

Philemon: The Polite Letter

Philemon 1

Pastor John Miller

I'm going to outline the book of Philemon tonight, a survey, but we're going to go into every little phrase and verse as we go through. I'll introduce it based on my first division, that is, verses 1-3. I give you these outlines, they are not in any way inspired or part of the text, but you look for the main themes in these sections as you outline the section, and it helps you to keep the individual verses in context. Let's read verses 1-3, Paul's salutation or greeting. "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, 2 And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house: 3 Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Notice verse 1 starts with the author of the epistle, Paul. This is Paul the Apostle. This is Paul who was first Saul of Tarsus, famously converted in Acts 9 on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians and have them imprisoned, who wrote so many epistles in the New Testament. There's really very little doubt about it. Paul mentions himself again in verse 19, in the very text itself he mentions his own name. We don't need to belabor who the human author is, again we know, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God."

It's interesting that Philemon was opposed by a lot of early church fathers as to being part of the canon of Scripture because they felt like it lacked doctrinal content. The idea that it lacks doctrinal content doesn't necessarily negate the idea that it's given by inspiration of God. Just because it's not a doctrinal epistle, it's not setting forth the doctrine of justification by faith as does Romans and Galatians, it's still given by inspiration to Paul as he wrote to Philemon and the church there in Colossae.

Notice that Paul is a prisoner as well, verse 1. Paul is the human author, writing in prison. In verses 9, 10, 13, and 23 you again have a reference to his bonds or the fact that he was in prison, so Paul is writing in prison. Now, this is where you need to listen carefully. Paul had two imprisonments, two major imprisonments, not counting the Acts 16 in Philippi, but Paul was basically put in prison two times, so we refer to them as Paul's first imprisonment and then Paul's second imprisonment. This is written during Paul's first imprisonment when he was arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome to stand trial before Caesar Nero. He would be released, have a short period of freedom, be rearrested under different charges, and then actually be martyred and write his last letter to Timothy, 2 Timothy, before he actually gave his life for Christ.

Let me say this about the first imprisonment. During this time when Paul was in prison, he was technically under house arrest, so he wasn't in a dungeon. The second imprisonment he was in what's called the Mamertine dungeon because he was arrested for political reasons. The first arrest was for religious reasons that Rome dismissed; the second arrest was for political reasons, and he was actually put to death for his faith in Jesus Christ. He was in a dungeon, the Mamertine dungeon.

The first imprisonment under house arrest he wrote the following letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. These are known as the prison epistles. Even though 2 Timothy was written from prison, it's not one of the grouping known as the prison epistles because it's a pastoral epistle. First Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are known as pastoral epistles. They are written to pastors, and they are in the order of 1 Timothy, Titus, and then 2 Timothy. Second Timothy is actually the last words that Paul penned before he was put to death for his faith in Jesus Christ. This book of Philemon is a prison epistle along with Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Of the prison epistles, Philemon is the only one uniquely written to an individual. All the other prison epistles were written to churches. Philemon was written to an individual, obviously his name is Philemon. Philemon was a Christian. It seems that he was a wealthy Christian. He lived in Colossae. When Paul was in Ephesus doing ministry there for three years, he never really got over to Colossae, which is in what's called the Hierapolis Valley, so evidently Philemon came from Colossae to Ephesus and met Paul and served with Paul and got to know Paul. Philemon is from Colossae, and Paul is writing to him personally and individually.

Paul is, "a prisoner of Jesus Christ." The fact that he says he's a prisoner of Jesus Christ and not Rome or the Roman government is significant. He saw that God was in control of the circumstances of his life. He didn't say, "This lousy Roman government arrested me for no good reason, and I'm mad and angry and I need to get some good lawyers going here." He said, "No, I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ." Over and over and over and over again, when Paul mentions his imprisonment, he realizes it was according to the will of God, the plan of God, the purpose of God. Now, we might not understand all the purposes God had, but had Paul not spent time in prison, he may not have written Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians, those marvelous prison epistles. I'm kind of glad that God said, "Paul, we need to write these letters. You're going to be put in prison for a little while. You're not going to preach, but you're going to be able to pray and pen these letters."

