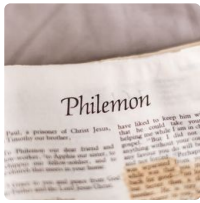


OpenTheo

Philemon (Full Book)



Philemon - Steve Gregg

In this biblical study, Steve Gregg examines the book of Philemon to reconstruct the situation and draw clues about the story. While the book may not provide enough data to fully picture the story, Paul's prayers for Philemon suggest that he was known to him. Paul also prays for Philemon's faith sharing to become effective, indicating that effectiveness may not be automatic. Overall, the study offers insights into the historical context and themes of the biblical book.

Transcript

Open our Bibles to the book of Philemon. This is a short book, only one chapter, 25 verses. Different than most books in that it is intensely personal.

It's in fact a personal letter from one man to another man about a particular matter that concerns yet a third man. Rather than tell you all the things I would normally say in introduction to the book, I think maybe I'll read the book and you can pick up much of it yourself. Those who teach about the inductive study method of Scripture, which is to read the Scripture itself and to simply draw from the text what is there rather than imposing on it what we think might belong there.

Often they use the book of Philemon as a test case because it is a book where if you have a study Bible and it has introductions to books, you can read in the introduction about all the setting of this book and so forth. But realize that the person who wrote the notes for that study Bible doesn't have any more material on this situation than the book of Philemon itself. Everything we know, if you've heard anything about the story of Philemon or Onesimus or anything like that, we don't know any of that information from independent sources.

It is all drawn from the book itself. And it's an interesting exercise in biblical study to look at the book of Philemon and to draw from it all the clues that are necessary to reconstruct the situation. Now see, Paul, when he writes letters, of course, the letters of Paul are what we call occasional documents.

They're written for an occasion. They're not, I mean, some of them fit more across the

board. A book like Romans would be, you know, not so much suited to any one occasion.

But books like Corinthians and Thessalonians and Philippians and Colossians and Philemon, these are all books that are written and Galatians that are written to meet the need of a situation on a particular occasion. And a lot of times we can gain information about the background and the occasion of the writing from historical data, what we know historically or politically going on or socially in a certain area. But you can't do that with Philemon because it's too personal.

It's about the relationships between three men. And the only thing we can learn about them is what we learn in the book itself. But it does provide within it more than adequate data to really get a picture of what the story is.

Although the book of Philemon does not tell the story, but rather presupposes a knowledge of the story, since all the three men involved were players in the story and knew what had happened. Yet we can draw from various parts of the book all things necessary to know what really was the setting. So rather than give you all that information at the outset, I'd like to just read the book.

It is short enough to do that without seeming burdensome. And when we have done so, we will draw from it the information that is suitable to our understanding of it. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our beloved friend and fellow laborer.

And the beloved Ephian, our kippus, our fellow soldier and the church in your house. Grace to you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith, which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgement of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you, being such a one as Paul, the agent and now also the prisoner of Jesus Christ. I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains.

Who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. I am sending him back. You therefore receive him.

That is my own heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent, I wanted to do nothing that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntarily. For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever.

No longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me. But how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.

But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account. I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay.

Not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self, besides. Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord, refresh my heart in the Lord. Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I say.

But meanwhile also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you. As do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Now what could we deduce from this letter as to its background? First of all, there are things that we could deduce that aren't particularly relevant to the story, at least not directly so.

We can see that there was a man named Paul who wrote it. We know who he is. Timothy was with him.

We also know who he is. But we are introduced first of all to a person we don't know in verse one where he says to Philemon. Now we don't know who he is.

He is not known from any other book of the Bible. He's not mentioned in Acts. He's not mentioned in any other epistle.

And so we are we are introduced here to a stranger from whom about whom we must deduce all that we are to know from what is said in the text. Who was Philemon? Well, Philemon is not alone addressed, but a couple of other individuals in verse two, the beloved Athea, which is a female name. And Archippus, who is said to be our fellow soldier.

Now, we do have reference to Archippus elsewhere over in Colossians. And chapter four in verse 17. Where Paul tells the Colossian church, say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord that you may fulfill it.

So Archippus had received a ministry or a service that God had appointed him to. And Paul encouraged him to fulfill that service. Now, Paul greets apparently the same man saying he is our fellow soldier.

Now, of course, this should not be thought to refer to a soldier in terms of military enlistment, but rather as Paul was a soldier of the gospel. He's out there fighting the good fight. He's out there advancing the kingdom of God against the adversary, the

kingdom of darkness.

So also apparently Archippus was. But having said that, we still know very little about Philemon, Athea or Archippus. In fact, from this, we know more about Archippus than we know about the other two.

Now, what is perhaps helpful is to see that after these three people are named, it says and to the church in your house in verse two. From this, we learn that in the town these people were in and we've not yet deduced what town that is, but we will have enough information later to know. But in the town where they lived, there was a church that met in their home.

Now, their home probably refers to all three of the persons mentioned. Your house would probably be a reference to the house of Philemon, Athea and Archippus, in which case it would be probably safe to deduce that Philemon was the master of the house. Athea may have been his wife, probably was.

And Archippus, another member of the household, possibly their son. Because these were the residents of one house where the church was hosted for its regular meetings. Of course, we know from many places in Scripture that churches met in homes in the first century.

In fact, in the first century, there were no church buildings. All churches either met in homes or they met in other kinds of public places that anyone could use, but they didn't have buildings of their own that they called churches. But here was a man, Philemon, who was apparently the host of the church in his town, or at least a church in his town.

And then we have the traditional greeting in verse 3, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, it's not until really verse 8 that we get any information about the occasion for Paul writing or what it is he's writing about. Because before he gets around to his order of business, he has some of the regular formalities of thanking God for his reader.

And stating something about what he's praying for, for his reader. Now, most epistles are written to churches. And so we read that Paul, for instance, the Philippian churches, I thank my God on every remembrance of you and I pray for you.

And he tells what he prays for the church. Here he does the same thing for the man and maybe his family, Philemon. And this is sort of the traditional place in the epistle to include this kind of information.

I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints. Now, we can learn more about Philemon here. He's a man that warms Paul's heart to remember.

When Paul remembers him, he thanks God for him. But he prays for him. Now, remember, Paul doesn't only pray for people who are doing badly.

We remember in the book of Colossians that he talks about how he'd heard of the love and the faith and the hope of the church. And therefore, he prays for them without ceasing. I mentioned when we were studying Colossians that it is perhaps more our habit to pray for those that we think are in desperate need and not doing well.

And that those who are doing well, we won't burden our prayer time with reference to them. But Paul knew that when people are doing well, they still need prayer for two reasons. One, those who are doing well become special targets for the enemy.

And two, even those who are doing well are not doing perfectly. There are people who are good Christians who still have areas where they need prayer. And that would appear to be the case with this man, Philemon.

Paul had heard good things about the man, about his love and his faith. Now, the fact that Paul says, I've heard about your love and your faith, raises questions as to whether Paul knows this man personally or whether it's by hearsay. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul says he has heard of their love and their faith and that they have heard of his ministry.

And scholars usually deduce from this that Paul had never been to the church of Colossae. He only knew about them by hearsay. And yet, Paul seems to know this man, Philemon.

