

Philemon-Devotionals

Philemon - Warren Wiersbe - Two statements in Paul's letter to Philemon remind us of what Jesus did for us. "Receive him [Onesimus] as you would me" (Philemon 1:17) reminds us that we are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). "Put that on my account" (Philemon 1:18) reminds us that Jesus paid the price for our redemption (Ro 4:1-8; 2Co 5:21). (With the word Bible commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

See - [Bible Illustrator on Philemon](#)

Philemon - Relationship Under Repair - Are you easy to get along with? Do you have a good relationship with your spouse or your friends? Then you probably aren't guilty of the following behaviors:

- criticizing instead of praising
- using insensitive words
- neglecting others
- making jokes at another's expense
- not listening
- refusing to admit wrong
- being rude
- belittling others' opinions

These kinds of behavior will wreck relationships and hinder the healing of past hurts.

For a good example of the way to strengthen relationships, read the apostle Paul's short letter to Philemon, a wealthy resident of Colosse. The subject is Onesimus, Philemon's slave, who had stolen from him and fled to Rome. There Onesimus met Paul, who led him to a saving knowledge of Jesus. The letter is Paul's kind, compassionate appeal to Philemon to accept Onesimus back--now as a brother. It's a great example of love in action.

Although Onesimus deserved Philemon's punishment, Paul called him a "son" (Philemon 1:10) and a "beloved brother" (Philemon 16). He said he would repay what Onesimus had stolen.

Paul knew how to restore a relationship. Do we? -- J D Brannon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God of grace and God of goodness,
Teach me to be ever kind,
Always gentle and forgiving
With the Savior first in mind. --Brandt

Forgiveness is the glue that repairs broken relationships.

Removing the Barriers

Read: Philemon 1:8-16

He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. Philemon 1:16

I saw Mary every Tuesday when I visited "the House"—a home that helps former prisoners reintegrate into society. My life looked different from hers: fresh out of jail, fighting addictions, separated from her son. You might say she lived on the edge of society.

Like Mary, Onesimus knew what it meant to live on the edge of society. As a slave, Onesimus had apparently wronged his Christian master, Philemon, and was now in prison. While there, he met Paul and came to faith in Christ (v. 10). Though now a changed man, Onesimus was still a slave. Paul sent him back to Philemon with a letter urging him to receive Onesimus "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother" (Philem. 1:16).

The gospel changes people and relationships.

Philemon had a choice to make: He could treat Onesimus as his slave or welcome him as a brother in Christ. I had a choice to make too. Would I see Mary as an ex-convict and a recovering addict—or as a woman whose life is being changed by the power of Christ? Mary was my sister in the Lord, and we were privileged to walk together in our journey of faith.

It's easy to allow the walls of socio-economic status, class, or cultural differences to separate us. The gospel of Christ removes those barriers, changing our lives and our relationships forever.

Dear God, thank You that the gospel of Jesus Christ changes lives and relationships. Thank You for removing the barriers between us and making us all members of Your family.

The gospel changes people and relationships.

By Karen Wolfe

INSIGHT After reading the book of Philemon, questions sometimes arise such as, "How can I trust a Bible that tolerated slavery?" and "When Paul had the opportunity to condemn slavery outright, why didn't he do it?" One thing to keep in mind is that slavery in ancient times was different than our concept of slavery today. For example, in the Roman Empire slaves could work toward and achieve freedom. Paul is actually suggesting a change that goes far deeper than an institution change. When Paul asks that Onesimus be taken back and viewed as a brother, he is ultimately dismantling the mindset that segregates people. The Scriptures deal with how we think and not simply how we act. J.R. Hudberg ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Philemon - A New Flax Shirt

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. . --Galatians 6:2

Onesimus was Philemon's slave. According to the law, he could have been executed for running away. But Onesimus had run into Paul and into the arms of Jesus. Paul sent him back to Philemon with the assurance that the apostle would repay anything the runaway slave owed. Paul carried Onesimus' burden.

Booker T. Washington wrote about an experience he had that illustrates the same principle:

"The most trying ordeal that I was forced to endure as a slave boy ... was the wearing of a flax shirt... That part of the flax from which our clothing was made was ... the cheapest and roughest part. I can scarcely imagine any torture ... that is equal to that caused by putting on a new flax shirt for the first time. But I had no choice... My brother, John, who is several years older than I am, performed one of the most generous acts that I ever heard of one slave relative doing for another. On several occasions when I was being forced to wear a new flax shirt, he generously agreed to ... wear it for several days, till it was 'broken in.'"

Jesus endured the pain of the cross on our behalf. When we bear one another's burdens, we follow His example and fulfill His will for our lives (Gal. 6:2; 1John 3:16). Are you willing to wear someone's new flax shirt today? --H W Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Bearing people's heavy burdens,
Shouldering their pain and grief,
Shows the love of Christ to others,
Bringing them His sure relief. --Sper

Christ bears our burdens
that we may bear the burdens of others.

Philemon 1:1 - WHOSE PRISONER ARE YOU? - Vance Havner

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.... Philemon 1; see Ephesians 3:1, 4:1.

Paul was not the prisoner of himself—shut up to what he wanted to be or do—for he stood in the liberty wherewith Christ had set him free. He was not the prisoner of circumstances. He was not the prisoner of a parish, a church flunkey, for he was a pastor to all the churches. He was not imprisoned by a sect, confined within any ism. He had belonged to "the most straitest sect... a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5), and he belonged to "the way which they call heresy" (Acts 24:14), but his was the liberty of the Gospel. He was not a prisoner of Rome, nor of Caesar, but of Jesus Christ, Master of all conditions within and without.

PRISONER OF THE LORD - Havner

The prisoner of Jesus Christ.... his prisoner.... Ephesians 3:1; Philemon 1:9; 2 Timothy 1:8.

Paul was in Nero's prison, but he was not Nero's prisoner. He was the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Back of all earthly incarceration, all dungeons of circumstance, all the jails of earth, stands our Lord and He is the Keeper of His people. Our times are in His hand. Stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage. However dark the shrouded room of sickness or sorrow, behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow keeping watch above His own. The Keeper of Israel does not slumber nor sleep. No man-made chains, no fetters of earth can bind our souls. We are prisoners of the Lord!

Philemon 1:2 C H Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

The Church in Thy House

Is there a Church in this house? Are parents, children, friends, servants, all members of it? or are some still unconverted? Let us pause here and let the question go round--Am I a member of the Church in this house? How would father's heart leap for joy, and mother's eyes fill with holy tears if from the eldest to the youngest all were saved! Let us pray for this great mercy until the Lord shall grant it to us. Probably it had been the dearest object of Philemon's desires to have all his household saved; but it was not at first granted him in its fulness. He had a wicked servant, Onesimus, who, having wronged him, ran away from his service. His master's prayers followed him, and at last, as God would have it, Onesimus was led to hear Paul preach; his heart was touched, and he returned to Philemon, not only to be a faithful servant, but a brother beloved, adding another member to the Church in Philemon's house. Is there an unconverted servant or child absent this morning? Make special supplication that such may, on their return to their home, gladden all hearts with good news of what grace has done! Is there one present? Let him partake in the same earnest entreaty.

If there be such a Church in our house, let us order it well, and let all act as in the sight of God. Let us move in the common affairs of life with studied holiness, diligence kindness, and integrity. More is expected of a Church than of an ordinary household; family worship must, in such a case, be more devout and hearty; internal love must be more warm and unbroken and external conduct must be more sanctified and Christlike. We need not fear that the smallness of our number will put us out of the list of Churches, for the Holy Spirit has here enrolled a family-church in the inspired book of remembrance. As a Church let us now draw nigh to the great head of the one Church universal, and let us beseech Him to give us grace to shine before men to the glory of His name.

Philemon 1:1–25 Finding Strength in Submission

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love.

Philemon 8–9

During the Reformation, when Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli were exchanging strong words about Biblical interpretations and ecclesiastical practices, Zwingli spent a troubled morning walking the mountain trails of his beloved Switzerland. From a distance he observed two goats making their way toward each other on a path barely stitched to the side of a cliff. It was obvious that these nimble creatures could not pass one another.

As the goats approached each other, each feinted a power move at the other in what looked like the beginning of a battle. In a surprise twist, however, one goat suddenly collapsed onto the narrow ledge so the other goat could walk over its back. Then each moved on.

Zwingli was impressed. Here was strength defined by submission. It allowed two opponents to survive a crisis so both could get on with more important things. Zwingli applied the lesson to his next encounter with Luther.

The same principle is evident in Paul's words to Philemon. Philemon's slave Onesimus had run away, met Paul in Rome and become a Christian. Now Paul was sending the slave back to his master, urging Philemon to receive Onesimus, not as mere property, but as a brother. Instead of butting heads with Philemon, Paul extended a hand of love. Was this a sign of weakness? Psychological manipulation?

Both possibilities and a variety of others enter a marital relationship. Sometimes we badger one another. Sometimes, like goats poised for battle on a mountain trail, we come close to butting heads. Sometimes we spit and snarl and lash out. Sometimes we sit together and lovingly hash things out.

