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PAUL JAKETOLENTINO

Charge It On My Account

A Study in Paul's Letter
to Philemon

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Philemon*

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Dedicated to My Parents, Rosanno and Maritess,
and my wife Yolanda.

**ALL GLORY BELONGS TO MY GOD AND SAVIOUR,
JESUS CHRIST, WHOSE GRACE CARRIED ME
THROUGH LIFE**

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Preface

It is very easy to ignore this little epistle. You can find it between Titus and Hebrews, and this letter is somewhat personal in nature, as it is about Paul's personal request to a specific person in the church, in behalf of another. Nevertheless, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."* What can we learn from this letter?

This book is the fruit of a closer look into this epistle, purposed to be a book review, to be taught by the author in a series of online Bible Studies. This book is generally divided to 4 chapters namely: 1) A short introduction about the epistle; 2) Verse-by-verse study and annotations from the author 3) Key themes found in the book explained; 4) Conclusion.

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Written during a community quarantine imposed upon the country due to Corona Virus Disease (COViD-19) pandemic, the author desires this short study would help the reader discover more the Word, for in it is the immeasurable treasure of wisdom from God, exposed by the illumination of the Holy Spirit to those who actually take time to meditate on it.

Also, please excuse the errors you may find in this little book. Should this have a little contribution on the reader's personal walk in God, the grace of God that enabled the writing of this treatise would have served its purpose.

Your Servant in Christ,

Paul Jake A. Tolentino

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CHAPTER 1:

Introduction to

the Letter

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The Letter to Philemon is part of the epistles in the New Testament, a series of letters written to the churches. The epistles were written as direct instructions to the church on how to live in this world in the Christian way. The epistles make up the majority of the New Testament, which is 22 out of 27 books (if one would consider the book of Revelation as an epistle, written to the 7 churches of Asia). Philemon has only 1 chapter, 25 verses and 445 words. It is the 57th book of the Bible and the 18th of the New Testament.

Author and Settings

The writer was the Apostle Paul, (I do not want to use the term author, as the real author of the whole Bible is God; here, God inspired even a seemingly personal letter of the writer to instruct

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His church). Paul was formerly known as *Saul of Tarsus*, a devout Hebrew who previously persecuted the Christians, but was converted when he met the Lord Jesus Christ in his way to Damascus to retrieve letters to arrest Christians and bring them bound to Jerusalem (**Acts 9:2**) The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him, preventing him on his way, and revealing to him that He is the one he persecutes by what he was doing, and not the Christians. From that point on, he became a Christian, and later on a missionary, who was used by God to start churches in Gentile territories. He wrote letters to the churches that was preserved and read by its members, and later on was included in the canon of the Scriptures, and these letters are called the Epistles, and one of the letters is his letter to Philemon.

This letter was probably written between AD 61 and 63. It was a time when Paul was at

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prison in Rome, or as widely accepted among scholars, *his first imprisonment in Rome*. A release and second imprisonment is clearly evidenced. In Jerome's *De Viris Illustribus*, he wrote regarding Paul's first imprisonment, "*It ought to be said that at the first defense, the power of Nero having not yet been confirmed, nor his wickedness broken forth to such a degree as the histories relate concerning him, Paul was dismissed by Nero, that the gospel of Christ might be preached also in the West.*"¹

He was released only to be imprisoned the second time in AD 64, for being accused as the one who started the fire in Rome. The account was recorded by Tacitus in his *Annals*;

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the

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conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. . . .

Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty [of being Christians]; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much for the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind²

Paul might have waited a certain period before his execution, just as we see in his second letter to Timothy, and unlike his first letter, he expected he would be declared guilty of the charge, and to be executed.

2 Timothy 4:6 *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.*

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So the letter to Philemon was written during Paul's first imprisonment, and was sent through Paul's friend, Tychichus, and Onesimus, along with the letters to Ephesians and Colossians.