He even goes on later to say that the man owes him his own life and speaks to him as though they are familiar with each other. So, I think it's not likely that Paul only knew about Philemon by hearsay, though one could maybe try to draw that from verse 5. But it's also possible that since Paul, as we believe, was a prisoner at this time, this letter we will have evidence to see later was written at the same time as the other prison epistles, that he, although he had known Philemon personally, face to face, he had not seen him recently and knew only of his present state by hearsay. And therefore, he's heard of, the most recent report he's heard is that the man is commendable in terms of his love and his faith, which he has toward the Lord and toward all the saints.

You can't do any better than that, can you? How could a man wish for more in his life? Well, yet Paul has something for which he prays for the man. He prays it in verse 6. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective. The man is the host of the church in his home.

He apparently shares his faith. Now, whether he does that as the leader of the church, we cannot say. He may not.

I mean, he may be the preacher in the congregation. Or he may simply be like any

Christian, one who tries to share his faith from time to time. Any Christian might have that duty, whether he's the leader of the church or not.

But Paul prays that this man's sharing of his faith will become effective, which may suggest that the man's sharing of his faith was not at this point as effective as it could be, or at least that the effectiveness of his sharing of his faith is not an automatic given, that this is something for which Paul feels the need to pray, that this man will continue or begin to be more effective in his sharing of his faith. And how is this to be accomplished? Well, he says he's praying that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. Now, in some manuscripts it says every good thing which is in us in Christ Jesus.

We really cannot settle the textual question. I mean, either of the readings might be correct, but it doesn't make a great deal of difference. The important thing is that he says that this man's sharing of his faith would become more effective if he were to acknowledge every good thing that was in him or in us, all Christians, in Christ Jesus, which suggests perhaps that the man was not as effective in his sharing of his faith as he might otherwise be due to a neglect of acknowledging the good things that were in him.

Now, this makes a great verse for self-esteem teaching, doesn't it? I mean, you need to acknowledge all those good things in you, brother. You can't really be effective for God until you have a higher self-image and recognize all those great things that are in you. Well, it's true, it would make a very good teaching text on self-esteem if it didn't end the way it does, because the last line is in Christ Jesus, every good thing that is in you in Christ Jesus.

Now, when we say that there are good things in you or in us, we have to realize that those good things have very little to do with us at all. In fact, Paul said in Romans chapter eight, excuse me, Romans chapter seven and verse 18, For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells or dwells no good thing. In my flesh, that means in my natural state, a Christian has himself, but he also has Christ.

And he's been crucified with Christ and he's not it's not he that lives, but Christ lives in him. In himself, the Christian has no good thing. In me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing.

And yet Paul tells Philemon, it's necessary to acknowledge the good things that are in you in Christ Jesus. If you would ask me whether there are good things in me, I could answer yes and no. In my flesh, no.

In Christ, yes. But in my flesh means the part that I am, the part that I contribute to the picture, the part that I can lay any claim to myself. No, there's nothing there.

Nothing to feel good about myself for. Because there's nothing that sets me apart from

somebody else. By the way, when you evaluate yourself as high or low in terms of your self-esteem, generally speaking, if you're going to evaluate anything in terms of high or low, you've got to have some standard by which you're measuring.

And most people have high or low self-esteem measured by the standard of other people. You know, somebody else is better looking than me. Somebody's smarter than me.

Somebody's more talented than me. Somebody's more athletic than me. Therefore, I have low self-esteem.

If I was exactly the same as I am now, and everybody was less handsome, less talented, less intelligent, less athletic, I'd feel great about myself. I wouldn't be any different. It's just the standard by which I was measuring would be different.

And when people assess themselves, either to think well or not of themselves, they're measuring by some standard. And they either feel good about themselves or bad about themselves as they measure against that standard. If they're better in the traits that they're measuring against everyone else around them, or the most, they feel good about themselves.

If they're worse, they feel bad. Although their feeling about themselves or the standard that they're using doesn't change anything about who they are innately. Paul said, what makes you differ from another? He said this in 1 Corinthians 4, 7. He said, what makes you to differ from another, and what do you have that you've not received? And if you have received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? Now, what Paul's saying is any way that you differ from another person is nothing to feel good about yourself for, even if you have some things that make you differ from someone else in a positive way.

Maybe you are smarter than some people. Maybe you are more musical than some people. Maybe you are more artistic.

Maybe you're more pretty or handsome than someone else. But who made you that way? Who made you differ from anyone else, Paul says? And the answer is implied. It's God who gives out these favors, these gifts.

And therefore, if you have more of one than another, it's nothing for you to boast about. What do you have that you have not received, he said. And if you received it, why would you boast as if you didn't? Now, in the world, people just figure that what their natural attributes are is theirs by right.

They claim it, and if they're good ones, they feel good about themselves. If they're bad ones, they feel bad about themselves. The Christian has no truck with this kind of self-image formulation.

Whatever may be said about me in my flesh, there's nothing good. You may be able to say many things about who I am by nature, but none of them could be good if they're going to be true. In me, in my flesh, there was no good thing.

Even the things about me that might seem better than what someone else does. Let's say I'm a little more civilized than some savages. Or I'm a little more morally behaved.

Even if I was not a Christian, I might be more moral than somebody else, conceivably. But even that is not a good thing in itself, because my motivation is what makes something good or bad. I might be more moral because I prefer to be thought of as a moral and a good person.

But if it's not done for the glory of God, if that's not my motivation, it's still a selfish thing. It's not a good thing. It's not pure inside of God.

It's religious, or it's self-serving. In my flesh, I can produce nothing good, because in my nature, I can produce nothing that is for the glory of God. And that is the standard by which we measure good.

And if God is the standard, then I have no area to feel good about myself. I remember a very spiritual man. I looked up to a great deal.

But among the things that were spiritual about him was his obvious humility. He was a very humble man. I asked him, how is it that a man who is obviously looked up to by so many people like myself, as having great spiritual wisdom and maturity and holiness and so forth, how is it that you win the battle against pride? How do you keep humble? Because you've got to have people complimenting you all the time and affirming you all the time and praising you all the time.

How do you stay humble? He said, humility is not really a problem. It all depends on what standard you're using to measure yourself by. If you measure yourself by the spirituality of most Christians, you might have occasion to feel good about yourself.

But he said, if Jesus is the standard, then you never will feel that you're doing great. You'll never feel that you're special or extremely good, because Jesus is always better. And therefore, you'll never have occasion for pride.

You'll never have occasion to have high self-esteem. And that's exactly right. Who I am, compared to God, there's nothing in me worth even acknowledging.

Nothing good. No good thing in my flesh. But there is a different way of looking at the reality, too.

And that is, since I am a Christian, God has invested things in me. He has put his spirit within me. And along with his spirit has come change.

There is genuine love there. There is genuine patience. There is genuine meekness.

There are some good things that have come because of the work of God. There is value there that God has put in me. It's a treasure in an earthen vessel.

The vessel has no value, but the treasure does. I brought the earthen vessel. God brings the treasure, see? Now, if the treasure is in an earthen vessel, how am I supposed to think about that? Is that vessel worth anything? Sure.