What is helpful and healthy in good relationships is honesty. Not just truthfulness that blurts out every last thought, but self-awareness that is not deceptive. It is as important that I learn to be honest with myself as it is to be truthful with my partner. If Paul was in touch with his own thoughts and feelings when he wrote to Philemon, he could state his case without deploying manipulative or subversive tactics. He could focus on Philemon's well-being and circumstances while maintaining his own perspective.

Too often we allow our emotions to derail relationships because we are blinded by excessive self-importance. The strength of our emotions, especially when we are at odds with each other, inflates our tendency for self-preservation and diminishes our sense of the other's importance in our lives. We need to keep relationships personal and issues impersonal as we build faithfulness with one another.

Disagreements are inevitable in any relationship. But the ways in which we work through them can bind us more tightly together in love. Paul's kindness to Philemon offers a very good example to follow.

Wayne Brouwer

Let's Talk

What do we tend to disagree about? What happens in our relationship whenever that topic comes up? How do our feelings get involved?

When we disagree, does one of us generally dominate the other? What is dangerous about that? How could we change that pattern?

How do we show our respect for one another when we disagree about something? If we videotaped one of our arguments and showed it to a friend or a marriage counselor, what would they say? ([Strength in Submission](#))

Philemon 1:8-19 Another Chance (See [another devotional on "Another Chance"](#))

[You] have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. —Colossians 3:10

For almost 100 years, a huge piece of flawed Carrara marble lay in the courtyard of a cathedral in Florence, Italy. Then, in 1501, a young sculptor was asked to do something with it. He measured the block and noted its imperfections. In his mind, he envisioned a young shepherd boy.

For 3 years, he chiseled and shaped the marble skillfully. Finally, when the 18-foot towering figure of David was unveiled, his student exclaimed to Michelangelo, "Master, it lacks only one thing—speech!"

Onesimus was like that flawed marble. He was an unfaithful servant when he fled from his master Philemon. But while on the run he came to know the Master Sculptor. As a changed man, he served God faithfully and was invaluable to Paul's ministry. When Paul sent him back to Philemon, he commended him as one "who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me" (Philemon 1:11). He asked Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother (Philemon 1:16).

Paul knew what it meant to be given another chance after past wrongs (Acts 9:26, 27, 28). He knew personally the transformation God can accomplish. Now he saw it in the life of Onesimus. The Lord can chisel His image on our flawed lives and make us beautiful and useful too. — Albert Lee ([Our Daily Bread](#))

Christ takes each sin, each pain, each loss,
And by the power of His cross
Transforms our brokenness and shame
So that our lives exalt His name. —D. De Haan

Our rough edges must be chipped away
to bring out the image of Christ.

Philemon 1:4-7 - Pure Water - The legend is told of a desert wanderer who found a crystal spring of unsurpassed freshness. The water was so pure he decided to bring some to his king. Barely satisfying his own thirst, he filled a leather bottle with the clear liquid and carried it many days beneath the desert sun before he reached the palace. When he finally laid his offering at the feet of his sovereign, the water had become stale and rank due to the old container in which it had been stored. But the king would not let his faithful subject even imagine that it was unfit for use. He tasted it with expressions of gratitude and delight, and sent away the loyal heart filled with gladness. After he had gone, others sampled it and expressed their surprise that the king had even pretended to enjoy it. "Ah!" said he, "it was not the water he tasted, but the love that prompted the offering." Many times our service is marked by multiplied imperfections, but the Master looks at our motives and says "It is good."

Philemon 1:4-7 - Remembering to Thank People - One day in the early thirties, William Stidger and a fellow pastor sat in a restaurant talking about the worldwide depression—the suffering people, rich committing suicide, the jobless. The pastor said, "In two or three weeks I have to preach on Thanksgiving Day. What can I say?" Stidger said it was like the Spirit of God answered that question: "Why not thank those people who've been a blessing in your life

and affirm them during this terrible time?" He thought of an English teacher who had instilled in him a love of literature and verse, affecting all his writing and preaching. So he wrote to her.

In a matter of days he got a reply in the feeble scrawl of the aged. "My Dear Willy: I can't tell you how much your note meant to me. I am in my eighties, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely, and like the last leaf of autumn lingering behind. You'll be interested to know that I taught in school for more than 50 years, and yours is the first note of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning, and it cheered me as nothing has done in many years."

Philemon 1:7 - Rob Morgan - "R" Stands for Refresh - The word "refresh" — I want to take you on a little tour of this word in the Bible.

- In Genesis 18, Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day, and he looked up and saw three men standing nearby. He hurried to meet them and he said in verses 4-5: Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way. Abraham understood that people traveling during

the hottest time of the day needed to pull off at rest stops. They needed some water and food and rest in the shade.

- In Exodus 23, the Lord gave some commandments about the Sabbath day, one day in seven, which was to be set aside as a day of rest. Ex 23:12 says: Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed. It's important to build periods of time into our weekly schedule in which our strength and our spirits can be replenished.

- In 2 Samuel 16, we have the story of King David being chased out of his capital city of Jerusalem because of a rebellion led by Prince Absalom. Verse 14 says, The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted, and there he refreshed himself. Sometimes we can't avoid growing exhausted, but it's dangerous to stay that way. Sometimes even in the middle of a crisis such as David faced, we have to pull off at rest stops to replenish our inner resources.

- One of the ways we replenish our inner resources is with Scripture, which brings me to the next verse – Psalm 19:7: The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.

- In the New International Version I'm using for this message, the next time this word occurs is in the Twenty-third Psalm: He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul.

- Proverbs 11:25 says: A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

- In Jeremiah 31:25 the Lord said, I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.

- On the day of Pentecost in Acts 3, Peter said, Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

- The apostle Paul said of his friends in 1 Corinthians 16:18: For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

- He told Philemon: You, brother, have refreshed the hearts of God's people.

God made us to need constant replenishing. He did not make us to be perpetual motion machines. He could have done that, but He didn't. I don't know what it's going to be like in eternity, but here on this earth there is a continual cycle between expenditure and intake. We expend energy, we become drained, we pull off at a rest stop, we refuel, we're replenished, then we can work some more. That's the cycle of productivity, of life; and it's terribly important to keep the right balance between work and rest. We have to learn to replenish our resources and be periodically refreshed. This is the cycle God established at the Creation when He worked for six days and then rested on the seventh. He Himself didn't need to be replenished, of course, but He was establishing a pattern for us. If you are not refreshing and replenishing your energy through adequate rest, you'll eventually suffer some kind of breakdown.

Philemon 1:1-9 Paul, The Aged

Being such a one as Paul, the aged, ... I appeal to you for my son Onesimus. —Philemon 1:9-10

Celebrating my 60th birthday really changed my perspective on life— I used to think people in their sixties were "old." Then I started counting the number of productive years I might have left and set the number at 10. I went along with this dead-end kind of thinking until I remembered a very productive co-worker who was 85. So I sought him out to ask what life after 60 was like. He told me of some of the wonderful ministry opportunities the Lord had given him over the last 25 years.

The apostle Paul, referring to himself as "aged" in Philemon 1:9, really resonates with my own sense of aging: "Being such a one as Paul, the aged, ... I appeal to you for my son Onesimus" (vv.9-10). Paul was asking Philemon to take back his runaway servant

Onesimus. Some scholars believe Paul was in his late forties or early fifties when he wrote this—certainly not a senior citizen by today's standards. But life expectancy in those days was much shorter. Yet despite awareness of his mature years, Paul went on to serve the Lord for several more years.

While we may experience physical or other kinds of limitations, what really matters is that we continue doing what we can for the Lord until He calls us Home. -- Dennis Fisher ([Our Daily Bread](#))

Think not your work of no account
Although it may be small;
The Lord marks well your faithfulness
When you give Him your all.
—D. De Haan

God can use you at any age—if you are willing.