I don't know about you, but I'm so thankful for these prison epistles. I think about the richness of Ephesians. I think about the blessings of Colossians. I think about the marvelous book of Philippians, what a marvelous book that is. This restricted time for Paul was purposed by God for His glory and for our good, and thank God for that.

Don't freak out when your circumstances don't look like what you want them to be. God is in control. Amen? We need to rest in Him and trust in Him. God is not unaware of what's happening to you tonight. You may be crying out, "God, where are You? God, do You know what's happening? God, do You see the condition or situation I'm in?" God sees, God knows, God cares. When the people of Israel were in bondage to Egypt, they thought, What are You doing, God? Four hundred years in Egypt as slaves. He was building them as a nation, He redeemed them and brought them out by a strong arm, and then He gave them His promises in His covenant and His Word. We may not see or understand why God has my circumstances the way they are, and if you're discouraged tonight, realize that maybe you're out of work, you're out of work according to the will of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, either that or you're just not

looking for jobs. Or, you're single according to the will of God in Jesus Christ. Don't freak out, rest in the Lord. Amen? I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Then, Paul mentions Timothy, which is one of my favorite traveling companions of Paul. The name Timothy means one who honors God. I love the name Timothy, and Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy, those pastoral epistles, to this young man. He says, "...and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon,"—there he's named in verse 1—"our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer." You're going to get a lot of real insight to this Philemon as he's described by Paul. Even in the salutation he doesn't waste any time by saying he's, "dearly beloved, and a fellowlabourer."

It's a wonderful thing when we can couple our lives together with other believers and have that love relationship as brothers and sisters in Christ. We can pray for one another, serve one another, lock arms together. Paul was not a lone ranger. Paul always had a group of people around him, he was in fellowship with others, and he was thanking God for them.

Paul is writing to Philemon. He's called, "...our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer," and in verse 2, "And to our beloved Apphia." There's little doubt and most scholars believe (and I agree) that Apphia is his wife, so Philemon had a wife. Her name was Apphia, and it's believed he had a son, but we can't be sure or dogmatic about it, "Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house,"—notice that. It would seem that Apphia was his wife and Archippus was his son. Another hypothesis is Archippus was the pastor of the church, and the church met in the home or the house of Philemon. He owned a slave, at least one, Onesimus. He had a house that was big enough to have a church in it, so it's concluded that he was well off, he had a large house, and maybe many slaves. He had a church that met in his house.

The word "church" is the Greek word ekklesia, which means called out assembly. Notice they didn't meet in the church building with a steeple and a cross, stained glass and pews, they met in their home because the church is not a building. Amen? You and I are the church. We're living stones compacted together and made a habitation for God by His Spirit, so when you leave here tonight, the church leaves the building. This is a sanctuary set apart for the worship of God, but this building is not the church—you are the church, we are the church, and we have the church universal and the church local here at Revival Christian Fellowship. This is a church that met in their house.

The church I formerly pastored was Calvary Chapel San Bernardino. In 1971, we started a small Bible study in a home with just five of us sitting around a dining room table that grew larger and larger. We had over a hundred people meeting in this house. Then, we moved into a chapel that we rented and then finally bought our own building in years and years and years of ministry as the church grew; but it started as a group of believers in a house and God blessed that and it grew as a church. The church is not a building, the church is people, and we need to keep that in mind. As you gather in your home, you can certainly have church, even in your living room.

Notice the normal greeting of Paul. It starts with, "Grace to you, and peace, from God our

Father.” In the pastoral epistles he actually adds a word uniquely, “mercy.” The only time he adds “mercy” in this greeting is to pastors. I’ve always kind of jokingly thought that’s because he knew that pastors need a lot of help, they need all the mercy they can get. In his other greetings, it was actually grace or peace, as *charis* and *shalom*, which is sometimes believed to be the Greek greeting, grace, and then the Hebrew *shalom*. It comes, “...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

I don’t want to tarry on this, we need to get through this letter. The fact that God the Father is coupled with Jesus Christ indicates His deity of Jesus Christ, that He’s one with the Father in essence. It also supports the doctrine of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned, but we certainly have two persons, God the Father and God the Son. It puts Jesus on an equal par with God the Father as being divine because grace and peace come from Him. This is the opening greeting of the church.