You can buy a house with it. It's worth a lot. But not because it's an earthen vessel, but because there's a treasure in it.

The earthen vessel is worthless. Take the treasure out and the earthen vessel would go into the dump. It has no innate value.

It's the treasure that has the value. As long as the treasure is in the vessel, then the whole thing has value. And in Christ, I am gifted.

In Christ, I am fruitful. In Christ, I am different. In Christ, there are good things in me.

There's nothing wrong with acknowledging this. This is not pride because it's the things that are in me in Christ. They're not things that are in me in me.

They're in me in Christ. Not in my flesh. My flesh is the part that I contribute and the only part I could boast about.

And there's nothing there good to boast about. But in Christ, there's much to glory in, much to acknowledge, and much to appreciate. But it's not me, and there's nothing there to increase my self-esteem.

Because those good things that are in me are not from myself at all. They're not even part of myself in the purest sense of that word. They're part of Christ, who has merged himself with me.

And therefore, because of that link, because I am in him, those good things are in me as well. But they're there as sort of an alien thing that was introduced from outside. Not from something that innately grew within me, or that I developed, or that I did something in order to have there.

Now, there's nothing wrong. In fact, there is everything right about acknowledging every good thing that is in you in Christ Jesus. In fact, even the things that are not in themselves spiritual things, let's just say natural talents.

You might well have had a natural talent before you were saved. And now that you're saved, you still have it. The difference is that now that you're saved, God may choose to use that talent to bring fruit to his kingdom.

Before you're saved, there was no possibility of this. A natural talent is not a good thing in itself. Most people who are endowed with great talents use them for corruption.

They use them to corrupt their own lives, to get fame, fortune, women, whatever. Talents in themselves are not good things. They are simply opportunities.

It is when you become a Christian and your talent is yielded to God that it can become a truly good thing. It can be something that God will get glory from. But if someone compliments you for the good thing that is done through your singing or your art or your sharing or your teaching or whatever it is you do, well, that compliment goes to God, not to you.

First of all, that talent probably was partly innate in you when you were born. Although in some cases you may have started from scratch and just built by hard work and skill and practice and so forth. You might have become very skilled and talented in something that you didn't have a natural knack for.

But even so, everything you could do in the flesh, if you became the most talented musician or athlete or whatever in the world, in the flesh it has no value to God. But when it is offered to God, if He chooses to use it, which He doesn't always, but He may, then it can be something that is truly good, but only because of what He brought to it, not what you brought to it. And therefore, it's not wrong if someone says, you know, you really are an anointed whatever, singer.

I really felt moved. I felt like God really touched me when you sang that song. There's no reason to feel like it's proud to acknowledge that this is true.

Because, after all, if it's true, there's no sense in lying about it. What is the important thing to note is that if that is true, it has nothing to do with you. And it has everything to do with God.

And yet, if I deny that in God there are good things, I will not be inclined to step forward and exercise those things. I mean, if God has given you a tremendous ability to counsel the people, but you don't acknowledge this, then you're not going to end up probably doing very much for God with that. If He's given you a tremendous ability to formulate, you know, scriptural truth and to present it, and you don't acknowledge this, then you probably won't do it.

And the thing that God's put in you will be poorly stewarded, and your fellowship will not be effective. It won't produce anything. So there's a balancing act here.

On one hand, we need to look at the strengths that God has put in us with the true humility that says, hey, this is, it's there, but it's not me. It's God. And truly, not out of a religious obligation, but out of a full conviction of heart, say, this is God.

He gets all the credit for this. And on the other hand, we need to make sure that we don't deny the things that God has put in us out of some sense of false humility. And so Paul says he's praying that this will be the case with Philemon, that he will acknowledge all the good things that are in him in Christ.

And as a result, the sharing of his faith will become effective. Now, he says in verse seven, for we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. The word heart here, actually, the Greek word is the word bowels or the stomach or not stomach, but the intestines.

You can see why the New King James has changed it to heart, because he is obviously talking about he's speaking metaphorically. He's using a term that refers to an organ of the body, but he's not really referring to the literal organ. He's talking about he's using idiomatically the way to speak of a deep emotion.

And in that society, they would say the bowels here, we'd say the heart. So the modern translations sometimes have changed it to heart. But the interesting thing is that Paul doesn't use this expression very often, but he uses it three times in this epistle.

In verse seven, he says, because the bowels of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. In verse 12, he says, receive him. That is my own bowels, the same word.

And in verse 20, he says, refresh my bowels in the Lord. I think that we can deduce from this that Philemon was running a kalima center, a colonic center, and he'd refresh people's bowels when they came to him. But that's a figure of speech, very much like what we would mean by the use of the metaphor heart.

And that is why the New King James uses the word heart instead of bowels. But we can say this, that Paul is telling us this much about this man Philemon, about whom we've learned very little so far from this inquiry. And that is that he was a man who was who ministered and was a delight and a refreshing influence upon the saints hearts.

He was not a man who was a troublemaker in the church. He was not a man who was an oppressive leader. He was a man who blessed people's hearts to remember him and to be around him.

Now, in verse eight, he actually gets down to business. And it's only at this point and never before this in the whole epistle that we get some inkling of what's going on here, why Paul's writing the epistle. He tells us, therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake, I rather appeal to you being such a one as Paul the aged and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Now, before we get any further, we can see that Paul had the kind of relationship with this man that he could give orders if he wanted to. He said, I could be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting. And it implies that I have this right.

And if I did so, you'd have to do what I said. But that isn't my style. That's not my way of leading.

I'm not one who stands in my ivory tower. And even though I have the authority to do so, hands down orders for people. I would rather appeal to you for love's sake.

I would rather have you do the thing I'm suggesting because of our relationship, because you love me and because I love you and not because I have authority over you. I'd rather see this thing work out, not by some kind of imposition of a chain of command, but rather because we have a mutual love and respect for each other. And it is on that basis that I'm coming to, not as the one who's giving orders.

Now, notice the apostle as an apostle. This guy had as much authority as anyone in the whole church in the world in his day had. He could he could command churches do things and they had to do him.

He could write scripture. As he demonstrated in writing this letter. But he was not authoritarian.

He was the type who would who did not believe that the leader is the boss. He believed that the leader is just that the leader. He provides leadership.

He does not provide commands and orders and control over people. Now, still, we have not read exactly what it is he's hoping that Fullerman will do. And we get that in verse 10.

He says, I appeal to you for my son, Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. Now, there's there's new information introduced here. There's a third man mentioned.

We had Paul, the writer and the recipient was Fulman. And now there's a third person who is neither the writer nor the recipient. But he's the subject of the letter.

The man's name is Onesimus. There is a play on words here because he says this man was once unprofitable to you. But now he is profitable to you and to me.

The word Onesimus literally means profitable. So Paul is sort of making a play on the man's name and making this statement, although he's not just doing it for the sake of cleverness. He's actually making a statement that is true.

He simply finds it possible to use a pun here, as it were, to make his point. The man is profitable, even as his name implies. But once he was not.

Now we can see here that this Onesimus, whoever he might be, had a formerly a relationship with this man, Fulman, to whom the letters written. And. Paul says this man Onesimus has been begotten by Paul while in chains.

