was also the Law of the Sanhedrin: 'If one teaches the son of his neighbour the law, the Scripture reckons this the same as though he had begotten him.' See Briggs, 'The International Critical Commentary', p.185]. Paul had tactfully taken nine verses before coming to the point! His appeal was neither curt nor abrupt.

"whom I have begotten in my bonds:" - "Whose father I have become in my imprisonment' (RSV). 'Begotten' - Gk. 'gennao', 'to regenerate, gender' (Stg). 'Bonds' - Gk. 'desmios', 'bond, band, fetter' (Stg). Onesimus had learned the Truth from Paul while imprisoned in Rome. He was 'begotten' by Paul, since Paul was the instrument of his conversion.

V.11-22 ONESIMUS SENT BACK

V.11 "Which in time past was to thee unprofitable," - This verse is read parenthetically in the RSV - a slight digression in the theme (there are many of these in the epistles). 'Time past' - Gk. 'pote', 'then (formerly)', (Nestle). 'Unprofitable' - Gk. 'achrestos', 'useless, worthless' (Yg); 'inefficient (detrimental)' (Stg).

"but now profitable to thee and to me:" - 'Profitable' - Gk. 'euchrēstos', 'very useful' (Stg) (emphatic). There is a deliberate play on Onesimus'

name. The slave named 'useful', formerly useless, was now useful - living up to his name. Notice the stress in this verse: Onesimus formerly 'useless to thee....before I had known him. Now he is profitable to us'. How could Philemon refuse a request with this force of emphasis?

V.12 "Whom I have sent again:" - 'Sent again' - Gk. 'anepempsa', the Greek 'epistolary aorist' by which the writer puts himself back into the situation. Literally: 'whom I send'.

"thou therefore receive him," - Not in the Greek text and deleted from RSV, Nestle & CV.

"that is, mine own bowels:" - 'Bowels' - Gk. 'splaǵchnon', 'always in the plural, properly denotes the physical organs of the intestines (Acts 1:18), which were regarded by the Greeks as the seat of the more violent passions, by the Hebrews as the seat of the tender affections. Hence the word denotes "tender mercies" (Vine); 'my very heart' (RSV); a 'part of myself' (NEB).

V.13 "Whom I would have retained with me," - 'Would have' - Gk. 'eboulomai', variously translated: 'be disposed, minded, willing, to intend'. Indicates deliberation with an accompanying indecision. 'Whom I have resolved with myself to retain' (Nestle). A paraphrase might be: 'I was inclined to keep him, and was turning over the matter in my mind'.

"that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds ['desmios'] of ['for', RSV] the gospel ['eungelion']:" - 'That' - Gk. 'hina', 'in order that', (Nestle). 'In thy stead' - Gk. 'huper', 'on behalf of thee', (Nestle). 'Ministered' - Gk. 'diakoneo', 'to wait upon' (Stg).

Paul implied that Onesimus had been serving him instead of Philemon, i.e., what Philemon had not been able to do, Onesimus had. There is the delicately expressed suggestion that the slave had done and could do what the master could not. How could Philemon reject Paul's request to receive back Onesimus, when Onesimus had been ministering on behalf of Philemon?

V.14 "But without thy mind would I do nothing;" - 'But I preferred to do nothing without your consent' (RSV). 'Without' - Gk. 'choris', 'apart from' (Yg). 'Mind' - Gk. 'gnōmē', 'knowledge, opinion, decision' (Yg). 'Nothing' - Gk. 'oudels', 'not even one' (Yg). Such an attitude of mind expressed by the apostle to his friend in the Truth, was sure to win favour with Philemon. **"that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly."** - "In order that goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will." (RSV). 'Benefit' - Gk. 'agathos', 'good' (Yg). 'Necessity' - Gk. 'anaǵkē', 'constraint (implied distress)' (Stg). 'Willingly' - Gk. 'katahekousion', 'voluntarily' (Yg). Paul could have kept Onesimus at Rome legally by merely gaining the consent of Philemon. Although Onesimus was very useful in serving Paul, why did he send him back to Philemon? The following reasons can be inferred: 1. No opportunity would be given to slander the Truth. Paul was having difficulties in Rome (Phil.1:14-18), and no opportunity would be given for slanderous charges that Paul disobeyed civil law (harbouring a slave) for his own needs, and that he encouraged slaves to withdraw from their masters under the pretext of the Truth (cf. Rom.13:1-9).