It was written to one Philemon, a Christian in Colossae, a wealthy man. The church gathers most probably in his own house as stated by Paul in the letter (**1:2**). The Colossian church was not planted by



¹ Colossae in Map

¹ User:Alecmconroy / CC BY-SA
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the Apostle Paul directly, but was a result of his ministry in Ephesus, that also became instrumental to the founding of the churches in nearby cities, 100 miles east, including Laodicea and Hierapolis. People who were converted by Paul's ministry in Ephesus went home to their cities with their newfound faith, and started evangelizing there. Epaphras, a convert by Paul was the one who shared the gospel to the people in Colossae, and started the church there. (**Colossians 1:7**) (Though some are also saying Paul might have come and preached in Colossae, when he went through Phrygia two times – **Acts 16:6** and **Acts 18:23**.)

Purpose of the Letter

Epaphras, from Colossae, reported to Paul the situation and issues in the church, and Paul wrote to them two letters:

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1. The Letter to the Colossians – this is more of a doctrinal treatise and warning. The Colossian church might have been, in that time, seduced by teachers of philosophy, beguiling the people with enticing words. So the Apostle wrote to them against these false doctrines such as Gnosticism and the Judaizers.



² Ruins of the ancient city of Colossae

² By A.Savin (Wikimedia Commons · WikiPhotoSpace) - Own work, FAL, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=87546204>

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2. The Letter to Philemon – a personal letter of plea to Philemon regarding his fugitive servant Onesimus.

Philemon might be someone who owned servants, and one of them, Onesimus, escaped his master, most probably with money stolen from him. He went to Rome, where he was converted in the ministry of the Apostle Paul while he was in prison, as while under military custody in his own hired house, he was allowed to receive visitors, and he preached unto them the kingdom of God. (**Acts 28:30**)

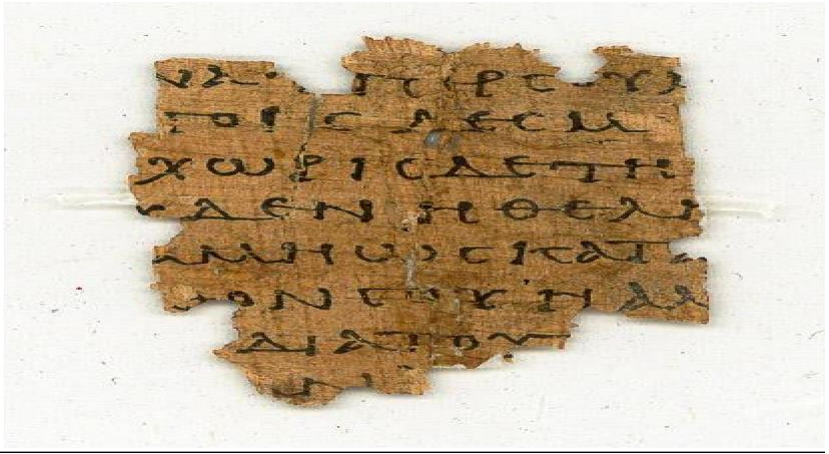
Onesimus repented and might have confessed to Paul regarding his past, and the Apostle, desiring to correct the mistake done, wrote the letter, pleading Philemon to receive again Onesimus, not as a slave but as a brother in Christ.

CHAPTER 2:

Verse by Verse

Study

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³ from Papyrus 87, earliest known fragment of *Philemon*, dated 2nd to 3rd century AD.

1 Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow labourer.

A prisoner of Jesus Christ – prisoner is /desmios/ in Greek (Strong’s G1198), meaning a captive, or someone in bonds; we understand this to be the literal

³ By User:Christian bitencourt, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=333073>

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condition of the apostle, being a prisoner in Rome, at the time he wrote this letter. He was imprisoned for preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was almost killed in the temple in Jerusalem when the Jews found him there, if it not for the Roman soldiers, who arrested him and kept him in custody (**Acts 21:27:32**). He appealed his case to Ceasar, being a Roman citizen, as he claimed to be in **Acts 22:25**.