So Paul's in chains. He's a prisoner somewhere. Rome, in all likelihood.

And while in chains, he has led this person to the Lord. That certainly must be Paul's. Meanwhile, he says, I have begotten him.

He's not talking about him being his biological son, but his spiritual son. So here we can deduce there's a man named Onesimus who has become a Christian through Paul's influence, although Paul was a prisoner. This man had formerly had a relationship with Fulman.

We have not yet been told what that relationship was, but it was it was a bad one. In the former relationship, Onesimus had been unprofitable. To Fulman.

Now, from this, we might deduce what kind of relationship it was. Because the Bible sometimes speaks of persons as unprofitable servants. And this man might have been a servant.

We could deduce up to this point, but we couldn't be sure. But we can when we look further down, because we get more information, verse 16, where he says, receive him no longer as a slave, but more than a slave. So we can see from that statement, the man was formerly a slave.

And an unprofitable slave. Now, we have to read further to get more of this picture, and I might as well give it to you a little further down. Paul says in verse 18, if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account.

Which suggests that this man was an unprofitable slave and that he might owe his master something. Which suggests that he may have stolen from his master. Now, the fact that Onesimus is known from another book of the Bible helps us get some picture of what's going on here, too.

Because when we study Colossians, in Colossians chapter 4, there is reference to Onesimus there also. And it says that Paul was sending the letter of Colossians from his prison in Rome to the church in Colossae. And along with Tychicus, the bearer of that letter, he says in Colossians 4.9, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.

Now, one of you means he's a Colossian. So now we get some more information here. Onesimus was a Colossian.

Paul sent him from Rome with Tychicus bearing the letter to the Colossians. So, Onesimus was on his way home to Colossae. He was a native of Colossae.

Now, we learn that he actually had been a slave of a man, and no doubt that man was in Colossae also. Because that's where he was being sent back, was to Colossae. So, this

gives us reason to believe that Philemon was the host of the church in Colossae.

Philemon lived in the city of Colossae, had a church in his home. He had had a slave named Onesimus who had been unprofitable to him, apparently had run away and maybe stolen things from him. The picture is starting to take shape.

This man, Onesimus, had come to Rome where Paul was imprisoned. Why or how he happened to come into contact with Paul is a mystery. We're never told.

But we can see that even though Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he was able to lead this man to the Lord. Now, think about this. Think about the sovereignty of God in this situation, the divine appointment in this.

As we will learn later, Paul says to Philemon, you owe me your own self also. We could possibly deduce from this that Paul had led Philemon to the Lord at an earlier time. Or if not, at least Paul's relationship with Philemon was such that Philemon owed Paul a great deal.

Although Paul had not evangelized in the city of Colossae, it's possible that this Colossian homeowner, Philemon, had come to Rome or even earlier than that to Ephesus when Paul was there for three years and that Paul could have led him directly to the Lord. Or when Paul sent Epaphras to Colossae and Colossae evangelized there, if Philemon was saved through that means, through Epaphras, Paul could still say, you owe me your life because I sent Epaphras and he evangelized you. I mean, I'm your grandfather in the Lord.

The point is here, there's been a remarkable sovereignty in the working out of this situation. Here is a slave that is a runaway. He runs away to Rome, a big metropolitan area where apparently he feels he can get lost in the crowd.

And yet the hand of God is on him and leads him to a Christian. But not just to a Christian, but to a Christian to whom his master is indebted. Philemon is indebted to Paul for his own salvation.

This Christian actually knows his master, not only knows him, but is somehow a father or grandfather in the faith to his master. And yet this same man who knows his master by some fluke comes in contact with the servant and leads him to the Lord. Now we have two people saved through Paul.

A master and his former slave, but they are alienated. There's been wrong done. Under the laws of Rome, the slave could be put to death.

A runaway slave was a felon because a slave was a piece of property. He's the only kind of property besides maybe livestock that could actually run away on its own two feet. And there were strict laws against doing that.

And the owner of the slave really owned him and could kill him. Just like he could destroy any of his other property or his animals. So a slave did not run away without counting the cost.

There'd be dire consequences if he was caught. He could be put to death. But for reasons unknown to us, Onesimus had left the employment.

We could say he'd left the household of Philemon at great risk in terms of possible consequences. And he happens to run in another country in Italy rather than in Turkey where he was from. In Italy he runs into a prisoner who happens to be well acquainted with his master back in Turkey.

Which was of course not called Turkey back then, but called Asia. But we're talking different parts of the continent. I mean, what a fluke.

And not only that, how would this runaway slave come into contact with the prisoner Paul? There are several possibilities, but we do not know which is true. One possibility is that Onesimus actually was arrested in Rome and thrown into prison himself. And that he and Paul were cellmates.

That's a possibility that we could never be sure. In that case, it is very possible that had he been apprehended in Rome, arrested and put in jail, that if he was now under the control of the law authorities, he would probably be destined to be sent back to Colossae to his master, possibly to face criminal charges and maybe even execution. If that is true, then Paul sending him back is sort of a moot point.

Because the authorities would be sending him back. Though Paul might well write a letter along with him so that his master would show kindness to him when he arrived back. But we don't know if that is the scenario.

It's possible that Onesimus, after running away, realized that he had gotten himself into trouble and maybe had some regrets. Maybe he wished he had not run away, but he was afraid to go back because of what consequences might await him there. Perhaps he, finding himself in Rome and learning that Paul, who was greatly looked up to by his master, was in Rome, maybe he looked Paul up on purpose in order to get counsel from him or to ask Paul to intercede for him with Philemon or something.

Maybe he didn't want to be a fugitive from justice for the rest of his life. Maybe he got tired of hiding and living anonymously and so forth. Maybe it wasn't as good on the outside as he thought it was going to be.

Maybe he wished he could go home, but he wasn't sure whether he could come back home. We don't know. That's another scenario.

In which case, maybe he deliberately looked up Paul, hearing that he was around and

knowing that Paul had some clout with Philemon. Or maybe someone who was a friend of Paul met Philemon in the marketplace and got into a conversation about the things of God. You ought to meet this guy, Paul, and brought him to Paul's home where he was in prison and Paul led him to the Lord.

We don't know. These are all possibilities. The thing is, there's a remarkable coincidence in it that Paul would have contact with this slave who had run away to Rome in order to disappear in the crowds.

And yet, God draws this slave somehow into contact with Paul, who happens also to be acquainted with Philemon and on good terms with him. This will be significant to a point I'd like to make later, but let's move along here and see what else we can do. He says, I'm writing to you on behalf of my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my chains.

He was once unprofitable, now he's profitable to you and to me. Now this last line in verse 11, Onesimus is profitable to me, is the first hint of something in this letter that is going to be developed further. And that is, although Paul does not give the command, but would rather beseech out of love, it would appear that Paul is hinting that he would like for Onesimus to be given his freedom so that he could come and help Paul.

Paul is a prisoner, he could use some help. I mean, the state didn't take very good care of its prisoners. They didn't even feed them.

Prisoners had to be fed by their friends. Food had to be provided by friends of the prisoner because the state was under no obligation even to feed them in prison. And so, there were many things that Paul could use help from a man like Onesimus to run Aaron's farm.