2. If there was a decision for Onesimus to return to Rome after he had been sent back to Colossae, this decision must come from Philemon himself, the rightful owner. A return visit by Onesimus (to assist Paul) would only be the result of a willing compliance of Philemon and could not then be construed as a heavy-handed action by Paul (if only written consent were achieved).

3. There was an appropriateness in Onesimus returning to Philemon as a practical demonstration of faith in action. It also showed that conversion to the Truth did not nullify obligations accrued prior to immersion.

4. As so often in Paul's epistles, the motivation for the action is stressed (see II Cor.9:7, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart,...not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." See also I Cor.13). Philemon's response would be one of love, not compulsion.

V.15 "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season," - "Perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while," (RSV). 'Perhaps' - Gk. 'tacha', 'possibly' (Stg). 'Departed' - Gk. 'chōrizō', 'to put apart' (Yg). 'Season' - Gk. 'hora', 'an hour, time' (Yg). Paul softened Philemon's reaction to the runaway slave by suggesting that he departed (not 'ran away') for a while, because this was in the Divine providence (like the evil Joseph suffered from his brethren, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me to preserve life." Gen.45:5).

"that ['hina' - 'In order that', Nestle] thou shouldst receive him for ever;" - 'Shouldst' suggests that he ought to, but this idea is not contained in the Greek word 'apechēs', hence 'might have' (RSV); 'mightest receive' (Nestle). 'For ever' - Gk. 'aiōnios', 'age-lasting' (Yg). Philemon lost a slave for an hour, but gained a brother 'for ever'. The bond between master and slave would no longer be that of ownership by purchase (or birth) which death could dissolve, but their common relationship to Christ which made them brethren now and in the Kingdom - for evermore (if faithful).

V.16 "Not now as a servant ['doulos', 'slave']," - 'Not now' - Gk. 'ouketi', 'no longer' (Nestle, RSV). Paul was saying that Philemon was to receive Onesimus freed, and no longer as a slave, but rather (whether he remained a slave or not) he must not be regarded as a slave, but as a beloved brother.

"but above a servant ['doulos'], a brother ['adelphos'] beloved," - 'Above' - Gk. 'huper', (accusative), 'over, above, in behalf of' (Yg); 'beyond' (Nestle); 'more than RSV. 'Beloved' - Gk. 'agapētos', see v.1. What this meant in practical terms is contained in the letter addressed to the whole ecclesia, "neither...bond nor free: but Christ is all in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another and forgiving one another..." (Col.3:11-13).

"specially to me," - 'Specially' - Gk. 'malista', 'most of all, chiefly' (Yg); 'most particularly' (Stg). On many occasions in his epistles, Paul spoke of his converts with great affection (eg, Gal.4:19; I Thess.2:7,8,19).

"but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord ['kurios']?" - In the 'flesh' - (Gk. 'sarx') as a slave. Onesimus' conversion gave him new incentive to be a useful slave. The Colossian letter instructed slaves to "obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God." (Col.3:22). "And in the Lord" - as a brother, Onesimus had already proven his worth in service to Paul in Rome. Paul inferred fruitful service could be expected of Onesimus in the ecclesia, if he was regarded as a brother and not as a mere slave.

V.17 "If thou count me therefore as a partner," - 'Count' - Gk. 'echeis', 'hold possession' (Stg); literally: 'If therefore me thou hast [as] a partner'

(Nestle); 'So if you consider me your partner' (RSV). 'Partner' - Gk. 'koinonos', 'sharer, associate' (Stg).

"receive him as myself." - Paul interceded for Onesimus in an irresistible manner. Onesimus was no longer a mere slave, but Paul's delegate, to be received as if Paul himself were coming to Philemon's house! How could Philemon refuse to receive Onesimus as a brother when he regarded Paul as a fellow-labourer, and when Paul intended to visit Philemon personally after his release (v.22)? A rebuff to Onesimus would have been an insult to Paul himself.

V.18 "If he hath wronged thee," - 'Wronged' - Gk. 'adikeō', 'to do injustice or unrighteousness' (Yg).

