

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, 2 and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; 6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. 7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. 15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

17 If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). 20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.

22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

My plan if the Lord will allow me is to begin a huge undertaking and work our way through all of Dr. Luke's writings together. The gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

Or if you will, the Acts of Jesus, and the resulting Acts of the apostles. A complete story of christianity from beginning to as far as Luke could get when he wrote.

But that is a daunting undertaking and once begun, we understand we won't be able to deviate to other things very often.

So, while I'm working through those thoughts and praying for guidance by the Holy Spirit, I thought we would take a small time out and look together at this wonderful little letter of Paul's that has much to teach us.

This little letter is unique. Paul wrote to churches and to Pastors. He wrote to Timothy and Titus, both Pastors in what we call the Pastoral epistles. What are the Pastors responsibilities. How should the church be organized.

And he wrote to churches mostly to address questions from within, and threats from without, and within.

Perhaps the book of Romans could be considered unique. It was Paul's final word on all of the doctrines of the faith written to a group he thought perhaps he might never get to visit.

So we have everything from complete doctrinal statements of the faith to individual addresses to threats and problems of massive scope and importance to the church both then and forever in the future until the Lord comes.

What Paul wrote in his apostolic authority is as relevant to us as it was to the original hearers. And tucked in right at the very end of the massive section of the new testament that came from Paul's mind and pen via the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is this little letter to Philemon. A little jewel for us to ponder and learn from.

You say, what could a letter about a slave to a slave owner possibly have to do with us in 2018? How is this relevant?

We consider and study it in view of what this very same Paul wrote to Timothy in his second letter. 2 Tim. 3:16-17a *16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work....*

The letter to Philemon is scripture. Inspired by the Holy Spirit. This little letter is also God breathed. And thus we will find things here that are profitable, useful, of value . . . for us in 2018.

In fact that very word, useful, becomes the theme of this little letter of Paul's. So hold that thought. Value. Profit. Usefulness. How amazing that a 300 word letter to a slave owner in the first century has value for us.

With that little introduction we'll begin.

In the year 2018 we are obsessed with human interaction. How do we treat other humans.

Is it OK for men of power to use that power to mistreat women who have less power?

Is it OK to murder babies while they are still in the womb?

Is it OK to dis-respect and mal-treat humans based on their sexual preference?

Is it OK for one ethnic group to eliminate another different ethnic group from the earth?

If an ethnic group murders over 3000 of our citizens, is it OK to cause some of them a very high level of stress in order to obtain information about what else they have planned to kill more of us?

What about one ethnic group that steals and enslaves another ethnic group? Is that ever right?

If I agree to provide services to someone for an agreed upon wage, how do we regulate what is and isn't OK for the two people in the agreement?

When is it OK for me to refuse service to another human based upon my religious beliefs that those services might in some way endorse what is clearly stated by the author of this book as evil.

Does anybody else besides me go to Bing dot com to glance through all of the headlines about what's happening today. Every single one of them is about human interactions with humans. What's OK. What's clearly not OK.

From Friday last; Texas school shooting. A mother that stole \$400,000 from a son. 34 bishops in Chile offer to resign their bishopships over the scandals about sexual abuses. Prince Charles will walk Megan Markle down the aisle. The White House is threatening to fire people. And on and on ad infinitum, ad nauseum.

We are totally and completely obsessed with what humans are doing to other humans. And you don't have to read very far to discover that humans are broken. Mostly we do awful things to each other. Dreadful things. Every day in those headlines, outrageous, sinful acts, human to human.

And that website wouldn't print them if we didn't read them, but we're obsessed with what humans do to other humans. And we argue every day about what is and isn't OK. We're revising what is and isn't politically correct every day. The rules change daily.

Our culture has jettisoned this book which had clear definitions of what is and is not OK. A revealed morality, given by God, which had authority without all the questions. Gone. And now the courts and the news headlines and Facebook is rewriting the rules daily about what is and is not OK. It's a total obsession.

Philemon speaks to all of that, because it is a picture of human brokenness, before and after. What humans do to each other without Christ, and how that changes, after Jesus comes into and rebuilds a life.

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus,

Here-to-fore, Paul wrote letters where he considered himself the slave of Jesus. He was the *doulos* of Jesus. Jesus is the Master in a sweet slavery where those who belong to Him, rejoice in every work of obedience to such a Master as Him who purchased us from a previous slavery to sin and death and destruction.

Jesus bought us out of that slavery with His very life. He purchased us out of bondage, and our slavery to His ownership is a joy and a freedom within His ownership. We've been bought by a loving Master who gives us all good things, even up to and including making us heirs of God with Him.