Philemon 1:1-7 - I hear of your love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints. Philemon 5

Last Sunday in my morning sermon, I mentioned that the Lord sometimes speaks to us through a mere phrase of Scripture. Later I received this letter: I've been meaning to send you a note since Sunday, as I wanted to tell you of finding strength in a simple phrase I saw on the way from New York last week. We'd gone to visit my mother. I'm concerned for her, as she's alone in the old farmhouse I grew up in. We don't know when she'll decide to move out, but it's obvious she'll soon need some sort of regular care. In addition, I'm pregnant, and I have a broken foot and several other concerns. I was fretting about it, but as we rolled down the highway, I saw a phrase someone had written in the dirt on the back of a truck. It simply said: "Trust Jesus." I couldn't get it off my mind. I recalled years ago singing a little song that said, "Why Worry, When You Can Pray?" I remembered the entire tune. I've found great comfort in that, and have ever since we returned, even though I'm 825 miles from my mom. It reminded me of the time Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dirt in John 8. We bolster the sinking spirits of all the saints whenever our love and faith writes a graffiti of grace in the grime of this world. (Robert Morgan - My All in All)

Philemon 1:10 - C H Spurgeon - There are two passages in the Epistles which, when put together, have often amazed me. Paul compares himself both to a father and to a mother in the matter of the new birth: he says of one convert, "Whom I have begotten in my bonds" (Philemon 1:10), and of a whole church he says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). This is going very far, much further than modern orthodoxy would permit the most useful servant to venture. Yet it is language sanctioned, even dictated by the Spirit of God Himself, and therefore it is not to be criticized. Such mysterious power does God infuse into the instrumentality which He ordains that we are called "laborers together with God" (1Corinthians 3:9). This is at once the source of our responsibility and the ground of our hope. (from The Soul Winner)

Philemon 1:9 - Such an one as Paul the aged. - Robert Hawker

AND what was Paul in the moment here represented? Verily an aged servant of his Master, but not retired from the scene of action. Paul, though grown old in the Lord's service, was still as hotly engaged as ever, in the Lord's battle. Art thou such an one, my soul, as Paul was? Then learn from hence, that however many, or however heavy, former campaigns have been, there is no rest for thee this side Jordan, no more than for Paul; no winter quarters for the true soldiers of Jesus Christ. Until thy Captain undress thee for the grave, the holy armour in which he hath clad thee is not to be taken off Art thou such an one as Paul the aged? Then, like Paul, see that thou art strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. And how sweet the thought! Thy Jesus, who hath borne thee from the womb, and carried thee from the belly, knows well the burthen of thy increasing years, and all the infirmities belonging to them, and will carry both thee and them. Yes, my soul, those very infirmities which the tenderest-hearted friend sometimes feels impatient at, and even thyself, thou knowest not how to bear, Jesus feels, Jesus commiserates, Jesus will soften! He that hath carried all thy sins, carrieth also all thy sorrows. Doth he not say so? Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you, Isaiah 46:3, 4. Precious Lamb of God! henceforth I cast all my burdens upon thee. Thou hast never called thyself, I AM, for nothing. Thou hast indeed made me, and new-made me. Thou hast borne all my sins in thine own body on the tree. Art thou not both the Alpha and the Omega, both the Author and Finisher, of my salvation? Oh, yes: thou hast been every thing to me, and for me, from the womb of creation; borne me on eagle's wings; made me, and new-made me; redeemed me, in a thousand redemptions, and been better to me than all my fears! What, indeed, hast thou not done for me? And now then, being such an one as Paul the aged, shall I now doubt, or now fear, when every pain, and every cross, and every new assault from sin, and Satan, bid me go to Jesus. Oh! for grace, ever to keep in view what thou hast said and done, and what thou hast promised. Yes, yes: it is enough; Jesus hath said, "even to your old age I am he." The same I have been, the same I will ever be. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. Shout, my soul, and cry out Hallelujah! He that hath been my first, will be my last; my strength, my song, my salvation for ever!

Philemon 10 - Jon Courson

While he was chained to a Roman guard, Paul came into contact with a man named Onesimus who was a fugitive in the city of Rome, a runaway slave who had stolen goods from his master. It is possible that Paul somehow bumped into Onesimus in the marketplace and began to dialogue with him. It is also possible that Onesimus was apprehended and chained to the same guard as Paul. We are not exactly sure how the paths of Onesimus and Paul crossed, but cross they did. Onesimus found there was no freedom in freedom itself, for although he was free from his master, he was still a slave to his own conscience, to his own sin. But Onesimus was to discover that although there is slavery in freedom—there is also freedom in slavery. How? Jesus calls all who are weary and heavy laden to voluntarily, willingly take His yoke upon them. And all who do, find freedom in their labor for Him. That's why Paul said, 'I am a bondsman—a slave by choice (Romans 1:1). Marriage proves this point, for it is, in a sense, slavery. And it can either be glorious or miserable, depending on with whom you are linked! The question in this life is not whether or not you're yoked, but to whom are you yoked? If we are yoked to Jesus, we are yoked to the quintessentially excellent Master, to the One who loves us so much, to the One who's so good for us and so good to us.

Philemon 1:10-18 - MECHANICAL PIETY - J H Jowett - THE Apostle Paul declares that benefits may be given in one of two ways—"of necessity" and "willingly." One is mechanical, the other is spontaneous. I once saw a little table-fountain playing in a drawing-room, but I heard the click of its machinery, and the charm was gone! It had to be wound up before it would play, and at frequent periods it "ran down." A little later I saw another fountain playing on a green lawn, and it was fed from the deep secret resources of the hills!

There is a generosity which is like the drawing-room fountain. If you listen you can hear the mechanical click, and a sound of friction, arising from murmuring and complaint. And there is a generosity which is like the fountain that is the child of the hills. It is clear, and sweet, and musical, and flows on through every season! One is "of necessity"; the other is "willingly." And "God loveth a cheerful giver."

And prayer can be of the same two contrary orders. One prayer is mechanical, it is hard, formal, metallic. The other is spontaneous, forceful, and irresistible. Listen to the Pharisee—"Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." It is the click of the machine! Listen to the publican—"God be merciful to me, a sinner!" It is the voice of the deeps.

Philemon 1:4-16 Freedom At Alcatraz

I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains. —Philemon 1:10

A tour of the federal prison on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay left me with some unforgettable images. As our tour boat pulled into the dock, I could see why this now-closed maximum-security federal prison was once known as "The Rock."

Later, inside the legendary Big House, I stared at shafts of light coming through heavily barred windows. Then I saw row after row of cagelike cells that housed well-known inmates such as Al Capone and Robert Stroud, the "Birdman of Alcatraz."

But another image made a deeper impression. Stepping into an empty cell, I saw the name "Jesus" scrawled on a wall. In another, a Bible lay on a shelf. Together they quietly spoke of the greatest of all freedoms.

Paul knew such liberty while waiting to be executed. Regarding himself as a "prisoner of Christ," he used his incarceration to help other inmates discover what it means to be an eternally forgiven, dearly loved member of God's family (Philem. 1:10).

Barred windows and doors represent one kind of confinement. Physical paralysis, inescapable poverty, and prolonged unemployment are others. Perhaps you endure another. None are to be desired—yet who would trade "imprisonment" with Christ for life "on the outside" without Him?-- Mart De Haan ([Our Daily Bread](#))

My heart and soul imprisoned lay,
Not knowing Christ the Lord;
But since the day He set me free,
We live in one accord. —Hess

To be under Christ's control is to have true freedom.

Philemon 1:7 - Somebody Forgets - A little fellow in the ghetto was teased by one who said, "If God loves you, why doesn't he take care of you? Why doesn't God tell someone to bring you shoes and a warm coat and better food?" The little lad thought for a moment then with tears starting in his eyes, said, "I guess He does tell somebody, but somebody forgets." God's plan is to care through His followers and that caring is the fruit of goodness.

Philemon 1:8 - Lack of self-confidence is the biggest barrier to creativity. —Robert J. Morgan, Leadership, Vol. 14

Philemon 1:4-16 Details, Details

In everything give thanks. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

Details make a difference. Ask the man from Germany who planned to visit his fiancée for Christmas but ended up in snowy Sidney, Montana, instead of sunny Sydney, Australia.

Prepositions in our language seem like insignificant details, but they can make a big difference. The words “in” and “for” are an example.

The apostle Paul wrote, “In everything give thanks” (1 Thess. 5:18). That doesn’t mean we have to be thankful for everything. We need not be thankful for the bad choices someone makes, but we can be thankful in the circumstances because the Lord can use the resulting difficulties for good.

The letter to Philemon illustrates this idea. Paul was imprisoned with Onesimus, a runaway slave. He certainly didn’t have to give thanks for his bad situation. Yet his letter is full of gratitude because he knew that God was using it for good. Onesimus had become something more than a slave; he was now a beloved brother in the Lord (v.16).

Knowing that God can use all things for good is more than enough reason to give thanks in everything. Giving thanks in difficult circumstances is a small detail that makes a big difference. -- Julie Ackerman Link ([Our Daily Bread](#))

Father, thank You that in every trial, challenge, and difficulty, You are behind the scenes working things out for our good. Help us to see Your hand in everything. Amen.

God has not promised to keep us from life’s storms, but He will keep us through them.

Philemon 1:12 OUR DAILY HOMILY by F B Meyer

My very heart. -- This fragment of ancient letter-writing gives us a model of the way in which our commonest or most prosaic dealings, and our letters, even on business matters, may breathe the spirit of Christ. It also illustrates the relation in which we stand to Jesus Christ. What Onesimus was to Paul and Philemon combined, that we are to our Lord.

What was Onesimus to Paul? — His child, whom he had begotten in his bonds. He had probably been discovered by some of his companions in the purlieu of Rome, where criminals concealed themselves from justice, and abandoned characters gave vent to the wildest passions. Or, having heard that the apostle, whom he had so often met in his master’s house, was residing in his own hired house in Rome, the runaway slave had found him out, when in the extremity of hunger. In either case he had now become dear as the apostle’s heart; had learnt to minister to him in his bonds; had proved more than a servant — a brother beloved. O Thou who hast redeemed us from our sins, may we be all this to Thee!