There is a variety of arguments as to Paul's nature of Roman citizenship. Paul was indeed a Jew, being born to Jewish parents, but by virtue of *Jus Soli*, Latin for *right of the soil*, he was also a Roman citizen. A person's citizenship can be through this principle, meaning being born in a place under the sovereignty of the said country; or by *Jus Sanguinis*, Latin for *right of the*

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blood, or by being born to a native of the country, in either or both the parents' sides. Paul being born of Tarsus, which was either a city under jurisdiction of the Roman empire, or as Poole noted, *Tarsus was a free city, granted by Augustus Caesar with privileges for their assistance in his wars with Brutus and Cassius. Some also theorized Paul's father or grandfather might had been rewarded with freedom and citizenship by Rome due to some military service*³.

Paul's appeal to the emperor as a Roman citizen led to his journey to Rome, where he was kept as a house prisoner. This was his condition when he wrote this letter.

While he was a literal prisoner in Rome, this may also be viewed as his commitment

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to the Lord Jesus Christ, being a servant, and fully committed to his duty as a preacher of the Word of God. He had fully committed himself to the purpose of preaching the gospel, making it the single, foremost objective of his life.

Timothy - was Paul's companion and disciple, and later on was bishop in Ephesus. Paul's missionary journeys had been Timothy's internship, if you may, in the ministry. Paul regarded him to be his own son in the faith (**2 Corinthians 1:1, 1 Timothy 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:18, 2 Timothy 1:2**) His mother was Eunice, and Grandmother Lois, both described by Paul as having the same unfeigned faith that Timothy had (**2 Timothy 1:5**). His Greek name *Timotheos* (Strong's G5095) means *dear to God*. His father was of Greek

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descent, while his mother was a Jewess, and are from the city of Lystra (**Acts 16:1**).

That Timothy was also imprisoned by the times of the writing of the New Testament was stated by the writer of Hebrews; **Hebrews 13:23** *Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you.*

Philemon - his name is from Phileo, meaning to love and also means friendly. He was a church leader in Colossae, therefore regarded by Paul as a fellow labourer */sunergos/* (Strong's G2041). His meeting with Paul was not directly stated anywhere in Scriptures, but in the nature of the letter, it implies they might have met somewhere, and even were closely acquainted to each other, perhaps during

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Paul's missionary journey. Internal evidence in the letter itself indicates he was converted to Christianity by the apostle himself. Philemon was a wealthy man and master-owner to the slave Onesimus.

2 *And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:*

Apphia and Archippus were believed to be Philemon's wife and son. Archippus may be a grown man and leader in the Colossian church, thus the term fellowsoldier */sustratiotes/* (Strong's G4961), meaning he was an associate in labour and conflicts for the cause of Christ.

To the church in thy house – the believers were gathering in the house of Philemon, a common setting of Christian assemblies during the time, indicating Philemon was

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among those believers who were affluent. Though some suggests that it may also mean that Paul was pertaining to the believers or saints who were members of Philemon's household, the former holds to be true as the term church */ekklesia/* (Strong's G1577) was used, meaning the gathering of believers, not the term saints or */hagios/* (Strong's G40), which pertains to a person or group of persons more specifically, as in **Romans 1:7** and **Ephesians 1:1**.

3 Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to you, and peace – Grace (Strong's G5485, *Charis*) was a common greeting among the Christians, but this is more customary greeting to the Gentiles. And

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peace (Strong's G1515, *Eirene*) or *Shalom* in Hebrew, was a common Jewish greeting. The apostle combined a Gentile and Jewish greeting, as he also did in other epistles (**Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1**, except for the Pastoral letters, Timothy and Titus, where he used *grace, mercy and peace*). This was also used by the Apostle Peter in his letters (**1 Peter 1:2 and 2 Peter 1:2**), and also Apostle John (**2 John 1:3**, '*Grace, mercy and peace*'). It seemed to be a common Christian greeting of the time, which is also rich in meaning, as the *grace* of God has finally brought man to true *peace*; **Ephesians 2:8** "*For by grace*

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are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:”

This grace brings the believer to reconciliation with God, his Maker, therefore bringing in true peace; **2 Corinthians 5:19** *“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”*

Also, this combined greeting expresses the oneness of the church, for; **Galatians 3:28** *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”.*