Timothy and Luke also helped Paul while he was in prison. Probably delivered messages and maybe did other things. Who knows? But Paul is hinting, I could certainly use a guy like him around here.

As if to suggest, maybe you could let him go, maybe you could let him come and help me if you don't need him around the house. By now you've probably gotten used to getting things done without him since he's been gone for a while. But I could use him.

Now, he doesn't say much about that yet, but we'll see that that comes out later. Verse 12, I am sending him back. This would possibly make it unlikely that the government was sending him back.

Paul said, I'm sending him back. If Onesimus was being forced as a captive of the chorus to go back, Paul could hardly say, I'm sending him back. But he says, I am sending him back.

You therefore receive him. That is my own heart, whom I wished to keep with me. He's

getting a little more explicit.

Yeah, it would really have been nice if I could have just kept him here instead of sending him home. That on your behalf, he might minister to me in my change for the gospel. Now to say that if he could stay with me, he could minister to me, serve me on your behalf.

In other words, it'd be like you're serving me. He would be your agent. He would be your contribution to the things I need to be done.

You can't come down here and help me, but you could, you know, send him. You could allow me to keep him here. Now, he doesn't say it too boldly because as he said, I could be bold in Christ's command to you, but for love's sake, I'm appealing to you.

So he says, I'm sending him home to you, but I really wished I could have kept him here. Because I could use his help. And if he had stayed here, he could have ministered to me on your behalf in your place.

But he says in verse 14, but without your consent, I wanted to do nothing. That your good deed might not be by compulsion, but as it were, as it were, but voluntary. Now, in order for a good deed to be good, it has to be voluntary.

Paul said, Philemon, I could really pull rank on you here. I could say this slave has gotten away from you. He's not in your household anymore.

He might be legally yours, but you're a church leader. I'm a leader of a higher rank than you. I could really put the pressure on.

I could compel you to do what I want to do. I mean, if you didn't do what I commanded you to do, it could really besmirch your name in the Christian community. I have ways of forcing this matter if I choose to do so, but I don't want that.

I want your good deed to be voluntary. Because indeed, if it isn't voluntary, it's not a good deed at all. It might be doing the right thing, but there's no goodness in it.

There's no moral goodness in that which you can't have any choice about. And so Paul says, I really wanted you to give me the slave. I wanted you to send him to me.

I wish he could have stayed with me to minister to me, but I didn't want that to happen without your permission. Not that I would have to get your permission, but that's just what I prefer. I would prefer that you would, out of the goodness of your heart, allow him to be with me.

Not by any kind of compulsion coming from me. And Paul is making it clear here. Even if you say, no, I'm not going to press you.

I'm not going to compel you. I'm appealing to you for love's sake. Some could argue that this letter is itself twisting the guy's arm.

And no doubt, Paul is putting on the pressure, but he's making it clear, I'm not going to make you do this. If you don't do it, you won't suffer any consequences from me. This is something I want to be with your consent, voluntarily, so that it could be credited to you as a genuinely good and generous deed on your part.

Rather than something you were forced to do. Verse 15, for perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever. No longer as a slave, but more than a slave.

As a beloved brother. Especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. Now, when Paul says, maybe he departed from you for this purpose, that you might receive him forever.

That doesn't mean that he'll be a slave in your house forever, but that you'll spend eternity together. You'll receive him as a brother, not just as a slave, but more than a slave, as a brother. Now, it's interesting that Paul suggests there could have been a divine, overarching, sovereign purpose in this whole thing of the slave running away.

Even though running away was a wrong thing to do. Even though for a slave runner, it was a crime and a sin. And yet, Paul says, you know, God might have had a purpose in this.

That's a strange concept, that God could have a purpose in his overarching plan that required that somebody sinned or that someone did sin. This is the kind of stuff Calvinism is made of. But, you know, even without being Calvinistic, we can certainly say this.

That a biblical view of the sovereignty of God is that God permits things to happen or does not permit things to happen as he sovereignly chooses. And God did not probably put it in the heart of Onesimus to run away. After all, if God wanted Onesimus to get saved, he didn't have to go to Rome to do it.

There was a Christian right there in the house, Philemon. There was a church meeting in his house. Onesimus didn't have to go to Rome to get saved and hear the gospel.

He could have responded to the gospel right there at home. So it's not as if God, in order to save them, had to have the man run away to Rome, had to have the man sin. It's simply this, that once the man decided to do this sinful thing, God could have prevented him.

Could have had him caught before he got out of town. Could have done things that would have prevented him from getting away. But maybe God allowed him to get away.

Maybe God allowed him to come to Rome because he was not apparently inclined to get saved through the testimony of the church in the house of Colossae. Maybe it wasn't the right time. Maybe there was something about the relationship he had with Philemon that was not winsome.

We don't know. But it is entirely possible to say that God has allowed someone to carry out their purpose, as evil as they were. Because through that, he was able to turn it about for good.

For something that he really did want to happen. Of course, the classic case of Joseph and his brothers comes to mind. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery.

That's a bad thing. But he said to them, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. It was God's will for Joseph to go to Egypt and save many alive, as it is this day, he said.

But it doesn't mean it was God's will for his brothers to be nasty and sell their brother into slavery. It's just that seeing they had decided to do so, God exploited that situation and allowed his purposes to work out through it. God does not inspire sin or ordain sin.

But he ordains the results. And where men would sin, God could prevent it. God could kill them.

He could prevent it. He's got angels. He can do all kinds of things.

Jesus said that if God didn't want him to be arrested in the garden, he could send 12 legions of angels to stop it from happening. There's nothing that guarantees that human free will will allow human plans to materialize. Man can plan his way, but God directs his steps.

God's the one who makes the disposition of the thing come out. And so, Paul is not necessarily saying that God put it in Onesimus' heart to run away from his master, which would be a sinful choice, so that he could become a Christian and come back in this form and be his brother forever. Because, first of all, it would not be essential for him to run away and do this in order to encounter the gospel.

And secondly, God does not inspire or tempt to sin. But he is suggesting that God has been in this situation. Philemon losing this slave on this occasion, although it involved a sin on the part of the slave, and maybe even theft on his part.

Yet God allowed this thing to carry out and to go the way it did. And God sovereignly moved in the situation in such a way as to bring about a result that God clearly wanted to happen, namely the salvation of this man, so that he and his former master would not have a relationship that was merely that of master and slave, but brothers in Christ for all eternity. So, he says in verse 16 that he might return to you forever no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother.

Now, when he says, no more as a slave, I mean, Paul's really making it clear. I mean, doesn't that indicate that he wants Philemon to have Onesimus no more be a slave? Isn't that essentially a... I mean, he's stating it plainly. I don't want this man to be a slave anymore.

I want him, I think God wants him to be your brother and not your slave. Now, there is a possibility that Paul is not saying something quite so bold. He might be saying that God wanted him to be in your family, not only as a slave, but also as a brother.

A slave who is a brother. That's always possible, because Paul did not tell all masters to rid their household of slavery. Paul never told masters, release all your slaves.