Let me give you just a quick synopsis. It’s a little bit of a challenge. It’s just like going down the street and opening a mailbox (don’t do this), taking out someone’s mail, and finding a personal letter from so-and-so to so-and-so, reading it, and trying to understand everything that’s going on in their interaction and relationship. This is a personal letter from Paul to Philemon. What’s happening is Paul was in Rome under house arrest. He was given liberty to preach the gospel, and somehow, someway, a man by the name of Onesimus (we’ll get him in the text tonight) who is the slave, ran away from his master, Philemon, in Colossae and tried to get lost in the big city of Rome. He ended up getting found by the preaching of Paul—he came to Jesus Christ and was saved. Way over in Colossae you have this slave that ran away from his master, Philemon, maybe he was under conviction, maybe he was just rebelling against his master, there’s a lot that we don’t know.

When we get to heaven, one of the people I want to meet is Onesimus. I want to get Philemon and have a little time with them—maybe a thousand years or so (we’ve no less days to tell our stories than when we first begun). I want to ask a lot of questions from Onesimus about his relationship to Philemon, how it all went down, how did he find Paul, and how did it all work out.

Anyway, the summary is that he ran away to get lost in the big city and was found by Christ. He came to faith in Jesus Christ through the ministry of Paul in Rome while he was in shackles (think about this, I’ll come back to this). You have a slave running for freedom from his master and he sees this former Jewish rabbi, Paul the Apostle, preaching in chains. He saw the glory of God, no doubt, in his face and the liberty that he saw in Christ. He heard the good news, and said, “I’m still enslaved to sin, this man is free,” and he believed in Jesus Christ and became a Christian. Somehow Paul found out that Onesimus, the runaway slave who was converted under his ministry, was from Colossae. He said, “Well, I know a lot of people from Colossae. Who is your master?” He replied, “Philemon.” “Wow! What a small world. I know Philemon. He’s a Christian brother. I’m going to write a letter and have you and the others go with you (Tychicus that carries this letter to the other churches). I’m going to have him go with you and escort you back. I’m going to ask Philemon to forgive you and to accept you back, no longer as a slave but as a brother in Christ.”

There's a beautiful message of friendship, of love, and forgiveness in the book of Philemon. We'll see some characteristics of friendship, caring for one another, and the qualities in Philemon that you want to look for in a friend. If God forgives us, which is basically what Paul is saying to Philemon, how can we not forgive others? This rebellious slave, that possibly robbed Philemon and fled from him, actually needs to be forgiven, because now he's a brother in Christ, and accepted back, and the whole thing where Paul says, "I'll pay whatever debt he left you, you can put it to my account." What a marvelous picture there as well. That's a picture.

He moves in verses 4-7 by still kind of warming up to his topic of forgiving Onesimus, the runaway slave, by expressing his appreciation. In verses 1-3, Paul's salutation; verses 4-7, Paul's appreciation for Philemon. Let's read it. He says, "I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, 5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; 6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. 7 For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels,"—or heart—"of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother."

Paul typically, when he writes to a church, will address the spiritual leader of the church, the pastor, and maybe give them a commendation or a general commendation to the congregation or the church, but this time he singles out this individual that he's writing to, Philemon. Notice, go back to verse 4. Part of having good Christian friends is having a heart for others that we're thankful for. This is true of Paul in verse 4, "I thank my God,"—and then being prayerful for others—"making mention of thee always in my prayers." You can simply look at it like this: Paul was a friend maker because he was thankful for these other people in his life.

Ask yourself tonight, are you thankful for the friends and the Christian brothers and sisters that God has brought into your life? Are you thankful to God for them, and do you let them know that you're thankful for them? It might start with your spouse, if you're married. Say, "I'm thankful to God for you." Instead of bashing them and complaining to them about their shortcomings, say, "I'm thankful for you." Do you know what that can do to the heart of an individual hearing that? Right now think about some people that you're thankful for and then send them a text (not right now, wait until we're done), or call them on the phone, write them a letter, send them a card.

One of the things that thrills my heart is getting little cards from the congregation, "Thank you, Pastor John, for the message Sunday," or "for your teaching on Sundays or Wednesdays." It blesses me and encourages my heart. If you're thankful for your friends, give thanks to God and let others know that you're thankful for them. He doesn't really shy away from saying, "Philemon, I want you to know I'm thankful to God for you."