What was Onesimus to Philemon? — He had been unprofitable; and we have been. He was sent back; and we have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. He had been a servant, henceforth he should be a beloved brother; and we are no longer servants, but friends. He had grievously wronged his master; but his sin had been forgiven, and so covered by over-abounding grace, that it would bring him into a position of greater privilege and blessing than ever before. In this man’s sin and restoration we see ourselves. Where our sin abounded, grace has much more abounded, through the tender pity of Him who had put our defalcations to his own account.

Philemon 1:12-22 One Heart At A Time

... no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother. —Philemon 1:16

Quaker John Woolman was an itinerant preacher who waged his own personal campaign to end slavery in colonial America. Woolman met with slave-holders to speak of the injustice of holding other human beings as property. Although Woolman did not eradicate slavery completely, he did persuade many masters to free their slaves. His success was due to individual, personal persuasion.

The book of Philemon contains a similar one-on-one appeal. Onesimus was a runaway slave who had escaped from his Christian master Philemon. Onesimus had come to faith through Paul’s ministry, and now Paul was sending him back to Philemon with these words: “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—a beloved brother” (vv.15-16). Although we don’t know if Onesimus was set free from slavery, his new faith in Jesus had changed his relationship with his Christian master. He was now also a brother in Christ. Paul was influencing his world one heart at a time.

By the transforming power of the gospel, people and situations can change. Like Woolman and like Paul, let’s seek to influence our world one heart at a time. - Dennis Fisher ([Our Daily Bread](#))

If I can help some wounded heart,
If I can by my love impart
Some blessing that will help more now—
Lord, just show me how.
—Brandt

The kindest thing you can do for another is to show him the truth.

Leading with Love

Read: Philemon 8–18

I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. Philemon 9

In his book *Spiritual Leadership*, J. Oswald Sanders explores the qualities and the importance of tact and diplomacy. “Combining these two words,” Sanders says, “the idea emerges of skill in reconciling opposing viewpoints without giving offense and without compromising principle.”

During Paul’s imprisonment in Rome, he became the spiritual mentor and close friend of a runaway slave named Onesimus, whose owner was Philemon. When Paul wrote to Philemon, a leader of the church in Colossae, asking him to receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ, he exemplified tact and diplomacy. “Although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. . . . [Onesimus] is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord” (Philem. 8–9, 16).

Leaders who serve will serve as good leaders.

Paul, a respected leader of the early church, often gave clear commands to the followers of Jesus. In this case, though, he appealed to Philemon on the basis of equality, friendship, and love. “I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary” (v. 14).

In all our relationships, may we seek to preserve harmony and principle in the spirit of love.

Father in heaven, in all our relationships, give us grace and wisdom to be wise leaders, parents, and friends.

Leaders who serve will serve as good leaders.

By David C. McCasland

INSIGHT Paul’s appeal of love to Philemon was rooted in his spiritual parenthood. In other letters, Paul spoke of himself as a father to those he brought to Christ (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Gal. 4:19). In this personal letter, Paul noted that Onesimus had become his spiritual son (v. 10). Then at the end of his letter, to reinforce his appeal, Paul reminded Philemon that he too was his spiritual son (v. 19). Paul used his fatherly authority to bring about reconciliation. It was the appeal of a father’s love and an appeal to family love for the reconciliation of two spiritual siblings. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Philemon 1:18 A Good Account

If he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. —Philemon 1:18

As a young boy I watched my dad write checks and wished that I could do it. What I didn’t realize was that there had to be money in an account to back them up.

The apostle Paul never wrote a check, but he did have an account good enough to pay an unusual debt if necessary. He referred to this in his letter to Philemon, a wealthy Christian whose slave Onesimus had run away and may have stolen some money from his master.

In the providence of God, Onesimus met Paul in Rome and became a follower of Christ. They agreed that it was right for him to return to his master. Paul wrote a letter to Philemon (the letter that bears his name), asking him to receive Onesimus as a brother, and assuring him that he himself would pay any debt Onesimus owed.

That's a picture of what happens in salvation. As sinners, we owed an enormous debt, but Jesus took care of it for us. Because of His sinless life, He has a limitless resource of righteousness. And by dying in our place, He paid the penalty for our sin. Now we can draw on this payment by faith. As Martin Luther said, "We are all His Onesimi." If we put our trust in Christ as our Savior, our sins are put to His account and we are free for all eternity. Praise God! —Dennis De Haan ([Our Daily Bread](#))

Rejoice, rejoice, the debt is paid!
For all our sins on Christ were laid;
Estrangement once was all we knew,
But now we know a love that's true. —D. De Haan

**Christ paid a debt He didn't owe
to satisfy a debt we couldn't pay.**

Philemon 1:18 - Put Them on My Account - Robert Morgan

I remember sitting in church as a child, listening as our pastor waxed vividly from this text. He described the slave Onesimus, how he transgressed, how he confessed, and how he was reconciled to his master through Paul's entreaty.

Is not this a picture of the gospel? I think I see Him as He brings the needy sinner into God's presence, saying, "Father, he has wronged Thee; he owes Thee much, but all has been charged to My account. Let him go free." Only years later did I discover that my pastor had preached one of Harry Ironside's most memorable sermons virtually word for word: **Charge that to My Account.**

Well, nothing is original. Ironside himself may have gotten the idea from the Methodist circuit rider, Daniel Curry. One night on the Nebraska prairie, Curry made himself a little campfire and fell asleep, using his saddle for a pillow. That night he dreamed of dying and going to heaven, where he was met by an angel who asked his reason for being there.

"My name is Daniel Curry," answered the preacher, "and I have come to claim the mansion Jesus promised me long ago." But the angel wouldn't let him in, and they got into a quarrel. Finally Curry was taken to argue his case before Almighty God Himself. But arriving at the throne, he was dumbstruck. It was ablaze with blinding light equal to a thousand suns, and Curry fell prostrate before the Lord, his eyes tightly shut. A stern voice cried, "Who art thou? What seekest thou?" Curry tried to rise, but he was too terrified to utter a sound.

Suddenly he heard sandaled feet drawing near. A hand touched him and pulled him to his feet. Daniel recognized the scars on the man's palms, and he heard Him speak these words: "Father, this is Daniel Curry. He confessed Me before men, and I am now confessing him before Thee. Whatever sins he has committed, whatever transgressions may blot his record, whatever iniquities may stain his past—charge them all to Me. Put them on My account." ([BORROW From This Verse](#) - highly recommended!)

Philemon 1:20 - One day when our oldest son, Zachary, was three, we were eating ice cream. He began shivering, placed his hand over his heart, and said, "Mommy, it's cold in my Jesus!"

Preparing a Lodging- "But withal prepare me a lodging." Philemon 1:22 - Ian Paisley

I want to take this text in the sense of preparing a lodging on earth for God. God says to us "but withal prepare me a lodging".

The Tabernacle

God said to Moses, "Prepare me a lodging" and the Tabernacle was set up.

It was a wonderful, divinely planned lodging for God, a replica of God's dwelling place in the heavens.

At its centre in the Holiest of All was the expression of the Divine Glory.

The Temple

It was in the heart of David to prepare a lodging place for God, a house of cedar for the Most High God.

God forbade him, directing that Solomon would be its builder.

But in the same way as God gave the plan and dimensions of the Tabernacle to Moses so He gave the plan and dimensions of the Temple to David (I Chronicles 28:19). Like the Tabernacle, the Temple had its expression of the Divine Glory with the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat.

The Body of Our Lord

The Tabernacle was superseded by the Temple; the Temple by the body of our Lord. There came the appointed time when God the Son said to His Father, "Prepare for me a lodging," and a body God prepared Him. (see Hebrews 10:5).

The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us and the display of the divine glory was seen on earth. We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth (see John 1:14).

The Body of Believers

Christ in His Body, now glorified, is in heaven. He has sent His other Self, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to this earth. The bodies of the believers have become His lodging place on earth. Through these lodgings places the expression of the divine glory appears on earth today. We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us (see II Corinthians 4:8).

Philemon 1:25 - Devotional by J C Philpot - It is the regenerating breath of the Lord Jesus Christ which makes the soul alive unto Himself. This is manifest from His own language: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Then for the first time "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit." For you will observe that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is not with our carnal mind: that ever remains the same, a body of sin and death, flesh, corrupt flesh, "in which dwelleth no good thing," and therefore not the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. His grace is with our spirit, that "new man" of which we read that "it is after God, [that is, after the image of God] created in righteousness and true holiness." This is called our "spirit," because it is born of the Spirit, as the Lord Himself unfolded the solemn mystery to Nicodemus: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This is no subtle, wire-drawn distinction, but a very important truth; for unless we see the difference between the two natures, the spirit and the flesh, the law in the members and the law of the mind, we shall always be in bondage, as looking for hiltiness in the flesh. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ being thus with our spirit, it breathes from time to time upon that spirit, moves and acts in it and upon it; for there is what I may call a gracious or spiritual union between the two. Thus we can no more live without the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ than the earth can live without the sun. He must shine, or we have no light; He must revive, or we have no warmth; and He must fertilise, or we bring forth no fruit. Then time after time there is an outgoing of the single desire of the soul to the Lord Jesus Christ that His grace would be with our spirit; that this grace may be ever flowing forth into yus, so as to make us new creatures, dispel all doubt and fear, break to pieces all binds and fetters, fill us with love and humility, conform us to His suffering image, produce in us every fruit that shall redound to His praise, be with us in life and death, and land us safe in eternity. (Ears from Harvested Sheaves.)