By combining customary Greek and Jewish greetings, the apostle by his letters

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signified the unity of the two, once separated, with great hostility and discrimination; **Ephesians 2:15**. “*Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;*”

From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. – *God our Father* denotes the adoption of both Jews and Gentiles into the family of God. He is the source of life, and everything, including the grace by which we were saved; and the resulting peace in the heart and conscience of the believers being reconciled to the Creator; and all these were made possible by the redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is proper for the writer to indicate the separate roles, *not persons* of God, being

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the Father, or the Source, and the –Saviour - as the Root of Jesse is also the Branch; the Father is also the Son, the Lion is also the Lamb. This would be the proper interpretation of this passage, along with other similar passages of greetings in other epistles mentioning the Father or God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, that would be consistent with the whole doctrine of the Scriptures. It is noteworthy to remember that all writers of the Bible have no idea whatsoever of different persons in the Godhead, as the doctrine of trinity was invented 200 years later, at the least. The writers of the Scriptures knew that there is only one God (**Deuteronomy 6:4**), and that He has no equal (**Isaiah 46:5**), and that Jesus is the manifestation of God in the flesh (**1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 1:3**).

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With that in mind, the careful exegete would see this, not as distinct persons existing eternally in the Godhead, side by side with each other, but rather that God by his grace and love for the sinful man, took the form of a man, and through the agency of death in the cross, God made his grace and peace available and effectual to those who believe the gospel. One can also note that the Greek word *kai* is not always translated as the English conjunction *and*, but also as the word *even*.⁴ Use that instead of *and*, the passage would read, *From God our Father even the Lord Jesus Christ*.

4 I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,

The ministry of the Apostle, and of every minister of Christ, is to make mention of

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the saints in his prayers. **1 Timothy 2:1.** *“I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.”*

Note also what the prophet Samuel said, **1 Samuel 12:23** *“Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:”* The spiritual leader has the responsibility of praying for the saints, and we can see from his letters that Paul was doing it. (See **Romans 1:9, Ephesians 1:16**)

This the Apostle did unto God with thanksgiving, implying Paul’s joy because of the faithfulness and obedience of Philemon and his household to the Lord, and also to the church. **Hebrews 13:17**

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“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” .

Mentioning somebody in prayer is a sign of genuine love and care. What is there more to do for a person, than to bring him under the care of the Almighty God? What needs could He not provide? Which trouble could He not save him from?

5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.

Hearing of thy love and faith - heard through the report of Epaphras to Paul, probably also by Onesimus, and possibly by other believers who are acquainted with him. A Christian should always strive for a

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good report, and be known by his benevolence and charity, not as brawlers, covetous and immodest. We are *epistles known and read by all men* (**2 Corinthians 3:2**). Unbelievers won't read the Scriptures, some probably would, but they don't have the spiritual appetite for it. What they read is the lives of the believers, and being so, we should strive that what they will be seeing in our lives will give glory to the Lord. We don't do this so to protect and maintain our image and reputation, but we need to do it in honor and protection of the name of our Saviour. **Matthew 5:16** *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”* **2Timothy 2:19** *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having*

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this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”

*Thy love and faith - as these should go together, for love without faith is shallow and inconsistent, nothing but a matter of taste or preference, full of partiality and hypocrisy. And faith without love is equally unprofitable; it becomes a set of rules, so rigid and cold, because it does not see through the motivation of grace. Faith is eternal, and so is hope and love. *But the greatest is love.* (1 Corinthians 13:13).*

Toward the Lord Jesus and the saints – this also is inseparable, as he who says he loves the Lord, whom he does not see, while hates his brother whom he sees, is a liar. (1 John 4:20) One’s love of God will enable

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him to love his neighbor; how much more his brothers and sisters in Christ! The Lord failed not to include the love of neighbor, though only secondary to the first, to his answer when asked, *which is the first of all the commandments* in **Mark 12:28-31**. Some people easily accept one and abandon the other, which should not be, as one is consequent to the other, and the second gives evidence to the first.