What a wonderful slavery! That was Paul's previous picture of himself and His position in Christ. But now we see Paul, not as joyous slave of Christ, but even more impossible as a joyful prisoner of Christ.

Paul went from slave to prisoner! And his joy is full. He's proud to be a prisoner if the owner of the prison is Jesus. Rome may have thought Paul was their prisoner. But Paul says, no, I belong to someone with far more power than Rome. If I'm in prison, it's because my Master, my

owner, the Lord Jesus, has caused me to be there. He is Sovereign over Rome and over all other sovereigns. Paul is a joyful prisoner of Jesus.

and Timothy our brother, The letter has the weight of not just Paul behind it, but also Timothy. That's no small thing. Timothy was Paul's heir apparent. Paul is grooming Timothy to care for the churches when he is gone. So Timothy adds weight and authority to the letter. The request isn't just from Paul, it's from Paul and Timothy together.

We would add here that Timothy in fact, did not inherit apostolic authority from Paul. Timothy was bishop of the church at Ephesus for some time and he cared and prayed for and ministered to the saints, but it was the intention of the Master that the apostolic era would be over when the apostles, including this one untimely born, Paul, were gone.

To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, 2 and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

Now here we have to make some assumptions that the church fathers also made. Philemon was a christian of influence. He was probably wealthy since the church was able to meet in his house. He may have been fellow elder in that church.

We know that he lived in Colossae. We believe that this letter to Philemon traveled with the letter to the Colossians, written at the same time, delivered at the same time.

Apphia is most probably Philemon's wife. Wives have a strong voice in helping their husbands sort out matters of the heart. Paul includes Apphia in his greeting, and he includes Archippus. And we think Archippus was probably the pastor of the church at Colossae.

Paul considers him a fellow soldier. And Paul has several plays on names in this joyful little letter. Philemon and Apphia's names both mean beloved. So Paul plays on that. Philemon the beloved. And Apphia the beloved sister. And Archippus means soldier, and Paul says, not just a soldier, but a fellow soldier in God's army.

And Paul brings the entire church in Colossae into the discussion. If Apphia and Archippus aren't enough to persuade Philemon to Paul's position, the church is also included in the discussion. This becomes a matter for the whole church if necessary.

4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;

Paul almost always begins every letter with praise for what the recipients are doing that is praiseworthy. The one exception is the letter to the Galatians. They were in such a state of danger that Paul doesn't praise anything that was going on there.

Sometimes there's nothing to praise and the firehose just starts lobbing water at the fire. But not here. There is much positive to say about Philemon, and Paul uses what Philemon is already doing as his baseline for the additional things he will ask for from Philemon.

This is who you are in Christ already. Therefore, this is what I'll ask. Philemon loves the saints and he has a deep faith in the Lord Jesus that he exhibits by his love.

6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

Paul says you're effective and I'm praying that you'll be even more effective. Jesus gives us every good thing. Paul prays that the good things that are there will be more and more effective. Knowledge causes faith which brings increase to the good things that Jesus has already given us.

7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

In Paul's praise of Philemon, he focuses on the relationship Philemon

has to other christians. He loves the saints. He encourages and blesses the saints. That will be an important element in what Paul will ask him to do for someone who previously was not a christian, and who injured him, but now IS a christian, and should therefore fall under the special love Philemon has for those who belong to God.

Paul's comfort and joy are derived partly in the success of his spiritual children. Paul rejoices when his children are thriving. Philemon was obviously a person in Christ who was thriving.

We see that here, and by direct opposite comparison we see in Ppn 3 the opposite thing is also true;

18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,

Enemies of the cross cause Paul to be sad, even to weep. Friends of the cross, like Philemon cause Paul joy, and comfort. Why? Because when the saints come to Philemon, they are refreshed.

because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

The world is a battlefield for christians. We are enemy combatants in a war. Satan rules this world. And christians are supposed to be engaged in the battle.

And Paul says, Philemon, you're like a cool drink of water for the saints. The battle rages, but Philemon refreshes the saints. And when Paul thinks about that, joy floods his heart. God has gifted His church with people like Philemon who refresh the saints. How wonderful is that.

No one can stay on the front lines of battle all the time. We need to pause and be refreshed, and God has His Philemon's that he gives to the church.

I can identify a little bit. I'm not really doing much battle, but whatever it is I'm doing, I can tell you, when I go to that conference once a year,

those men who are there are a real refreshment to me.

So I understand just a little bit about what Paul is saying. How good it is to be refreshed by someone like Philemon. Shade and fellowship and rest. Occasional refreshment is necessary. Philemon was a gift to the saints.