I don't think this was insincere or that it was a tactic to butter him up before he lays his request upon him, I think it's the genuine heart of a true child of God to be thankful for others. And, prayerful as well, verse 4, "...making mention of thee always in my prayers." Whenever you find Paul in prison, guess what he's doing? Praying, praying, praying, praying, praying, praying.

Amen?

Maybe you're put in the hospital, you can pray, pray, pray, pray; maybe you're sitting in a cubicle all day, and you can pray while you're working and talk to God—whatever you find yourself. Paul's imprisonment did not hinder his prayer life, it actually emboldened it, so be thankful and prayerful for others. Paul believed in the power of prayer.

Then Paul begins to describe Philemon, "Hearing of thy love,"—so he was getting word about Philemon's love (this is agape love)—"and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints." Again, he was thankful for his love, which is the mark of a true believer, and for his faith which is trust in the Lord, "...and,"—also—"toward all saints,"—not just some of them but all of them. He was a man who was impacting the lives of others. Paul was thankful for Philemon. He was praying for Philemon and the others probably in the church of Colossae, and he was thankful for Philemon's love that he had for Christ and for the other saints. Again, if you want to find a good Christian friend, look for somebody who loves Jesus and loves the saints.

Paul then describes this, "...communication of thy faith." The word "communication" is the word *koinonia* which normally is translated fellowship. It means joint participation, so your communication or *koinonia* your fellowship with the saints, he was actively involved with them, "...may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus." He was loving toward others, verse 5; he was a servant toward others, verse 6; and fifthly, he was also, verse 7, one who brought joy to others. "For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels,"—now, I'm reading from the King James translation and the word 'bowels' is actually conveying the idea of the heart, the emotions, the inner feelings—"of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother." What a beautiful person Philemon was. This is why, again, I want to meet him when we get to heaven.

Wouldn't you like that to be said about you? The words that Paul uses in commendation for Philemon we should desire them to be said about you—that we love Jesus, we love and encourage and comfort the saints, and that we bring joy to others. Our lives should be bringing joy to the saints and encouraging them. Are you thankful for others? Do you tell them that you are thankful for them? Do you pray for them? Does your life bring joy to them when they think about you? It's appreciation.

Beginning in verse 8, down to verse 17, Paul gets into the heart of why he's writing to Philemon. It's his appeal. We have his greeting, salutation, his appreciation, and now his appeal. Verse 8, "Wherefore,"—notice the "wherefore" in verse 8 and why it's there for. It's there because of verses 4-7, all that he saw and commended in the life of Philemon led him to feel comfortable to make this petition. In light of that, he says, "Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,"—in other words he says, 'I could use my apostolic authority and be very bold and kind of in your face, and I can actually command you' (to enjoin means to command you)—"Yet,"—this is the approach he said he wanted to take, verse 9—"for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the

aged, and now also a prisoner,”—there’s a reference to his imprisonment—“of Jesus Christ.”

An interesting point there, too, Paul mentions he’s, “Paul the aged.” It’s interesting that he was probably in his sixties. I don’t know where in his sixties, but evidently 60 was aged even in Bible days. He says, “...the aged.” He’d been around the block and says there, “...Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. 10 I beseech thee for my son,”—and here’s his name for the first time in the letter—“Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.”

The name, and I’ll come back to it, Onesimus means profitable. He’s going to do a play on words in just a minute and say, “Onesimus, who is profitable, ran away from you and became a fugitive and unprofitable but then got saved; and profitable, who became unprofitable, is now profitable.” He’s actually using this play on words to communicate this to Philemon.

Verse 8, “...I might be much bold,”—I could command you. One of the reasons why this letter is called “The Polite Letter” (and that’s the title I gave to my study tonight) is because he doesn’t just overpower Philemon and say, “I’m Paul the Apostle. Forgive him. Let him be set free,” and “I’m telling you to do this.” He very politely and very compassionately says, verse 9, “Yet for love’s sake I rather beseech thee,”—or beg thee—“being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. 10 I beseech thee,”—‘I’m asking you,’ and then calls Onesimus—“my son...whom I have begotten in my bonds.” This is a clear statement to the fact that Onesimus came to Christ through Paul’s ministry. Paul is referring to Onesimus as his son, so Paul became his spiritual father in that sense leading him to Christ. Then, he says, “...whom I have begotten in my bonds,” which is a reference to his imprisonment, so he’s in chains preaching and people are getting saved.