And yet, many of them must have had Christian slaves. Certainly, Paul gives instructions to Christian slaves with reference to their Christian masters to serve them well and so forth, and not to serve them less diligently simply because they're brothers. And so, we see then, Paul might be just saying, well, you can keep him as a slave, but God has given you him as more than a slave.

In addition to being a slave, he's a brother. Not only, but also, is how this could be understood. But I think Paul is essentially saying, I think, God, I had another plan for this man's life, other than him being your slave.

Rather than he would just be your brother. And maybe come down here and help me out. In my ministry down here in Rome.

A beloved brother. Now, when he refers to him as a beloved brother, he says, especially to me, but how much more to you? Both in the flesh and in the Lord. I read this book many, many times, and I've seen the problem raised in this phrase.

One of my children raised it. I think Benjamin raised it years ago when we were going through Philemon. He said, does this mean that Philemon and Onesimus were brothers? Physical brothers? I thought, well, interesting question.

Because he says, he's a beloved brother, especially to me. But how much more to you? Both in the flesh and in the Lord. I mean, a brother in the Lord and a brother in the flesh.

Does this mean, is Paul saying that Onesimus was in the flesh, a brother of Philemon? It almost sounds like it, but I think I'd be cautious about reaching those conclusions. First of all, it's extremely unlikely that men who were siblings would end up in such a relationship of slave and master. I mean, it's almost impossible to imagine the scenario that would bring that situation about.

And so, frankly, it just seems very unlikely that that's what Paul's saying. And there are other ways to understand it. It could mean that just as all persons who are relatives or in one household are sometimes called brothers, as for example, when Abraham said to

Lot, who was his nephew and not his brother, he said, let's not have any strife between us because we're brothers.

And there are a number of cases in Scripture where the word brothers is used not so much for people who are siblings, but who are related or in the same household. The slave was a member of the household. And Paul might be simply saying that he's been a member of the family to you.

To me, he's a member of the spiritual family, but to you, he's a member of your natural family as well as in the Lord. Might not be saying he's literally your brother, but really that he's been a slave in your home all these years. He's a member of your family, not necessarily biologically related, but a part of the family.

Think of the slaves in some of the stories in the Bible, Abraham's servants. They were there for life and they were like members of the family. And so Paul could be simply saying, well, you know, he's originally he was part of your household.

Now he's coming back to be part of your household, your earthly, fleshly household. But also he's part of the household of God. He's your brother in more ways than one.

He's part of the family for you in more ways than one, both in your natural and in your spiritual family. Another way to understand it is that Paul says no longer is a slave, but more than a slave is a beloved brother in the flesh and in the Lord. He could mean a slave in the flesh, but a brother in the Lord.

That's a possibility too. This man serves in two roles in your family, not in mine. Paul says he's just a brother to me, but to you, he's got a dual role.

He's a slave in terms of his fleshly relationship to you and he's a brother in the Lord. So, however, I mean, the phrase at the end of verse 16 raises questions about its exact meaning, but probably one of these other alternative explanations is more likely to be true than to suggest that Onesimus and Philemon were blood brothers. Now, verses 17 and 18 are very powerful to my mind, very powerful verses.

He says, if then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account. I'll tell you what's so powerful about these verses.

Paul here is the intercessor. We have a situation where there is a master who has been offended and grieved and wronged by his slave. The master has the right of retribution.

The master actually under law could kill him. The slave, on the other hand, wants things to be better than they are. He's had a change of heart.

He's willing to go back and be right with his master again. But he's not sure that he can.

The law is against him.

What will his master do? Will his master receive him or will his master punish him? We've got a situation here where there is a desire for reconciliation, but there are some obstacles to it. For one thing, there's some debt to be paid here. The slave has stolen from his master.

The master has every right to expect repayment of the debt, but apparently he didn't have the money to pay it anymore. That's why Paul said, if he owes you, I'll pay it. So we've got a debt here that cannot be paid by the slave.

And yet that debt remains a bone of contention and an offense and a legal matter between him and his master. We have in this situation an analogy. I'm not saying that it's intended as one, but it's so close that it's hard to believe that it isn't.

It's an analogy to the relationship of the sinner and God. The sinner, like all human beings, is technically owned by God. But the sinner has rebelled against God, has run away from God, has robbed God, is alienated from God, stands condemned under the law as one who should die because of his crimes against God.

Just like the runaway slave, the sinner in the world today is like Onesimus. And God is in a position like Philemon. He's the one who has the power and the legal right to execute and punish to the fullest extent of the law, the rebel.

Now, in this story, we don't know what Philemon's disposition was. Philemon might have been eager to forgive Onesimus. We just don't know.

All we know is that Paul is writing a letter urging him to. We don't know what Philemon's actual attitude was, whether he was reluctant or more than happy, like the prodigal son's father. When the prodigal came home, the father, the prodigal expected his father to be a little upset.

He said, don't make me a son, just make me a slave in your household. But his father said, no way, you're going to be my son. And he ran out to meet him, was eager to see him.

Philemon might have been that way toward Onesimus. We just don't know because we don't have the story except for this particular letter. But let us say this, we have in the relationship of Philemon and Onesimus a true picture in many respects of the relationship of God and rebel humanity, the rebel sinner.

And even if the rebel wishes that he could get right with God, he can't just go walking on home. There are too many outstanding charges. There's condemnation, there's alienation, there's not an open door there.

There's a debt that can't be repaid. There are, in other words, barriers to reconciliation. Therefore, how can reconciliation between God and man occur? Well, it can occur if there is a third party, a third party who is on good terms with God and who's on good terms with man.

That is, a third party who has an interest in man's well-being, but also has good standing in the side of the offended God. This is the role that Paul stood in with Philemon and Onesimus. Paul was in good standing with Philemon, even though Onesimus was not.

But Paul had Onesimus' interest at heart and his well-being at heart. Whether Philemon did or not, we don't know. But we can say this, we have Paul standing in as a third party, very much equivalent to what Jesus is in our case.

Jesus is on good terms with God. And Jesus has our interest at heart. Which, by the way, so does God.

But the fact of the matter is, Jesus is very much, in our relationship with God, like what Paul is in this relationship between these two men. And notice the two very important things Paul says in order to guarantee reconciliation. One of them, the second thing he says, I'll talk about the first one in a second.

In verse 18 he says, if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account. He has a debt that he owes you. He can't pay it.

I'll pay it. Put that on my account. It's exactly what Jesus has done.

He says, have they sinned against you? Put that on me. The Bible says that he who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. It says, his own self, there are sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin should live into righteousness.

Jesus took our debt, our penalty, on himself. Basically he's saying, is a penalty due? Put it on me. Is there something owed? Charge me for it.

Put that on my account. Exactly what Jesus has done in order to remove the barriers between us and God. He says, is there a problem here with sin? Put that on my account.

I'll pay for that. Put the sin on me and I'll pay the penalty for it. Now of course in the case of Philemon and Onesimus and Paul, it's not really very likely that Paul would end up having to pay anything.

Can you imagine? Philemon said, okay Paul, the charges are about \$300. I'll put that on your ticket. When you're out of jail we can work this off.