6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

There is a variation in the interpretation of this verse. Communication (Strong's G2842, (*koinonia*) means partnership, fellowship, communion and distribution. So it means the sharing of the faith will

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become effectual, or effective, */energes/* (Strong's G1756) meaning active, operative or powerful, by the means of acknowledging every good thing the person has in Christ Jesus. This will be further discussed in a certain part of the next chapter.

∫ For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

Philemon's charitable heart towards the saints is of great joy to the Apostle, knowing this son of him in the faith is walking in love and as example to the believers. This indicates Philemon used his abundance to help the believers, they are relieved by the assistance of Philemon, and this evident love */agape/* of Philemon

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produced great joy and consolation to the Apostle. **3 John 4** “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*”.

Consolation */paraklesis/* (Strong’s G3874) means *comfort*. Despite of the apostle’s bondage as a prisoner, the hearing of how a son in the faith walks in faith and love, gives comfort or consolation to him. How about you? *Are you a source of consolation to your pastor or leader?*

8 *Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient.*

After greetings and commendation, here Paul goes to the purpose of him writing to Philemon. Here he meant, that as an apostle, a leader of the church, even his father in the faith, he had all the rights to

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be bold or authoritative in his request. The church leaders were given by God the authority to administer in the church, under God's guidance. They can be used by God to speak to us, to give directions and instructions, and therefore needed to be heeded by the saints. And in fact, this is convenient, e.g. this is what needs to be done, he can command it to Philemon. But the Apostle chose not to command, but to plead. What an example of gentleness Paul is to the believers! We must emulate his demonstration of meekness, which is a Christ-like quality. He could be authoritative in his approach and all, it would be proper, he had all the rights, but he chose not to capitalize on his position of authority, but pleaded with humility, as to his request.

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9 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.

For love's sake, not in the name of his Apostleship, Paul used a rather pleading manner to Philemon. For the purpose that love and gentleness would always be magnified; not as a spiritual authority, but as Paul, an aged man; not as a leader in tone, but as someone being in bondage for Christ. This should set an example to everyone of us, not to use our authority to gain favor, or make requests. We should always take the path of humility and love.

Matthew 20:25-27 *“But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so*

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among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.”

Many leaders would be tempted to use a condescending manner or tone in speaking to someone under his authority, but that should not be the case with real Christian leaders. His Christ-like character made the apostle all the more justified in his apostleship, being someone emulating Christ and leading others to do the same.

10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.

Onesimus was a slave of Philemon, he ran away, probably stole some money, but was converted by Paul to Christianity while in prison in Rome. His name means

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profitable, which he did not quite live up to that time, for he was not profitable to Philemon at all.

Regarding slavery, the Bible does not directly condemn, neither does the Bible promote it, but rather it teaches that both the slaves and freemen have equal standings in Christ. **1 Corinthians 7:21-23** “*Art thou called being a servant? Care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called being free, is Christ’s servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men*”. Paul was saying, don’t think that you are just a servant of man, even in the lowest and direst status and standing here on earth, do everything as in service to God, for that’s

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the status of all Christians, we were all bought with a price. Much more on this topic on the next chapter.

Also here we see how Paul cared for Onesimus. It is already a good thing to have someone be converted to the faith. How great it is for a person to be instrumental to someone's salvation! But his care for this son in the faith did not stop on the "spiritual matters"; he cared enough to plead to Philemon for his forgiveness and restoration, and also acceptance in the Christian community. How great love Paul expressed not only in words, but also in deeds, helping Onesimus in the best way he could, so he could really begin a new life, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of fellow believers.

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11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.

Unprofitable, contrary to the meaning of his name, as he was bought with a price as a slave. If the master was not able to get value from him, that will be equivalent to the price he was paid for, how much more to profit from the transaction! Same as we all are, in our great transaction of exchanging our sins with the Lord Jesus Christ's righteousness, we have all the gain and profit. And what can we add to his glory? To His power and dominion? He exists by himself as God, and there's nothing we can add to his greatness, for his status in His self does not depend on our worship or veneration. He remains God and will remain so, even if we don't serve Him. He remains a good and just God,

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even if He throws us all sinners to hell, because it is the rightful thing to do.

Romans 6:23a *“For the wages of sin is death...”*.