Verse 11, “Which in time past was to thee unprofitable,”—this is the play on words. This Onesimus, “Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.” The Roman world at this time had at least two million slaves. There were actually more slaves in the Roman world than free men. The book of Philemon, I won’t develop it much tonight, is also a letter that we can use to get a lot of light shed on the issue of slavery in the Bible days and even as that relates to today. It was part of the culture of that period, and all the manual labor jobs, and even some of the professional jobs, some doctors and other physicians and lawyers, were slaves. A large percentage of the Roman population were slaves. Actually one-third of Rome were slaves. That’s why they were afraid of a slave rebellion taking place, and if someone ran away like Onesimus did, he could easily be put to death for escaping from his master. In that time and in that culture slavery was just integrated as part of the economy and the way they lived.

The Bible doesn’t specifically condemn slavery, but it doesn’t endorse it either. What it does is present Christianity in a way that the truth changes men’s hearts and how they view one another which led to the emancipation of slaves because of the understanding that we’re brothers in Christ. He’s going to tell Philemon he’s no longer just a slave, he’s now your brother in Christ and hints at the idea of releasing him, giving him his freedom, that “I believe you’ll do more than even what I ask you to do.” What Christianity did, instead of directly attacking

slavery, is they preached the gospel. People's hearts were changed, and they began to love one another as brothers in Christ. In the church there were free men and slaves, and they began to release their slaves and treat them respectfully.

Time and time and time again, in the epistles of Paul, especially the prison epistles, he does give instructions for masters on how they should treat their slaves—that they should love and respect them and treat them fairly. He also tells slaves how they should work hard and respect their masters as being examples to them of a Christian individual.

I read today that in the Roman Empire during this time that Christian slaves were actually in demand, they actually sold for more money than non-Christian slaves because of the instructions Paul gave them to love their masters, to serve them well, and eventually it led to the demise of slavery. They didn't attack slavery directly (which would've caused a war, people would've been killed, riots taking place), the gospel is what changed culture.

When you study Philemon you learn that Christianity can actually change the culture by changing the heart of individuals. We live in a democratic society today, which they did not in Rome, so we can be politically involved and active in voting, and we should. We should stand up for righteousness and truth, but the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. The church must stay faithful to their task of preaching the gospel as well as being salt and we should also be light. We should be socially engaged, but we should also be evangelistically preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's go back to our text. The man Onesimus was unprofitable (he ran away), "...but now profitable to thee and to me,"—Paul said he's a blessing to me—"Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him." If you're taking notes, I want you to mark that, "I'm sending him back to you. Receive him." Don't punish him. Don't kill him. Don't do anything negative, just "...receive him, that is, mine own bowels,"—heart. He's saying, "Receive him as you would receive me. Open your heart and accept him back." Paul would not coerce Philemon, he wanted him to respond in Christian love. We should never try to coerce, force, or manipulate anybody into doing something. We should always pray for them, exhort them, and encourage them to do it out of love.

It's interesting that he didn't write a letter to Philemon and say, "Hey, this dude got saved," (I'm using the word 'dude' for Onesimus) "and I found out he's your slave. Before I send him back, I'd like to keep him. Can I have him? If he stayed with me, it would be a blessing." He didn't do that. He sent him back first because it was the right thing to do—it was the polite thing to do—with a letter saying, "I'm returning him to you, that's the right thing to do, but you should forgive him and receive him and maybe you'll send him back to me."

Go back to verse 13, "Whom I have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me,"—so, I would have liked to have kept him here in Rome because he was ministering to me in my bonds of the gospel, verse 14,—But without thy mind,"—which means without your consent—"would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but

willingly,”—notice the difference, “I don’t want you to feel that you have an obligation to do it, I want you to be willing voluntarily to do it.” Make a note of that.