Yeah, sure. You know, Paul the agent, Paul the prisoner of the Lord, Paul to whom you owe your own self also. And that's what he says at the end of verse 19.

Not to mention that you owe me even your own life. I'll pay the bill. Put it on my account.

But I won't make any mention of the fact that you owe me everything. You know he's not going to get that bill. That's one difference in the case of Jesus.

Jesus did pay the tab. Jesus did have to pay the bill. But the point is Paul was willing to.

It's just impossible to imagine that Philemon would allow him to. As soon as Paul said, put it on my account, it was impossible for Philemon ever to put it on Onesimus' account again. Do you see that? If someone says, listen, I'll pay your bill, then you can't be charged again because I've taken full responsibility.

I've assumed all responsibility for that debt. There's no way that Onesimus could be charged. I mean, if Onesimus walked home and Philemon said, hey, there's this little matter of this money you ripped me off for.

Onesimus says, here's a letter from Paul. He says he'll take it on. He'll take the debt.

It's his debt now. I mean, Philemon, what could he do? He could say, oh, I guess it's either charge Paul or forgive it. It's got to be one or the other.

I can't charge Onesimus now because Paul said, put it on my account. That's official. And so Paul assumes the bad credit of the one for whom he's interceding.

But then he imputes his own good credit to Onesimus. In verse 17, he says to Philemon, if you count me as a partner, which of course he did, receive him as you would me. In other words, don't receive Onesimus as you would receive Onesimus.

That could hardly go well for Onesimus. But receive him the way you would receive me. How would Paul be received? Well, he'd be received very well.

Why? Because Paul was a good man. Paul had not offended Philemon. Paul was in good standing with Philemon.

Paul had good credit, as it were, in the side of Philemon. And he says, OK, when Onesimus comes, treat him the way you treat me. Put my credit on his account.

Treat him as if he were me. Whatever good thing would cause you to treat me well, impute that to him and treat him that way. So that there's a double transaction going on here.

There is Onesimus' bad credit. Paul says, I'll take that. Put the bad credit on me.

And then Paul's good credit, put that on Onesimus. Treat him the way you'd treat me and charge me for what you'd charge him for. And this is exactly parallel to what the Bible says Jesus has done to reconcile us to God.

And this may be the reason this book is even here. I mean, it's really just a private transaction between three men. Why should it be in the Bible? It may be there for this very reason, that it is such an analogy of our relationship with God.

Because we have offended God. We've broken laws. We're worthy of death.

And even if we wish to be reconciled to God, and if he wishes to be reconciled to us, there are matters of law to settle. There are penalties to pay. And there is the matter of simply not being good enough to be in fellowship with God.

But along comes Jesus, who is on good terms with God, obviously. And he is on the side of the sinner. And he says to God, whatever this sinner owes you, put it on my account.

And if you receive me as a partner, Father, receive him just the same way you received me. The Bible teaches that God receives you on the same terms that he receives Jesus. He loves you as much as he loves Jesus.

That's hard to imagine. But Jesus said it himself. In John chapter 17, when he was praying to his father, he says in verse 20.

Well, it's a long sentence. I'll pick up near the end. In verse 23, John 17, 23, he says, I in them and you, that is the father in me, Jesus, that they may be one or may be perfect in one, excuse me, and that the world may know that you have sent me and that you have loved them as you have loved me.

Jesus says, I want the world to know that you have loved them, the Christians, the same as you love me. If you receive me as a partner, receive them as you would receive me. The Bible says we are accepted in the beloved.

It says that in Ephesians chapter 1, God accepts us in Christ. And to the same degree that he accepts Christ, the same degree he accepts us. That's why it's not necessary for us to say, Jesus, would you go talk to your dad about this? He says, you talk to him.

You talk to him yourself. Jesus does not have any more access to the father than you have. Because of him, of course, not because of you.

Not because there's some sense in which you are the equivalent of Jesus or like him or whatever. It's because Jesus has imputed. He says, Father, I know you accept me, accept them the same as you accept me.

Love them the way you love me. Now, of course, God did not have to have his arm twisted by Jesus on this matter. God already had that in his plan.

That's why he sent Jesus so that this transaction of reconciliation. The difference here is that Onesimus in this story seems to have been the one who would maybe be initiating reconciliation. But maybe only because Paul wanted him to.

We don't know. But in the story of salvation, obviously, it's God who initiates everything. And the sinner sometimes doesn't even want to be saved, doesn't want reconciliation.

But God reaches out. And when that sinner does want to repent, there is a third party. There's a third party that can take care of that debt and can impute his own credit to the returning sinner so that God cannot punish, cannot impose that debt on you.

Do you ever wonder why it is that it says in 1 John 1, 9, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Just? Doesn't it seem like you should say he is faithful and compassionate or faithful and merciful or faithful and forgiving? Why does it say he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins? What is just about forgiving sins? Forgiving sins is an act of mercy, not of justice. What makes it a matter of God's justice that he forgives us when we repent? Quite simply, God cannot hold our sins against us if he holds them against Christ.

Because if our sins are upon Christ and Christ has paid the penalty for them, there can be no other bill sent to us for them. Now it's very important we understand the conditionalness of this. It says if we confess our sins, then he is faithful and just to forgive us.

It is not automatic that because Jesus died for my sins, my sins are covered. They are paid for, but only on certain terms. If I was in jail and my grandmother said, I'll tell you what, I'll pay your fees and get you out of jail, but only on the terms that you go to Bible college and become a pastor.

I might say, well, gosh, I appreciate the generosity, but I don't want to be a pastor. Thanks. I'll stay right here in jail.

She might have even paid it, but told the jailor, this person can leave if he's going to go under these conditions. There are conditions for a gift sometimes, and that doesn't change the fact it's a gift. Christ has made the payment, but the way out is through repentance.

The way of the condition for forgiveness is repentance. But see, if Christ had not paid the gift, then even repentance would not warrant forgiveness. There's nothing about my repenting that obligates God to forgive me, except that he has, in Christ, accepted what Christ has done on my behalf.

And he's willing to honor the fact that Christ says, if you receive me as a partner, receive him even as you receive me. That's what Paul did in this case, as a very fitting picture of Christ. And not only of Christ, but of a Christian peacemaker generally or mediator.

Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be the children of God. Here's a case where there's no peace, there's hostility, there's alienation between two parties. Paul is not a party to the dispute.

He's not alienated from Philemon, he's not alienated from Onesimus. He could just stay out of this business and let them find it out on their own, but he's a peacemaker. He steps in there and says, listen, I can speak into both of these situations here.

And so he is committed to reconciliation between brethren. And he is one who mediates and who helps alienated brethren be reconciled in friendship. This is a peacemaker.

That's what we should be. But notice how it is done. It is not without expense to himself.

He says, listen, if there's some kind of a thing here, an offense, a debt that can't be worked out between you, I'll pay it. It can be expensive being a peacemaker. But the idea is that in order to make peace, you make sacrifices.

Even if you're a person who doesn't have any debt in the matter, any innate debt, you're not part of the dispute. But it requires some sacrifice to be in the business of reconciliation. Sacrifice of time, sometimes sacrifice of friendship, because parties sometimes resent attempts of meddlers to get in and bring reconciliation.