But because of His love and mercy, he saved us. **Titus 3:5** *“Not by works of righteousness we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;”* So we cannot add anything to His greatness, we are unprofitable to Him.

Luke 17:10 *“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”*. But if we will have this right heart and attitude, of being meek servants, we can be regarded as profitable servants by God, and be regarded as *“good and*

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faithful servants”, just like Paul had regarded Onesimus, from being unprofitable, to a real “Onesimus”, not just by name, but by every sense of the word.

Here Paul vouches for the character of his son in the faith, that he is already a changed man, and he stood with this belief with his own word of integrity. Paul was putting his name at stake here, attesting to Philemon that Onesimus is no longer the man he used to be. Had Onesimus be found to be the same old thief, the apostle would be partly to be blamed for it, but with full confidence of the changing power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he affirmed to be his character reference.

12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is mine own bowels:

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Whom I have sent again – it is one thing to repent and be forgiven by God of our sins, but it is another to restore broken relationships, that resulted from the sin committed. There should also be an attempt to right the wrong done and ask forgiveness from the person wronged. **Matthew 3:8.** “*Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.*”

But this should not be viewed as in support of the Roman Catholic Church doctrine of the sacrament of penance. The fruit cannot be yielded without the proper root, and should be the beginning of it, or the work becomes a mere vain attempt to pacify the conscience. Jerome in his Latin Vulgate translated the Greek /metanoeo/ (Strong’s G3340) which is an internal change of mind, as *poenitentiam agite*, which was

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translated and understood as *do penance*. The Roman Catholic Church adhered to this false translation, for more than 1,000 years, that instead of a genuine change of mind, people think that just the outward deeds done in penance resolves the sins. While a Catholic theologian would beautifully defend this doctrine, that penance is not just the outward works, but rather the outward and the internal change; the practical implication to the common people that adheres to this sacrament remains dangerous and erroneous. People doing penance, consciously or not, may regard sin as something that can be paid with our own works. This would make somebody go back to the same sin again and again, because one can always pay it back through the penitentiary deeds. True

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repentance is a change of mind, a turning away from sins. This should come first, before attempting to right any wrong, because repentance always starts with a godly sorrow, then these fruits will naturally follow.

Here Paul helped to set things straight for Onesimus, and used his influence, not for his own benefit, but for the benefit of others. The ministry would always place someone in position of favors, and the temptation is to use it for own advances. But we can see an example by Paul, taking advantage of whatever influence he may have, in aid of a brother in Christ, and ultimately for the glory of God.

Paul sent his letter to Philemon by the hands of Onesimus. He pleaded him to

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receive Onesimus, as he would have received Paul himself. Bowels */splanchnon/* (Strong's G4698) means literally the intestines, and the heart, lungs, liver, etc., and it were regarded as the seat of the more violent passions, such as anger and love; but by the Hebrews as the seat of the tender affections, especially kindness, benevolence, compassion; hence our hearts. So the apostle was saying here I send to you Onesimus, with my heart; or *I am sending my very heart* (as translated by the ESV and NIV), as with full of compassion and tenderness, not as a sign of authority or apostleship. Here Paul used carefully chosen words to imply that he would greatly appreciate if his request be granted by Philemon.

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13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.

Whom I would have retained with me – as he was beneficial to Paul, it would be of great help to him to keep Onesimus as his aide. Though more like a house arrest, Paul’s condition and mobility was restrained, and his fervor for the work of the Lord will not be hindered by such a predicament, so the ministry of helps would be great. **2 Timothy 2:9** “*Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.*”

That in thy stead – you ought to assist me, but since you are not here, he is helping me instead, or in your place. *So he might do*

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*the service you would have done if you were here (Barnes)*⁵.