All Christian service should be voluntary. We should serve the Lord with grateful hearts, thankful hearts, humble hearts. You never want to do ministry for the Lord out of a sense of duty and obligation unwillingly, “I don’t want to teach the Sunday school class, but they need teachers really bad so I’m going to go teach the brats.” Please don’t do that. Do it out of love; do it out of a willing heart. Everything we do we should do willingly to the Lord. Any ministry that you might be involved in here at Revival Christian Fellowship, do it willingly as unto the Lord.

I love verse 15, “For perhaps,”—he gives a hypothetical possibility about Onesimus’ running away and getting saved—“he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; 16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? 17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.” Trust me, we will get through this letter today. This is where it really gets amazing. First of all, he says, “For perhaps,”—and I have it underlined, highlighted, and always been blessed by this “perhaps” of Paul the Apostle who is writing under divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. “For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.”

Sometimes when things go wrong in our lives, we’re wondering why God allowed it, what God is doing, and sometimes we don’t really see until we get a little further down the road with a little bit more perspective and sometimes even hindsight. Hindsight is 20/20, right? Paul is telling Philemon, “I know that it probably was a bummer to find your slave ripped you off and ran away, and you lost a good slave. He probably robbed you in the process, but perhaps—maybe God was using it for eternal things.” It’s a perspective that is seeing the hand of God, we use the term “providence of God,” in this situation.

Philemon could’ve been angry. He could’ve said, “He’s there in Rome? Send him right now! I’m going to whip him and beat him.” Paul says, “Listen. Think about this. Perhaps, perhaps he ran away from you, which was a bummer, but he ended up in Rome, he heard the gospel, and got saved so that he could come back to you, not just as a slave but more than a slave, a brother beloved, and not just for a season, but for eternity. How marvelous is that?” Sometimes with our limited perspective, we’re freaking out, “Why would God let this happen? What’s going on? This is terrible. This is a disaster. I can’t believe he’d run away. I can’t believe he’d rob me. I can’t believe this took place.” Paul says, “Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. Perhaps, perhaps God was in this.” This is a great verse to put alongside Romans 8:28 which says what? “And we know that all things work together for,”—what?—“for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” So, just perhaps...

I think of Joseph who was sold by his brothers. Remember when his brothers brought back his bloody coat, tore it up, tricked their dad Jacob to think that his son Joseph was dead? Remember what Jacob said when he saw the bloody coat of Joseph, his beloved son? He

said, "...all these things are against me." He just freaked out, "...all these things are against me." Wait a minute, Jacob, all you need to do is hang in there. Read the next two chapters. Joseph is alive. Joseph is in Egypt. Joseph is going to save you and sustain you and become a great man. "...perhaps..."—perhaps what you see as a reverse or a negative is going to be used by God in a glorious way, that he might come back and you might have not, verse 15, "...for a season,"—but —"...for ever"—Christian love and brotherhood seen in this text—"Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? 17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself."

This is the beginning of a very clear picture of a doctrinal truth, so bear with me. The doctrinal truth is what's called the believer's identification with Christ. Paul argues for Philemon to take Onesimus the slave back and to accept him as he would accept Paul himself. That's the same principle by which the believer finds acceptance before God the Father in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ. Read Ephesians 1:6, "...he hath made us accepted in the beloved." I like that. Our standing and acceptance before God is that we are in Christ, so we are accepted by God the Father as being His own dear Son. Someone said, "Near, so very near, nearer I could not be; but in the Person of His Son I'm just as near as He. Dear, so very dear, dearer I could not be, but in the Person of His Son, I'm just as dear as He." It's a picture of our identification in Christ. Do you know that God the Father looks at you as a believer, a Christian, as being in Christ and accepts you in Christ, not in your goodness or righteousness but in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is the doctrine of the believer's identification with Christ.

In closing, verses 18-25, we have Paul's assurance of payment, some more doctrinal pictures. "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought,"—Onesimus has done something wrong and has robbed from you and owes you anything—"put that on mine account,"—another doctrinal picture here of what's called imputation. The first picture is that of identification; the second one, and I'll come back to it, is that of imputation. He says, verse 19, "I Paul have written it with mine own hand,"—and again—"I will repay it,"—isn't that cool? Put it on my account, put it on my tab, I will repay if he owes you anything. "...albeit,"—however—"I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self,"—this is where he does kind of tighten the screws on Philemon a little bit. "I have to remind you that I led you to Christ, and you owe your salvation to my influence and my ministry in your life," so—"thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. 20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels,"—heart—"in the Lord,"—bring me joy.