Philemon - Sermons4Kids

All Our Righteousness Is of God

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ....God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them....Be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

Have you ever heard of Onesimus (oh-NESS-ih-muss)? The apostle Paul wrote a letter for the sake of Onesimus, and that letter was inspired by God to be a part of the New Testament. If you find the book of "Philemon" in your Bible, you can read the whole story, but here it is in a nutshell:

Onesimus was not a powerful king or a famous preacher. In fact, Onesimus's only claim to fame was that he was an unprofitable servant. He had left his master, Philemon (fai-LEE-munn). Bible scholars think Onesimus had run away or had been sent to prison by Philemon for doing wrong.

But God saved Onesimus during his time away from his master. Onesimus met Paul, and through Paul, Onesimus met Jesus Christ. In his letter to Philemon, Paul describes Onesimus as his own spiritual son, and he asks Philemon to take Onesimus back into his household as a servant again – and not only as a servant, but as a profitable, useful servant. And not only as a profitable, useful servant, but as a much-loved brother and a fellow-laborer in the faith.

Imagine yourself in Onesimus's situation. The only thing you are known for is being an UN-profitable servant. You have wronged your master, and you haven't done what you were supposed to do. You have been an unrighteous servant, and no one owes you anything – especially not your master.

Now imagine you read what Paul has written your master: "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account. I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it."

The apostle Paul wrote that letter in behalf of Onesimus. He offered to shoulder the blame for anything Onesimus had done wrong.

He told Philemon to put Onesimus's wrongdoings on his account. Paul told Philemon to take Onesimus in as though Philemon were taking in a respected friend and brother like Paul.

How do you think that Paul's letter made Onesimus feel? He probably felt very special, but it was not because of anything he deserved or earned for himself. If his master let him come home and treated him like a brother, Onesimus would have to realize that it was Paul who patched things up. He would know that Paul was the one helping him to fix that relationship, helping him to get things right with his master.

In the verses at the beginning of the devotional, the word "reconcile" carries that idea of "patching things up" between two people. "While we were yet sinners," the Bible says, Jesus Christ, Who is God the Son, came to die for us and save us. God Himself came to Earth to reconcile us to Himself. The word "imputed" means that God put our sins on Christ's account and put Christ's righteousness on our accounts. Since He was God on Earth, living a perfect human life, Jesus Christ was able to shoulder the blame for all our sins. Through Jesus Christ's character and sacrifice, God is able to forgive us and adopt us into His family.

If Jesus Christ has reconciled you to God, how should that make you feel? He was able to take the responsibility for you, even though you do not deserve any grace or mercy. All of us, if left to ourselves, are unrighteous servants. We are runaways and rebels, just like Onesimus was. To have Jesus Christ on our side, with His perfect righteousness, going to God on our behalf – that should make us feel special. We ought to be glad that He has made it possible for us to be right with God, for things to be "patched up" between us.

Onesimus is not the star of his reconciliation story, and neither are we the stars of our stories. God is the righteous One Who made it all possible.

Our righteousness and spiritual reconciliation comes from God Himself.

Philemon 1:1-3 By the year 2000, Jenny Thompson had won more Olympic gold medals than any other American woman. She had won ten medals in the previous three Olympics and eight of them had been gold medals. Despite her skill, Thompson could not have won any of these medals on her own. Why? The reason is simple. She had competed in each of these events as part of a team. Her victories were the result of a group effort.

This is also true of the Christian life. Paul's letter to Philemon, like so many of his other letters, begins by mentioning several of his co-laborers in ministry. Philemon was probably wealthy. He was at least enough well off to afford slaves. He lived in Colossae and his home was used as a meeting place for the church there. Paul had led Philemon to the Lord and now refers to him as his "dear friend" and as a "fellow worker." Apphia, whose name meant something like "darling" or "sweetheart," was probably Philemon's wife. She is described by Paul as a "sister" in the Lord. Archippus may also have been a member of Philemon's family, perhaps his son. It's possible that he was one of the leaders of the church that met in Philemon's home. The apostle calls Archippus a "fellow soldier."

Paul also addressed this letter to the entire church that met in Philemon's home. This is interesting in view of the personal nature of the request that occasioned the letter. Paul wrote on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave owned by Philemon, asking him to accept Onesimus back into his household as a brother in Christ. Paul also mentions Timothy in the introduction to this letter and refers to him simply as "our brother."

Can you name at least three other "team members" who contribute to your effectiveness in serving Christ? Success in ministry is a group effort. (Today in the Word)

Love and Labor - Philemon

He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. Colossians 4:9

Nelson Mandela oversaw the reintegration of South Africa after a brutal period of apartheid. His most powerful negotiating tools? Love and forgiveness, two things he practiced in his own life as much as he prescribed them for the nation. For example, on the twentieth anniversary of his release from prison, Mandela invited one of his former jailers to a celebratory dinner. Speaking about the relationship that developed between the two men, Mandela said it "reinforced my belief in the essential humanity of even those who had kept me behind bars."

In Philemon Paul demonstrates his own knack for negotiation, with love and forgiveness forming the active core of his argument. The book of Philemon, the shortest letter written by Paul, is to Philemon about the matter of the escaped slave Onesimus. As author Bill Heatley explains, Onesimus escaped, became a Christian himself, and then became an assistant to Paul. Under Roman law, Philemon had the right to punish Onesimus severely. But as an apostle of the LORD, Paul had the right to command Philemon to

receive Onesimus as a brother. Instead of resorting to a hierarchy of rights, Paul calls for love, forgiveness, and mutuality. He requested that Philemon forgive Onesimus and forego any punishment, while at the same time asking Onesimus to return voluntarily to Philemon.

Mandela remembered the “essential humanity” of his captors, but Paul adds to this kinship in Christ. He asked Philemon and Onesimus to treat each other as brothers rather than as slave and master. Here we see a three-way application of the principle of mutuality among Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. Each of them owed something to the others. Each of them had a claim over the others. Paul wanted to have all the debts and claims relinquished in favor of a mutual respect and service.

Apply the Word -Philemon could not have failed to notice Paul’s statement that he would be following up with him (v. 21). But Paul managed the communication in an artful way that provides a model for resolving issues in the workplace. For more insight into cultivating a loving posture in the workplace, read *The Gift of Work: Spiritual Disciplines for the Workplace* by Bill Heatley. (Today in the Word)

Philemon 1:4-5 - Today in the Word - Even though his father had died several decades earlier, every time Samuel Thornton spoke of him, he gave the impression he had just had a conversation with him. In fact, the memory of his father was so vivid that Samuel often referred to him in the present tense, as if he were still alive. What was most apparent, however, was the pleasure it gave Samuel to remember his father’s life. A missionary to India and then to Japan, his father had been a godly example to his family. Each story brought to Samuel’s mind the valuable spiritual lessons he had learned from his father while growing up.

Paul felt similarly about Philemon. Every time Paul remembered Philemon, he rejoiced. This was true of others also. Paul told the Roman believers that he remembered them constantly in prayer (Ro 1:9). He wrote to the Ephesian church, “I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:16). He gave thanks to God every time he remembered the Philippian believers (Phil. 1:3). He assured the Thessalonians: “We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thess. 1:3).

For Paul, remembering and praying were synonymous. The memory of those he loved immediately prompted him to pray for them (2Tim. 1:3). Paul also asked others to remember him (1Cor. 11:2). He asked the Colossians to “remember” his chains (Col. 4:18). He reminded the Thessalonians of his example of effort, endurance of hardship, and diligent work during his time of ministry among them (1Th. 2:9). He expected the churches to remember his teaching (2Thess. 2:5, 8).

Missionaries often use prayer cards with photographs to remind their supporters to pray for them. Why not use the snapshots and school photographs that friends and family members give you as a similar reminder? Use a bulletin board or refrigerator door to create a “wall of remembrance.” The pictures and keepsakes you post there will remind you of needs for which you can pray. Or you can simply praise God for the lives of those represented there.

Philemon 1:6-7 D. L. Moody once said: “If this world is going to be reached, I am convinced that it must be done by men and women of average talent. After all, there are comparatively few people in the world who have great talents.” Yet “average” ability may be one of the things that keeps Christians from sharing their faith. Many are intimidated by the thought that they are ordinary people given the extraordinary task of showing the love of Christ to others.

The good news is that we don’t have to be super heroes or have all the answers in order to share our faith effectively with others. In fact, Paul prayed that Philemon would be active in sharing his faith, so that he would have a greater understanding of all that was his in Christ. In Philemon’s case, however, “sharing” involved more than simply stating the facts of the gospel. It’s possible that the sharing Paul had in mind consisted of acts of hospitality or financial generosity that were prompted by Philemon’s faith in Christ.

In Philemon 1:7 Paul praises Philemon for being an encouragement by “refreshing” the hearts of the saints. Philemon had used his resources to provide relief for other believers, perhaps by opening his home to them as they traveled from one city to another. Some commentators suggest that the “sharing” mentioned in verse 7 might even refer to the faith Philemon had in common with the rest of the church. If this is the sense, then Paul’s prayer would be that Philemon would grow in his understanding of the mutual treasure of faith that was his along with other believers.