"or oweth [thee] ought," - Gk. 'ophellō', 'to be indebted' (Stg). It would be very unlikely that Paul lacked information from Onesimus about his offence. The hypothetical manner ('if') in which Paul presented the case required Philemon to press his case without Paul assuming Onesimus' innocence in these matters. Onesimus may have defected from Philemon while in Rome on his master's business, or he may have stolen money in order to travel all the way to Rome. In actual fact, in a secular court a slave could be neither a debtor nor a creditor.

"put that on mine account;" - Literally: 'tout emoi elloga' - 'this to me reckon'. 'Ellogēō' - 'reckon' (Stg). Here Paul was a type of Christ in taking on or bearing the sins of another.

V.19 "I Paul have written [it] with mine own hand," - Paul in effect, wrote a promissory note and authorised the debit by his own handwriting. 'Written' - Gk. 'egrapsa' is another 'epistolary aorist'. The CV captures the flow of thought by providing the parenthesis: "I Paul (I write with my own hand), I will refund it."

"I will repay [it]:" - 'Repay' - Gk. 'apotinō', 'to pay in full' (Stg). It is unlikely that Paul in prison would have large funds at his disposal. Paul either knew that if money had been taken from Philemon, it was a small amount, or that he was prepared to work for Philemon to make restoration. But in terms of what followed, how could Philemon have pressed a case?

"albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides." - 'Albeit' - Gk. 'hina', 'in order that' (Stg). 'Owest' - Gk. 'prosophellō', 'to be indebted additionally' (Stg). Paul was saying, 'Philemon, you are my debtor not only to the amount for which I have become responsible, but also to your own self. Even if you remit the debt, you still owe me yourself!' Paul elsewhere stressed the spiritual debt owed by others (eg., of Gentiles to Jews - for the Jerusalem Poor Fund, Rom.15:27; of converts to the maintenance of the apostles, 1 Cor.9:11). The CV is worth noting, "Not that I may say to you that you are owing me even yourself!" This more vividly captures Paul's contrast.

V.20 "Yea, brother ['adelphos'], let me have joy of thee in the Lord ['kurios]:" - 'Joy' - Gk. 'oninēmi', 'to have joy, pleasure or advantage' [The verb 'oninēmi' is related to the adjective 'onesimus' (beneficial)] (Yg); 'to have profit, derive benefit' (Vine). "Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord.' (RSV). The CV, in recognition of the fact that Paul was continuing the 'credit-debt' metaphor, translates 'oninēmi' by 'profiting'. "Yea, brother, I may be 'profiting' from you in the Lord! Soothe my compassions in Christ." There is obvious irony in v.19,20 which is

retained in the CV, and which is more apparent when the section is now read as a whole: "I, Paul (I write with my own hand), I will refund it. (Not that I may say to you that you are owing me even yourself!) Yea, brother, may I be 'profiting' from you in the Lord! Soothe my compassions in Christ!"
"refresh my bowels in the Lord." - 'Refresh' - 'anapauō', see v.7. 'Bowels' - 'sp̄laġchnon', see v.7. 'Lord' - Gk. 'Christos', Christ (RSV, Nestle).

V.21 "Having confidence in thy obedience" - 'Confidence' - Gk. 'peithō', 'to persuade' (Yg). 'Obedience' - Gk. 'hupakoē', 'hearkening submissively' (Yg); 'compliance' (Stg). The obedience would result not from a commandment on the basis of Paul's apostolic authority, but from the 'love' engendered by belief of the Truth, a regard from the commandments of Christ (Jn.15:14; I Jn.5:3).

"I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say," - 'I wrote' - epistolary aorist. 'Knowing' - Gk. 'eidō', 'to see, have seen, known' (Yg). 'More' - Gk. 'huper', 'over', above, on behalf of' (Yg); 'beyond' (Nestle). The confidence of successful intercession - but how ironical! A prisoner intercedes for a slave!