He might have ministered unto in the bonds of the gospel – what Onesimus would not do as a slave to Philemon, he did now unto Paul as a free man. “If the Son of therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” **John 8:36**. Christ has made us free from the bondage of sin, from the law of sin and death (**Romans 8:2**), but this freedom he gave us, is also the freedom to serve; to serve God and people. **Galatians 5:13** *“For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”*

The bonds of the gospel – the gospel is not bound, but what Paul pertains here is his

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being in prison because of preaching it. We would be bound and be in persecutions because of the gospel **Luke 21:12** “*But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and unto prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake.*”

14 *But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.*

But without thy mind – without your consent. Mind is /*gnome*/ (Strong’s G1106) meaning cognition, opinion, resolve, agree, judgment, mind, purpose, will. Though a spiritual authority over Philemon, Paul was exercising gentleness, which is, not being forceful of one’s own will over another.

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Such is a true Christian, as it is the same character with God, being gentle, not forcing anyone, but rather giving man free will, the responsibility of choice, and accountable to the consequences resulting from such choices.

Would I do nothing – pertaining to keeping Onesimus, which he previously stated. He won't do it recognizing Onesimus is still Philemon's slave until released. Paul was not willing to employ, nor grant freedom to a person who was not his to dispose as such. In Christ, Onesimus gained freedom from sin, but in his social standing, he remained a slave, that was the law of the land, and being such, Paul had no legal right to make him a free man. Only one person could make Onesimus a legal freeman – Philemon, his rightful master-

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owner. Christianity is not a quick escape from reality, nor a speedy way to success in this life. The Lord does not offer a magical change of all life circumstances. It is about a change of mind, a new heart; it is about the new creation, a changed perspective and hope. If a person goes to Christ in hope of riches in this world, and fame, and honour, and increase in societal standings, he will be disappointed. The Christian perspective is an improvement of the inner life. The world may see a convert as still the same ordinary person, but inside him is a radical and dynamic change. A fountain of life begins to flow from his belly, joy unspeakable and peace that passeth all understanding dwells in him, and this will manifest in his daily disposition, his character, his lifestyle, but

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not necessarily his socio-economic status.

1 Corinthians 15:19 *“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are all of men most miserable.”*

That thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly – should Philemon allow Onesimus back to minister Paul, this benefit will be not as though Philemon, or Onesimus had no choice, not because Paul compelled them to, but it will be voluntary. Anything done or given in service to God or to people must be done in the spirit of volunteerism, not by compelling or constraint. **1 Peter 5:2** *“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.”*

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15 *For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.*

For perhaps – who knows, if this might be the reason he departed? As in Mordecai to Esther, **Esther 4:14** “...and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”. As God moves in ways we cannot see, who knows his plan in its entirety? Perhaps a bad thing happened to fulfill God’s purpose? Perhaps a failed plan is a redirection? What if a person’s greatest failure is God’s way for him to find the Saviour? Perhaps the prodigal son needed to depart and be broke, and eat husks, before he understands the value of relationships and his Father? Sometimes what we need is a good fall, to reveal our hearts and grow up from the mistakes. The same thing happened with Onesimus. He

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was already in a Christian household, but was not converted there. It was evident that he was converted by Paul in his ministry. God makes divine appointments in our lives, to fulfill his purpose, and to complete our testimony.

*He departed for a season – how long Onesimus had departed we cannot know, but he travelled quite far, at least 2,000 km. How far can one go before he finds God, when all of this time, God has already found him? His plan is sovereign, and you know it, when after you sailed to Tarshish to escape, you find yourself on the shores of Niniveh, after a big fish vomited you out. **Psalms 139:7** “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?”*

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*That thou shouldest receive him for ever – what Onesimus did to Philemon surely had caused trouble, money and hurt, but it turned out to be for the best. **Romans 8:28** “For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose”.* Is not the return of the prodigal son, the happiest moment in the life of the Good Father? For sure the prodigal son would not leave his Father’s house again, knowing what a loving Father he has, and what it’s like to be outside His fellowship. Was not Joseph’s “departing” from his family turned out later for the good of the entire race? **Genesis 50:20**, *”But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”*

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Here Paul was giving Philemon a different perspective on the events, the deed, the mistake done. From being a wronged, hurt and offended master, Paul wanted him to look at things through the lens of faith, through the eyes of a trusting Christian who sees God's provision in all things. There is really not much of a need of change in circumstances in a person's life, but rather a change in perspective.