How can you share your faith today? It may be by telling someone else the good news of Jesus Christ. Or, God may give you an opportunity to provide momentary relief to someone else. Don’t be discouraged if you feel as if you are just an “average” Christian with little to offer. Most of those who have had extraordinary ministries have been ordinary people who allowed our extraordinary God to use them. All who are active in sharing their faith learn more about the faith that they share.

Philemon 1:8-9 During the Civil War a woman sent Abraham Lincoln a letter asking for his autograph. She also requested that he include a sentiment with the autograph, perhaps hoping for something like “Best Wishes” or “Your Faithful Servant.” Lincoln was annoyed by the selfish nature of her request and wrote back: “Dear Madam: When you ask from a stranger that which is of interest

only to yourself, always enclose a stamp. There's your sentiment, and here's my autograph. A. Lincoln."

Paul wrote to Philemon also to ask him for a favor, but the apostle's request was not prompted by self-interest. Paul's motivation was his concern for Onesimus and for the church. Onesimus had come to faith in Christ while Paul was in prison. It's possible that Onesimus was himself a prisoner at the time. As a fellow Christian, this would have been reason enough for Philemon to rejoice. But the language Paul uses in describing Onesimus' conversion is designed to remind Philemon of other things he and his former slave had in common. They both had Paul as their spiritual father. Now Paul was asking for a favor.

Yet Paul did not want Philemon to forgive Onesimus merely out of obligation. It's true that as Philemon's spiritual father and as an apostle, Paul had spiritual authority. "I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do." But Paul wanted Philemon to comply with his request willingly, not under compulsion: "I appeal to you on the basis of love." Still, the apostle did make it clear that Philemon was also obligated to do what Paul asked.

Philips Brooks said,

"Duty makes us do things well; but love makes us do them beautifully."

What do you have on your agenda today that might qualify as a duty? Do you plan to fulfill it out of a sense of grudging obligation or will you be motivated by your love for Christ and gratitude for all that He has done in your life? Choose at least one task on your "to do" list and consider how being motivated by gratitude will change the way you approach it.

Philemon 1:8-14

A network television show asks: "What Would You Do?" The show contrives difficult situations and uses hidden cameras to see how people will react. For example, a mother loudly criticizes her overweight daughter (both portrayed by actors) in a crowded restaurant. Many of the patrons are bothered, but most simply shake their heads in disgust. A few, however, do respond. One man chose to confront the mother. When asked why, he responded, "I had to do the right thing."

In this letter to Philemon, Paul appeals to his colleague to do the right thing in a difficult situation. He is writing to Philemon about Onesimus, who was Philemon's former slave. Some extra-biblical accounts explain that the slave had robbed Philemon and fled to Rome. There, the slave came in contact with Paul, and Onesimus's life was forever changed by the gospel.

Onesimus, Paul agrees, was formerly "useless" to Philemon (v. 11). Much has changed, however. Paul not only appeals to Philemon's forgiving side, but also now describes the former slave as a "son" and as "useful" (vv. 10-11). Even more radically, he states in verse 12 that Onesimus "is my very heart."

Once a rebellious slave, Onesimus was changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul appeals to Philemon to accept this change and to take his servant back based on two motivations. First of course, is that both Paul and Philemon themselves are prisoners of God and bound by love (vv. 8-9). They are taken captive by the will of Christ.

The second reason is that Philemon and Onesimus now share a bond in Christ. Paul appeals to Philemon for this favor and wants him to do it of his own accord and not because he felt forced to do it. He wants Philemon to make the choice himself, do not only do the right thing, but to go beyond what is expected because of his love for Paul and his love for Christ.

Note that this is not a small request. Philemon was asked to forgive someone who had wronged him, to welcome him back with honor, and to work alongside him for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

Apply the Word - In this spirit of "lavish love," consider taking an extra step of love toward someone today. Pray for someone in your church who has hurt you, and also send them an encouraging note. Offer to help in a ministry like the nursery or grounds crew that has a need, even if it isn't your favorite. Cook or take out the trash so that your spouse or family member doesn't have to. These actions please God when motivated by love.

Philemon 1:10-11 When he was young, Dan wasn't expected to become interested in the Bible, let alone become the pastor of a church. Widely known as the "town drunk," Dan had a reputation for hard fighting and heavy drinking. Then a local pastor began to pray for Dan and patiently share the gospel with him. When Dan trusted Christ, his life began to change. In time, he felt God calling him to prepare for the ministry. He left the small town where he had grown up and attended a Bible college. When the pastor who had led him to Christ felt called to the mission field, Dan returned to his hometown and replaced him as the church's minister.

Charles Spurgeon once declared,

"The most useful members of a church are usually those who would be doing harm if they were not doing good."

This was certainly true of the apostle Paul. Prior to trusting in Christ, he was a persecutor of Christians.

The same was true of Onesimus. In Greek the name Onesimus literally meant “useful.” In an ironic play on words, Paul admits that formerly Onesimus had been “useless” to Philemon. In fact, Paul uses one more word play here. The word translated “useless” is similar to the Greek word Christless. When Onesimus was Christless, he was useless. Once he came to know Christ, his life was changed, and he became useful, both to Philemon and to the Lord Jesus.

Have you become more useful to God and to others since you trusted in Jesus Christ? Has anyone expressed surprise at the change in your life? Think about these questions. Ironically, those who have experienced such a change can sometimes be the most skeptical about the possibility of God’s grace impacting others in the same way. Think of one such “hopeless case” that you know. Pray that by God’s grace they will come to know Christ, become His useful servant, and show God’s love to others.

Philemon 1:12-14 Hobbits, the fictional inhabitants of Middle Earth created by J. R. R. Tolkien, are fond of giving gifts. Instead of receiving gifts on their birthday, they give gifts to other Hobbits. “Actually in Hobbiton and Bywater every day in the year was somebody’s birthday,” the author explains in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, “so that every hobbit in those parts had a fair chance of at least one present at least once a week.” As they were required to give so many gifts, some Hobbits recycled them. What was received from one Hobbit was passed on to another on one’s birthday. For Hobbits, this habit of gift giving “was not a bad system.” We, however, might get offended if we knew that someone had given us a “recycled gift.”

Paul had a similar concern about the request that he was about to make of Philemon. Onesimus had become so useful to Paul in his ministry that he would have liked to keep him with him. However, he did not feel that he could do so without Philemon’s permission. He decided, instead, to send Onesimus back with his letter and let Philemon decide what must be done.

God is also concerned about the gifts that we give to Him. He commands us to offer ourselves to Him but wants us to do so willingly. We should see the command to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice as “reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Those who serve as leaders in the church are to do so because they are “willing” (1Peter 5:2). This is also to be true of those who offer their finances to God (2Cor. 9:7). How would you rate your willingness to serve Christ today on a scale of 1 to 10, if 1 is grudging and 10 is eager and willing?

Philemon 1:15-16 One of the most destructive results of slavery has been its tendency to dehumanize its victims. Slaves had monetary value in the eyes of those who bought and sold them, but their value as human beings was diminished. They were viewed as objects and often treated as such. Although some masters treated their slaves with respect (as Philemon seems to have done), others were abusive (1Peter 2:18).

The New Testament did not condemn the practice of slavery outright, but its principles undermined the values that made slavery acceptable. Its assertion that in Christ there is no such thing as slave or free and that every believer is a brother or sister in Christ sowed the seeds that would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery.

Paul wanted Philemon to appreciate Onesimus’ true value. As a believer Onesimus was “no longer a slave.” Even though society may have regarded him as such, in God’s eyes he was a free man (1Cor. 7:22). The believer who was not a slave had no right to look down on the Christian slave because the free man was Christ’s servant. Those who owned slaves were to recognize that they also had a master in heaven (Col. 4:1). At the same time, a new position in Christ did not give Christian slaves the right to be disrespectful. Slaves were to obey their masters with a sincere heart, out of reverence for the Lord (Col. 3:22).

We do not own slaves, but we do sometimes undervalue those around us. Although sin and character flaws may have rendered some “unprofitable servants,” these same people were so valuable that Christ shed His blood for them. Perhaps God brought these “difficult” people into your life for you to share the love of Christ with them. They have inherent value as people created in the image of God. Ask God for an opportunity to tell them about Christ, so that they can find their true worth in Him.

Philemon 1:17-21 A woman who had a long-standing grudge against her sister was describing her plan for revenge. “I’ve kept a list of every mean thing she has ever done to me,” the woman explained. “I keep it in my safe deposit box with instructions that it be given to my sister when I die.” When someone suggested that she was being bitter, the woman denied it. “I’m not bitter,” she declared. “I just want her to know what she has done.”

Although we may not be as careful about keeping accounts of what others have done to us, most of us do keep a mental list of the offenses we have suffered. Although we know we should forgive, it’s not always easy. We know that the offenses we have suffered are real and we are reluctant to let others “get away with murder.”