But in any case, it costs something sometimes. Now, Paul says in verse 19, I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. Now, the reason he has to say that is because he just said, I will assume the debt.

It's like, you know, I'm signing a contract. This debt you transfer to my account. This is my own signature here.

This is my I wrote this myself. This isn't someone else transferring a debt to me. I am assuming it with my own responsibility, with my own signature.

I will repay. Not to mention it to you that you owe me or even your own self besides. Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord.

Refresh my heart in the Lord. Now, verse 21, he says, having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. Now, what could that possibly mean? I write to you with the full confidence that you're not only going to do what I'm asking you, you can do more than that.

You know, Paul has not technically asked him to. Dissolve. The condition of slavery.

What he has mostly said is I would like him to be with me. I would like you to send it down here. Now, it's possible that Ernest could still be a slave of Philemon, but be on assignment to work with Paul.

And all that Paul has really requested at this point, if Philemon wanted to grant it, could be granted without granting liberty. He could just be a slave whose duty is to go and work for Paul. But Paul says, I really think you're going to do more than what I'm actually asking.

And he doesn't say what that is. It might be that what that is, is give the man his total freedom. Don't just let him out of your household, but let him have his freedom and do let him be a free man.

That's possibly it. Some scholars think that that's what's implied here. Or it might mean more.

It might mean not only send me the slave, but send me some money, too. You know, I mean, I I'm asking for one thing, but I know you're going to do more than what I ask. The disposition of doing more than what is required is a Christian trait.

You'll often meet Christians who are always looking for the bare minimum that God requires to be saved. That's what you find in the attitude of someone who's always saying, can you still do this and be saved? Can you still do that and be saved? And they're always trying to think of some kind of behavior that they maybe are doing or thinking about doing. But they're not sure that they could still be saved if they do that.

Well, obviously, the fact that they're wondering means that they don't consider that that behavior is particularly godly. No one would ever say, can I still pray and be saved? Can I still give up my life and be saved? Can I still give to the poor and be saved? I mean, no one asked that kind of question. When people ask that question, the thing they're asking is something that they don't consider to be a godly thing.

They're basically saying, what does God require? Bare minimum, you know, I mean, does God require that I be perfect or can I have this much imperfection? Still be safe. Can I have this much compromise and still be saved? How much sin can I do and still be saved? That's not a Christian's attitude. Such people are often asking the question of, do you believe in once saved, always saved? Can you backslide and still be saved? I don't know.

I don't think so. I don't care. I'm not planning to backslide.

Are you? Why do you want to know? What matter does it make? Christians don't plan to backslide. Christians plan to be holy. Christians plan to be faithful to death.

Christians don't sit around thinking, I wonder what would happen if I backslid. That's not a consideration. Because the Christian's attitude of wanting to please God doesn't just say, how much does God require? I'll do just the bare requirements.

The Christian wants to do what he knows will please God. Philemon was that kind of Christian. I know that you will do what I require, but I even know you'll do more than that.

We don't know what it is he's implying, but he's essentially saying, I'm not writing this as if I'm writing to a begrudging person who's going to say, oh, shucks, Paulson, I got to do

this. I'll do it, but I won't do any more than that. He's saying, I know that you're amenable to this.

I know that you're agreeable. You love me. You're generous.

You want to do the right thing. You're not just going to do what I make you do. You're going to do more than I would make you do.

I just know you. I know you're that kind of person. That's what he's saying.

But he says, but meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me. For I trust that through your prayers, I shall be granted to you. Now that's in one sense, a backhanded way of saying, pray for me to be released from prison.

Because he was in chains and he couldn't very well come and visit Colossae while he was in chains in Rome. So he's saying, I'm trusting that by your prayers, hint, hint. In other words, you are praying, aren't you? That I will be released, aren't you? I'm hoping that through your prayers, I'll be released from my prison and I'll be able to come visit you.

In fact, as a matter of faith in that prospect, go ahead and start preparing the room. I'm still a prisoner, but go ahead. If you're praying for God to release me, do it with the kind of faith that would actually be exhibited in going ahead and preparing a place for me already.

I'm still in chains and I'm not going to show up today. But make sure there's room for me because I'm planning on getting out of here. Because I'm figuring you're praying for that, aren't you? Remember the people who prayed for Peter to be released from prison and God answered their prayers and they didn't believe it? But Paul said, I want you to believe it.

You're praying for me to get out of prison? Make a room for me, plan on me. I'll be knocking at your door. And when the servant says, it's Paul, don't say, you're mad.

It's his angel. That's what they said when Peter was at the door. But Paul's obviously requesting prayer for his own deliverance from prison and suggesting that if he's freed, he will come and see them and they should be prepared for that to happen.

Now, there's a few other names mentioned here. Verse 23, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ, Jesus greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. These men are all mentioned also in Colossians four.

So we can see that when Paul wrote this letter, he had the same companions with him that he had when he wrote Colossians. Furthermore, we know from Colossians that he was sending the letter to the Colossians by the hand of Onesimus and Tychicus. And

while there's not a mention of Tychicus here, there is mention of Onesimus.

And all likely that this letter was carried at the same time from Rome to Colossi by Tychicus and by Onesimus. He says, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Now, many of Paul's epistles end with this line, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. If you'll just on your own take a look at the last line of each of Paul's epistles. More often than not, almost every single time, the last line is going to be, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Only twice that I can think of, I could be wrong, but I think there's only twice Paul says, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. I'm not really sure if in Paul's mind there was a difference between the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and being with your spirit. There's a difference in wording and it may have been significant.

It's possible that what he's saying, he's praying that Philemon's spirit will be a gracious spirit, that the grace of Jesus will be manifested not only in God being gracious to Philemon, but that Philemon's own spirit will be a gracious spirit reflecting the grace of Christ, as he considers this matter of forgiving this servant who has wronged him. Jesus forgives and it's that grace of Jesus that I hope will be in your spirit, as you consider forgiving and responding to this letter, he says. So that is the story of Onesimus.

And as you can see, although it's a bit here and a bit there, you can pretty much piece it all together without any expenditure of imagination. It really is something that can be deduced or inductively drawn from the text. It's a good study in inductive biblical study methods.

How you can come to a text with a clean slate, without assumptions, and say, OK, I'm not going to be coming to this passage with what my pastor told me this means, or what the study Bible editors said it means, or what some teachers said. I'm going to read the text and see what it says, see what it brings out. Now, I'm not saying that you would learn something else from Philemon this way than you would learn from the Bible's notes.

You'd learn the same thing because essentially it's obvious in this book. At other times it's not as obvious, and inductive Bible study means that you look to the text itself and draw from the evidence within the text your understanding of its meaning and its background and so forth. But a lot of that work is done for us by commentators and Bible editors and things like that.

But it's a good habit to develop of thinking and looking and drawing and observing so that you can know exactly what it is that really was there and not what people say is there. Sometimes people can't be trusted. The text can.

So we have this model of Paul the intercessor, who is very much like Christ, our intercessor. And that's no doubt perhaps the most valuable lesson to be learned in the book of Philemon. Although there are other lessons there.

All right, we'll stop with that, and if you have any questions about it, I'll try to answer them. Thank you.