8 Therefore, Oh boy. Here it comes. Paul's been spreading on the butter, right. He's got Philemon all buttered up and now he's going to take a bite. You know you're in for it when someone says a whole bunch of wonderful stuff about you and then says; therefore. Uh-oh? Therefore what?

though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

Paul wasn't quite finished stacking the deck. Paul and Timothy to Philemon, and his wife, and the pastor, and the whole church, and you're fantastic, and you refresh me, and a warm glow comforts my heart every time I think about you, and I pray for you all the time, and you refresh the saints, and there's this one little thing I want.

But that's still not quite enough. Paul says, I could order you to do it. But I'm stacking the deck so that I don't have to order it done, I'll appeal. For loves sake. Because I'm old and pitiful and in prison. Yeah, right.

Nobody could say no to this man, even before he stacked the deck. It's almost humorous that Paul says, would you do this one little thing for me, because we love each other, and because I'm Paul, and I'm old, and I'm the prisoner of Jesus? Just one little thing Philemon, for me?

Just imagine if there were two letters and the first one stopped here. For goodness sakes Paul! What is it you want? I'll do anything. Anything!! You name it Paul. Anything! What is it you want?? I'll come and they can lock me up in prison and set you free. Anything. You name it.

Well, we'll pick it up there next week. Just kidding.

It's interesting to me, that I compared the translation of what Paul writes here in almost 40 different possible translations, including the authorized version, and the order that Paul writes the request is changed.

Most translators say something like what I read when we began. That was from the New American Standard 1995 version. *10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,*

But Paul carefully continues to stack the deck in his favor, even in the order that he presents his request. I found just a few translations that saved the order as Paul wrote it.

Berean Literal Bible

I exhort you for my child whom I have begotten in chains, Onesimus,

NAS 1977 *I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus,*

Now that's not a big deal, but it's Paul's intent to say everything possible he can say, before the name that is going to complicate matters intensely for Philemon, ever gets stated.

I'm begging for my son. I begot him in my chains. This child was formed spiritually and quickened to life spiritually while I was in prison. That makes him even more dear to Paul. He's a son, and not just a son, a son begotten in imprisonment. Paul's spiritual child.

Paul lays the value out before he speaks the name. Because the name will forever complicate things for Philemon. Onesimus. My son. My spiritual child. Quickened to life even while I was in prison. Born in my chains.

10 I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus, 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.

The other reason Onesimus' name needs to appear where it does is

because Paul is going to make a play on words. Onesimus means useful.

And Paul picks up on that and uses it to launch into a discussion about Onesimus.

who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.

Useful was useless, but now he lives up to his name. Onesimus, valuable, was worthless to Philemon.

Onesimus was a worthless slave. A disgruntled employee. A fellow who works only when the boss is looking his direction. Ultimately, we'll learn that Onesimus stole some money and ran away. Useless. Worthless.

We talked at some length about the human race when we began earlier. All of the headlines. Broken people obsessing about other broken people and what they did.

It turns out all the self righteous me-too people are just as broken as the people who damaged them. All of Adam's race is broken. Born in sin. And some more, some less, worthless. Useless.

To our God who created us to shine as the glory of His creation, to bring glory to Him, now broken, by sin, we are useless. Worthless. Valueless.

Unless something happens that restores that original value we were created with. And Jesus is in the business of re-making broken people.

Jesus is in the business of taking dead people, and quickening them to spiritual life. Jesus is in the business of taking the sin that made us worthless, away, He takes it to the cross, and He replaces it with life. Value.

Jesus took Onesimus, who's name was useful, but who was useless, and

made him new. He made useful, useful again. Quite the wonderful play on words.

Jesus is in the business of making worthless people valuable. Valuable to God, and it turns out, valuable to others. Jesus takes the broken and the worthless and the useless sons of Adam, and He quickens them to life, and He restores value.

We all, like Onesimus, were worthless, until Jesus gave us the breath of life and made us the most valuable commodity in the universe.

Listen to a brief description of our value. Written by Paul. This is from his letter to the Ephesians;

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Paul has an explosion of words, trying to tell you, how rich you have become, in Christ.

You used to be worthless. Now you are so rich that even Paul is having difficulty describing just how valuable you are. An explosion of words barely scratches the surface.

That's the difference between the old Onesimus, and the new Onesimus.

Paul says, he was worthless. But now his value to both of us, can barely even be described.

And that's what Jesus does for every christian that prays a prayer of repentance and asks Him to come into them and dwell with them and own them.

I think we'll pick it up there next week and finish this little epistle.

Are you worthless? Or has Jesus made you of infinite value, both now and forever. Don't be worthless. Come to Jesus. Give your worthlessness to Him and ask Him to replace it with Useful.