V.22 "But withal prepare me also a lodging:" - 'Withal' - Gk. 'hamas', 'together with' (Yg); 'at the same time' (CV, RSV). 'Prepare' - Gk. 'hetoimazō', 'to make ready' (Yg). 'Lodging' - Gk. 'Xenia', 'a place for strangers' (Yg); 'hospitality' (Stg). This was the frankness of one who knew his presence would be esteemed an honour and a pleasure. 'At the same time' as what? The context would suggest the receiving of Onesimus. What an incentive for compliance this would be!

"for I trust that through ['dia'] your prayers I shall be given unto you." - 'Trust' - Gk. 'elpizō', 'to hope' (Yg). 'Prayers' - Gk. 'proseuchē', 'a prayer, pouring out' (Yg). 'Shall be given' - Gk. 'charizomai', 'to grant as a favour' (Yg). Paul presented his expected, imminent ('at the same time') release from prison in Rome as a Divine favour granted by God in response to the prayers of Philemon. The implication is worthy of note. God responds to the prayers of other brethren and sisters for the welfare of oneself. How much time do you spend in prayer for others in the Truth?

Paul expected, when released, to go to Philippi (Phil.2:24), but the language of v.22 'at the same time', suggests that Colossæ would be the first place he would visit. Either plans changed between the writing of the two epistles, or Paul might have intended to visit Philippi (on the great highroad between Europe and Asia) on his way to Colossæ.

V.23-25 SALUTATIONS

V.23 "There salute thee Epaphras," - 'Salute' - Gk. 'aspazomai', 'to salute, embrace, draw together' (Yg); 'to enfold, welcome' (Stg). 'Epaphras' means 'devoted to' (Stg). Epaphras was an important founder of the ecclesia at Colossæ (Col.1:7, 4:12).

"my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus:" - 'Fellowprisoner' - Gk. 'sun' (with), 'aichmalōtos' (prisoner), 'fellow captive' (Yg). The expression may be used figuratively as spiritual soldiers, eg., Andronicus and Junia (Rom.16:7); Aristarchus (Col.4:10).

V.24 "Marcus," - Probably John Mark of Acts 12:12, a prominent brother in Jerusalem. Mark defected from the early work in Galatia to Jerusalem, and later became the subject of contention between Paul and Barnabas (Acts

15:36-40), Mark was Peter's 'son in the faith' (1 Pet.5:13), and had either visited Colossæ or sent letters there (Col.4:10). It is noteworthy that Timothy (Paul's 'son in the faith') who replaced Mark, was instructed to bring him to Rome "with thee; for he is profitable for me for the ministry" (II Tim.4:11). The preachers to the Gentiles and Jews were united through their sons in the faith in their work, despite the personal cleavage in Antioch (Gal.2:11).

"Aristarchus," - His name means 'best ruling' (Stg). He was the Thessalonian delegate to carry their ecclesial contribution to the Jerusalem Poor Fund (Acts 20:4). He accompanied Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2).

"Demas," - His name is probably a contraction of Dēmētrios, probably a Thessalonian (II Tlm.4:10). Although a faithful disciple initially (Col.4:14), he later fell prey to the world (II Tim.4:10).

"Lucas," - The beloved physician who accompanied Paul to Macedonia (Acts 16:10), and was there about 7 years later when Paul visited Philippi (Acts 20:5-6). He accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 21:15).

"my fellowlabourers." - Gk. 'sunergos', from 'sun' (with), 'ergos' (to work). Paul had other fellow workers - Phill.4:3; I Thess.3:2, just as he had 'fellow-prisoners'.

V.25 "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." - 'Grace' - Gk. 'charis'. 'Spirit' - Gk. 'pneumatōs'. 'Your' is plural, but 'spirit' is singular.

THE CONTRASTS

1. A PRISONER APPEALED FOR A SLAVE (v.10)
2. THE AGED INTERCEDED FOR HIS CHILD (v.9,10)
3. THE USELESS BECAME PROFITABLE (v.11)
4. ONESIMUS PARTED FOR A WHILE, BUT RETURNED FOREVER (v.15)
5. THE SLAVE BECAME FREE (v.16)

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Onesimus was like the prodigal son. He left in a state of rebellion, but returned to be welcomed in his Father's house. It is a lesson for us all. We were the slaves of sin, but are now made free by the blood of the Lamb.

From 'The Ecclesias in the LYCUS VALLEY
Colossæ, Hierapolis, Laodicea' by Ron Abel