The feeling that a debt is owed when others hurt us is real. True biblical forgiveness is not saying that the offense another has committed is “nothing.” There must be an accurate reckoning of the offense in order to give true forgiveness. Unlock the mental safety deposit box where you keep the accounts of all your offenses. Look at the ledger and honestly calculate the debt. Now compare that to the price paid by Christ to forgive you. Shouldn’t you show the same kind of mercy to others as Christ has shown

you?

Philemon 1:22 On one of James Hudson Taylor's journeys, the sailing ship in which the pioneer missionary to China was traveling passed dangerously close to a reef. The ship's anxious captain kept hoping for a favorable evening wind to carry them away from certain disaster. When no wind came, the captain said, "Well, we have done everything that can be done. We can only await the result." "No," Taylor replied, "there is one thing we have not done yet." "What is that?" the captain asked. "Four of us on board are Christians," Taylor continued. "Let us each retire to his own cabin, and in agreed prayer ask the Lord to give us immediately a breeze. He can as easily send it now as at sunset."

After a brief time of prayer, Taylor felt so sure that God would grant his request that he could pray no longer. He went up on deck and asked the first officer to let down the mainsail. An unbeliever, the first officer refused and scornfully said, "What would be the good of that?" "We have been asking God for a wind," Taylor declared. "It is coming immediately and we are so near the reef that there is not a moment to lose!" As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Taylor saw the uppermost sail of the ship begin to stir, moved by a fresh breeze. They lowered the mainsail and within minutes the ship was steering toward safety.

Paul had the same confidence that God would answer his prayers for release from prison. He was so certain, in fact, that he asked Philemon to prepare a guestroom for him. Was this presumptuous? Not in view of the passages of Scripture that urge us to expect answers to our prayers. Jesus taught His disciples to pray with the assurance that God knew what they needed before they asked Him (Matt. 6:8). Jesus also taught His disciples to be persistent in prayer (Luke 18:1).

Examine your prayer list today. How many of your requests do you expect God to answer? Are there reasonable steps you should be taking to prepare for His answer? Remember, however, that God always reserves the right to answer our prayers in His own time and way. An answer of "No" or "Wait" is still an answer. When asked about delayed answer to prayer, Hudson Taylor explained, "If we are kept waiting, the spiritual blessing that is the outcome is far more precious than exemption from the trial."

Philemon 1:23-25 Jill Briscoe tells of the time she sat at a table with three attractive young women and felt very insecure. "I felt fat, forty, and somewhat futile," she writes. Then she sensed the Lord speaking to her. "Why do you think everyone is so tense?" In a flash, she understood the reason for the unease she had sensed between the women as well as her own insecurity. "Competition," she replied to the Lord. "I distinctly heard his next words," Briscoe writes, "'Jill, you'll never be competition.' For the first time I thanked God for my ordinary good looks. I could be a big sister to women, a friendly mother, an aunt. I could relax, knowing I would never threaten anyone. God had made me just right for my ministry of teaching women, and that was all that mattered."

Briscoe's experience is not unusual. Many Christians, both men and women, feel as if they are in competition with one another. We silently compare our jobs, children, homes, and even our spouses. Worse yet is the competitive spirit one often senses in churches. How happy are we when the church down the street begins to gain more members than our own? Such success is more likely to generate an attitude of jealousy rather than an occasion for rejoicing. If there's a competition between us, we need to remind ourselves of our heavenly Master who looks at us all as fellow workers.

As you pray for your church and its ministries this week, why not also consider praying for the "competition"? Think of another Bible-believing church or Christian ministry and ask God to bless their efforts. Also ask God to make you sensitive to any areas of your life where you may be competing with others. We don't always need to be the best. Indeed, the basic principle of life in the body of Christ is found in 1 Corinthians 12:26: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

CHARGE THAT TO MY ACCOUNT

Henry Allan Ironside

Philemon 17-19

If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it; albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides (Philemon 17-19).

Someone has said that this epistle to Philemon is the finest specimen of early private Christian correspondence extant. We should expect this, since it was given by divine inspiration. And yet it all has to do with a thieving runaway slave named Onesimus, who was about to return to his former master.

The history behind the letter, which is deduced from a careful study of the epistle itself, seems to be this: In the city of Colosse dwelt a wealthy Christian man by the name of Philemon, possibly the head of a large household, and like many in that day, he had a number of slaves or bondsmen. Christianity did not immediately overturn the evil custom of slavery, although eventually it was the

means of practically driving it out of the whole civilized world. It began by regulating the relation of master and slave, thus bringing untold blessing to those in bondage.

This man Philemon evidently was converted through the ministry of the apostle Paul. Where they met, we are not told; certainly not in the city of Colosse, because in writing the letter to the Colossians, Paul makes it clear that he had never seen the faces of those who formed the Colossian church. You will recall that he labored at Ephesus for a long period. The fame of his preaching and teaching was spread abroad, and we read that "all in Asia heard the word." Among those who thus heard the Gospel message may have been this man Philemon of Colosse, and so he was brought to know Christ.

Some years had gone by, and this slave, Onesimus, had run away. Evidently before going, he had robbed his master. With his ill-gotten gains he had fled to Rome. How he reached there we do not know, but I have no doubt that upon his arrival he had his fling and enjoyed to the full that which had belonged to his master. He did not take God into account, but nevertheless God's eye was upon him when he left his home, and it followed him along the journey from Colosse to Rome. When he reached that great metropolis he was evidently brought into contact with the very man through whom his master, Philemon, had been converted. Possibly Onesimus was arrested because of some further rascality, and in that way came in contact with Paul in prison, or he may have visited him voluntarily. At any rate God, who knows just how to bring the needy sinner and the messenger of the Cross together, saw to it that Onesimus and Paul met face-to-face.

Sam Hadley Finds Jim

Some years ago there happened a wonderful illustration of this very thing: the divine ability to bring the needy sinner and the messenger of Christ together.

When Sam Hadley was in California, just shortly before he died, Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman, that princely man of God, arranged a midnight meeting using the largest theater in the city of Oakland in order to get the message of Hadley before the very people who needed it most. On that night a great procession, maybe one thousand people, from all the different churches, led by the Salvation Army band, wended their way through the main streets of the city. Beginning at 10:30, they marched for one-half hour and then came to the Metropolitan Theater. In a moment or two it was packed from floor to gallery.

I happened to be sitting in the first balcony, looking right down upon the stage. I noticed that every seat on the stage was filled with Christian workers, but when Sam Hadley stepped forward to deliver the stirring message of the evening, his seat was left vacant. Just as he began to speak, I saw a man who had come in at the rear of the stage slip around from behind the back curtain and stand at one of the wings with his hand up to his ear, listening to the address. Evidently he did not hear very well. In a moment or two he moved to another wing and then on to another one. Finally he came forward to one side of the front part of the stage and stood there listening, but still he could not hear very well. Upon noticing him, Dr. Chapman immediately got up, greeted the poor fellow, brought him to the front, and put him in the very chair that Sam Hadley had occupied. There he listened entranced to the story of Hadley's redemption.

When the speaker had finished, Dr. Chapman arose to close the meeting, and Hadley took Chapman's chair next to this man. Turning to the man he shook hands with him, and they chatted together. When Dr. Chapman was about ready to ask the people to rise and receive the benediction, Hadley suddenly sprang to his feet, and said, "Just a moment, my friends. Before we close, Dr. Chapman, may I say something? When I was on my way from New York to Oakland a couple of weeks ago, I stopped at Detroit. I was traveling in a private car, put at my disposal by a generous Christian manufacturer. While my car was in the yards, I went downtown and addressed a group at a mission. As I finished, an old couple came up and said, 'Mr. Hadley, won't you go home and take supper with us?'

"I replied, 'You must excuse me; I am not at all well, and it is a great strain for me to go out and visit between meetings. I had better go back to the car and rest.'

"They were so disappointed. The mother faltered. 'Oh, Mr. Hadley, we did want to see you so badly about something.'

"'Very well, give me a few moments to lie down and I will go with you.'"

He then told how they sat together in the old-fashioned parlor on the horsehair furniture and talked. They told him their story: "Mr. Hadley, you know we have a son, Jim. Our son was brought up to go to Sunday school and church, and oh, we had such hopes of him. But he had to work out rather early in life and he got into association with worldly men and went down and down and down. By and by he came under the power of strong drink. We shall never forget the first time he came home drunk. Sometimes he would never get home at all until the early hours of the morning. Our hearts were breaking over him. One time he did not come all night, but early in the morning, after we had waited through a sleepless night for him, he came in hurriedly, with a pale face and said, 'Folks, I cannot stay; I must get out. I did something when I was drunk last night, and if it is found out, it will go hard with me. I am not going to stay here and blot your name.' He kissed us both and left, and until recently we have never seen nor heard of him.

“Mr. Hadley, here is a letter that just came from a friend who lives in California, and he tells us, ‘I am quite certain that I saw your son, Jim, in San Francisco. I was coming down on a street car and saw him waiting for a car. I was carried by a block. I hurried back, but he had boarded another car and was gone. I know it was Jim.’