Verse 21, "Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say,"—he was confident of Philemon's obedience and that he would even go beyond what Paul was asking and possibly even alluding to releasing Onesimus. Verse 22, "But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you." Would you take your guest room and wash the sheets of the bed, prepare the room, and get it ready, but pray, "...through your prayers,"—Paul understanding the power of prayer—"I shall be given unto you." Paul was released from his first imprisonment. Verse 23, "There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; 24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas,

Lucas, my fellowlabourers. 25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Paul talked about the believer's identification when he actually said, verse 17, "...receive him as myself," and now he talks about the believers having imputing to him the righteousness of Christ. It's also the doctrine of substitution where Jesus died to pay our debt when he says, "...put that on mine account." Isn't that what Jesus did for us? We owed a debt we couldn't pay, He paid a debt He didn't owe. When Jesus died on the cross He said, "It is finished," right? "Tetelestai," paid in full. He paid our debt, and it's put to our account, His righteousness, "...I will repay it," so there's substitution, imputation, and forgiveness. Christ paid it all, all to Him we owe.

Paul was confident that Philemon would obey, verse 21, and that he would pray, verse 22. Verse 23, "There salute thee Epaphras,"—then he salutes those that are there in the church in Colossae, first a guy named Epaphras, which some feel was maybe one of the pastors. He had journeyed from Colossae to be with Paul, now he's, "...my fellowprisoner,"—with Paul—"in Christ Jesus;" and verse 24, "Marcus,"—is a reference to John Mark, who is also the one the gospel of Mark was written by. It is believed he got his information from Peter, but it's Mark's gospel. This is the same Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark, known as John Mark, who flaked on Paul but actually came back and began to serve together with him. Then, "...Aristarchus,"—who was actually a companion of Paul—"Demas,"—is the one that Paul later would say, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,"—and—"Lucas,"—is actually Luke the author of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts—"my fellowlabourers,"—with me, Dr. Luke, and then closes with—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

I want to throw up on the screen and then make these five last points where we see how Christian love and friendship works. Let me summarize it. First of all, we should be thankful and prayerful for others, verse 4. Second, we should seek the welfare of others. We saw that in verse 10. Thirdly, we should deal honestly with others, not coerce or pressure them, but pray for them. We saw that also in verse 14. Fourthly, bear the burdens of others, verse 18, "...put that on mine account." I think of the Good Samaritan when he put the man in the inn and gave the innkeeper money, right? What did he say? "When I come back through this part of town, if he owes you anything more, I'm good for it. I'll pay it." It's a picture of Christ paying for our debt; but we, in our friendships, should bear the burdens of others. Fifthly, believers should actually be a blessing to others, verse 21, "Having confidence in thy obedience...knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say." We should do the best we can to bless and encourage others.

Now, we all are God's Onesimus'. We're all slaves to sin. We've wronged our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. We've all run from Him, but He reaches down in His grace and saves us, right? What does He do? Forgives us and sets us free, so how could we not forgive others that have wronged us?

What a beautiful picture that Onesimus runs away, trying to get lost in the big city of Rome. Well, probably when he ran out of money that he had stolen from his master Philemon, he was walking down the street, dejected and saw a crowd. Looking over the crowd he saw a man

sitting there preaching, in chains, but he heard the message of freedom and he received Christ and was born again. Isn't it awesome how God can use even the reverses and the problems of our lives for our good and for His glory? Out of all the people in Rome, how is it that Onesimus just so happened to encounter Paul the Apostle? Can you imagine when Philemon read that letter, "Paul? You know Paul? You met Paul? Where did you see Paul?" "I was in Rome and he was preaching and I accepted Jesus." "You're a Christian?" He kept reading with interest. I have no doubt but Philemon forgave Onesimus, and they're going to be hanging out together in heaven.

Do you see the power of the gospel to change lives and to change society and to change culture. Amen? Let's pray.