“He is still living, Mr. Hadley, and we are praying that God will save him yet. You are going to California to have meetings out there. Daily we will be kneeling here praying that God will send our boy, Jim, to hear you, and perhaps when he learns how God saved one poor drunkard, he will know there is hope also for him. Will you join us in daily prayer?”

“I said I would, and we prayed together. They made me promise that every day at a given hour, Detroit time, I would lift my heart to God in fellowship with them, knowing that they were kneeling in that room, praying to God that He would reach Jim and give me the opportunity of bringing him to Christ. That was two weeks ago. I have kept my promise every day. My friends, this is my first meeting in California, and here is Jim. Tonight he was drinking in a saloon on Broadway as the great procession passed. He heard the singing, followed us to the theater, and said, ‘I believe I will go in.’ He hurried up here, but it was too late. Every place was filled, and the police officer said, ‘We cannot allow another person to go inside.’ Jim thought, ‘This is just my luck. Even if I want to go and hear the Gospel, I cannot. I will go back to the saloon.’ He started back; then he returned determined to see if there was not some way to get in. He came in the back door and finally sat in my own chair. Friends, Jim wants Christ, and I ask you all to pray for him.”

There that night we saw that poor fellow drop on his knees and confess his sin and guilt and accept Christ as his Savior. The last sight we had of Jim was when J. Wilbur Chapman and he were on their way to the Western Union Telegraph office to send the joyful message: “God heard your prayers. My soul is saved.” Oh, what a God, lover of sinners that He is! How He delights to reach the lost and needy!

“He Delighteth in Mercy”

This same God was watching over [Onesimus](#). He saw him when he stole that money and as he fled from his master's house. He watched him on his way to Rome and in due time brought him face-to-face with Paul. Through that same precious Gospel that had been blessed to the salvation of Philemon, Onesimus, the thieving runaway slave, was also saved, and another star was added to the Redeemer's crown.

Then I can imagine Onesimus coming to Paul and saying, “Now, Paul, I want your advice. There is a matter that is troubling me. You know my master, Philemon. I must confess that I robbed him and ran away. I feel now that I must go back and try to make things right.”

One evidence that people are really born of God is their effort to make restitution for wrong done in the past. They want a good conscience both before God and man.

“Paul, ought I to go back in accordance with the Roman law? I have nothing to pay, and I don't know just what to do. I do not belong to myself, and it is quite impossible to ever earn anything to make up for the loss. Will you advise me what to do?”

Paul might have said, “I know Philemon well. He has a tender, kind, loving heart and a forgiving spirit. I will write him a note and ask him to forgive you, and that will make everything all right.”

But he did not do that. Why? I think that he wanted to give us a wonderful picture of the great gospel of vicarious substitution. One of the primary aspects of the work of the Cross is substitution. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself paid the debt that we owe to the infinite God in order that when forgiveness came to us it would be on a perfectly righteous basis. Paul, who had himself been justified through the Cross, now says, “I will write a letter to Philemon and undertake to become your surety. You go back to Philemon and present my letter. You do not need to plead your own case; just give him my letter.”

We see Onesimus with that message from Paul safely hidden in his wallet, hurrying back to Colosse. Imagine Philemon standing on the portico of his beautiful residence, looking down the road and suddenly exclaiming, “Why, who is that? It certainly looks like that scoundrel, Onesimus! But surely he would not have the face to come back. Still, it looks very much like him. I will just watch and wait.”

A little later, he says, “I declare, it is Onesimus! He seems to be coming to the house. I suppose he has had a hard time in the world. The stolen money is all gone, and now perhaps he is coming to beg for pardon.”

As he comes up the pathway, Onesimus calls, “Master, Master!”

“Well, Onesimus, are you home again?”

“Yes, Master, read this, please.”

No other word would Onesimus speak for himself; Paul's letter would explain all.

Philemon takes the letter, opens it, and begins to read: Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Phile 1:1).

"Why Onesimus, where did you meet Paul? Did you see him personally?"

"Yes, Master, in the prison in Rome; he led me to Christ."

Unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlaborer (Phile 1:1).

"Little enough I have ever done, but that is just like Paul."

And to our beloved [Apphia](#) (Phile 1:2). (That was Mrs. Philemon.)

"Come here, Apphia. Here is a letter from Paul." When Mrs. Philemon sees Onesimus, she exclaims, "Are you back?"

One can imagine her mingled disgust and indignation as she sees him standing there. But Philemon says: "Yes, my dear, not a word. Here is a letter for us to read—a letter from Paul."

Running on down the letter he comes to this: Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus (Phile 1:9-10).

"Think of that! He must have been putting it over on Paul in some way or another."

Whom I have begotten in my bonds (Phile 1:10). "I wonder if he told him anything about the money he stole from us. I suppose he has been playing the religious game with Paul."

Which in time past was to thee unprofitable (Phile 1:11).

"I should say he was."

But now profitable to thee and to me (Phile 1:12).

"I am not so sure of that."

Whom I have sent again (Phile 1:12).

"Paul must have thought a lot of him. If he didn't serve him any better than he did me, he would not get much out of him." He goes on reading through the letter.

"Well, well, that rascally, thieving liar! Maybe Paul believes that he is saved, but I will never believe it unless I find out that he owned up to the wrong he did me."

What is this? If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides (Phile 1:18-19).

Oh, I think in a moment Philemon was conquered. "Why," he says, "it is all out then. He has confessed his sin. He has acknowledged his thieving, owned his guilt, and, just think, Paul, that dear servant of God, suffering in prison for Christ's sake, says: Put that on my account. I will settle everything for him. Paul becomes his surety." It was just as though Paul should write today: "Charge that to my account!"

A Gospel Picture

Is not this a picture of the Gospel? A picture of what the Savior has done for every repentant soul? I think I see Him as he brings the needy, penitent sinner into the presence of God and says, "My Father, he has wronged Thee, he owes Thee much, but all has been charged to My account. Let him go free." How could the Father turn aside the prayer of His Son after that death of shame and sorrow on Calvary's cross, when He took our blame upon Himself and suffered in our stead?

But now observe it is not only that Paul offered to become Onesimus's surety, it was not merely that he offered to settle everything for Onesimus in regard to the past, but he provided for his future too. He says to Philemon: If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself (Phile 1:17).

Is not that another aspect of our salvation? We are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:6). The blessed Savior brings the redeemed one into the presence of the Father and says, "My Father, if thou countest Me the partner of Thy throne, receive him as Myself." Paul says, 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? (Phile 1:16). He is to take the place, not of a bondsman, but of an honored member of the family and a brother in Christ. Think of it—once a poor, thieving, runaway slave and now a recognized servant of Christ, made welcome for Paul's sake. Thus our Father saves the lawless, guilty sinner and makes him welcome for Jesus' sake, treating him as He treats His own beloved Son.

Jesus paid it all

All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain
He washed it white as snow.
(Based on Isaiah 1:18-[note](#))

And now every redeemed one is in Christ before God—yea, “made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Co 5:21[note](#)). Oh, wondrous love! Justice is satisfied. What a picture we have here then of substitution and acceptance. The apostle Paul gave the epitome of it all for us:

“[Jesus our Lord] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Ro 4:25-[note](#)).

We are accepted in the Beloved. The Lord Jesus became our Surety, settled for all our past, and has provided for all our future. In the book of Proverbs 11:15, there is a very striking statement, “He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure.” These words were written centuries before the Cross, to warn men of what is still a very common ground for failure and ruin in business life. To go surety for a stranger is a very dangerous thing, as thousands have learned to their sorrow. It is poor policy to take such a risk unless you are prepared to lose.

But there was One who knew to the full what all the consequences of His act would be and yet, in grace, dignified to become “surety for a stranger.” Meditate upon these wonderful words:

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Co 8:9).

He was the stranger's Surety.

A [surety](#) (see also [Wikipedia](#)) is one who stands good for another. Many a man will do this for a friend long known and trusted, but no wise man will so act for a stranger, unless he is prepared to lose. But it was when we were strangers and foreigners and enemies and alienated in our minds by wicked works that Jesus in grace became our Surety. “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pe 3:18-[note](#)).

All we owed was exacted from Him when He suffered upon the tree for sins not His own. He could then say,

“I restored that which I took not away” (Ps 69:4).

Bishop Lowth's beautiful rendering of Isa 53:7 reads: “It was exacted and He became answerable.” This is the very essence of the Gospel message. He died in my place; He paid my debt.

How fully He proved the truth of the words quoted from Proverbs when He suffered on that cross of shame! How He had to smart for it when God's awful judgment against sin fell upon Him. But He wavered not! In love to God and to the strangers whose Surety He had become,

“He endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2-[note](#)).

His sorrows are now forever past. He has paid the debt, met every claim in perfect righteousness. The believing sinner is cleared of every charge, and God is fully glorified.

He bore on the tree
The sentence for me,
And now both the Surety
And sinner are free.
(cp 1 Peter 2:24-[note](#))

None other could have met the claims of God's holiness against the sinner and have come out triumphant at last. He alone could atone for sin. Because He has settled every claim, God has raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in highest glory.

Have you trusted the stranger's Surety?

If not, turn to Him now while grace is free.