16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

Here Paul went another notch higher: it is one thing to accept a run-away slave, and drop all possible charges he could legally ascribe to him, but here, Paul was

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requesting for Philemon to accept him not as a servant, but a beloved brother! He was simply asking for Onesimus *freedom*. As a slave master, he acquired Onesimus in a fair and legal way, we suppose. Whether he acquired him before or after being a Christian, we cannot be certain, but he must have paid a substantial amount.

Onesimus being a slave or a bond servant is debatable and is questioned by many who hold that he was not a slave, but rather just a voluntary servant, or somebody who serves to a person in a way or another. But the word used by Paul here pertaining to Onesimus was */doulos/* (Strong's G1401) meaning a slave, bondman, man of servile condition, one who was bought with a price, and has become a property of the master. He did not use the words

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/therapon/(Strong's G2324) as pertained to Moses in **Hebrews 3:5**, being a servant to God; nor the word */oiketes/* (Strong's G3610) meaning one who lives in the same house as another, spoken of all who are under the authority of one and the same householder, as in **Romans 14:4**; nor the word */diakonos/* (Strong's G1249) meaning a deacon, or an attendant or minister, as in **Romans 16:1** pertaining to Phebe; nor the word */pais/* (Strong's G3816) meaning a child servant as in **Matthew 8:6**. All these 5 different Greek words - *doulos*, *therapon*, *oiketes*, *diakonos* and *pais* were all translated in the King James Version as the English word *servant*, but pertaining to Philemon, Paul used the stronger word *doulos*, a bond servant, a slave, which he also used pertaining to himself being a

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bondservant or slave of the Lord Jesus Christ (see **Romans 1:1**, **Galatians 1:10**, **Philippians 1:1**, fellowservants with Epaphras in **Colossians 1:7**, **2 Timothy 2:24 and Titus 1:1**). Also James, Peter and Jude used the same term pertaining to themselves (**James 1:1**, **2 Peter 1:1**, **Jude 1:1**).

So here, Paul was asking Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother, and no longer as a slave! He must be pretty confident on Philemon's generous heart to have requested this. To change one's status from a slave to a free man, required a substantial payment, and later on we will tackle what payment it was to have covered such substantial price.

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A brother beloved – not just grant him freedom, but love him as a brother, as somebody close to your heart, as a part of your family. Paul was asking that he take care of Onesimus. Not only was his past and present being take care of by Paul, he was also making sure Onesimus will be in good care in the future.

Specially to me – Onesimus is not just a slave now, he is no longer a fugitive stranger, he is now a beloved brother in Christ. The faith should bring people together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, and not as strangers. Paul regarded Onesimus as his son in the faith, so he is special to him.

But how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord – if he is special to

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me how much more to you? Philemon knew Onesimus, once a part of his household, if Paul regarded a stranger as someone special, how much more can Philemon take care of him, since he was somehow connected to him?

17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

A partner - one should note Paul's humility, not placing himself above Philemon, although he is regarded as an Apostle, yet he called Philemon here not as a subordinate, but a partner. As partners, he was saying here that he was just same as him, a partner, a fellow labourer in Christ.

At the same time, this is a strong statement – Paul was saying Philemon's acceptance or non acceptance of Onesimus would say

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something about his regard of Paul. His recognition of Paul being his partner required him to accept Onesimus. Here we can see how the Apostle used all possible ways he could, using whatever influence he might have, just so he would be sure Onesimus would be taken care of. What love and concern he had for his son in the faith!

Receive him as myself – welcome him, as if I myself have come to you. Treat him as you would have entreated me. As you would be filled with joy to have me come to your household, without any negative implications or feelings, so you should be towards Onesimus. Paul wants Philemon to bestow upon Onesimus all benefits and good treatments he would have done, had Paul come to him.

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18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;

He indeed did Philemon wrong, either it was directly confessed by Onesimus to Paul, or reported by Epaphras to Paul; but the former was more probable. A converted man has nothing to hide, a man who was truly born again will have the need to confess, and he would be urged by the Holy Spirit to correct the wrong deed done, if possible. It was not indicated in the letter what Onesimus had done, but for a servant to escape from his master is already an unlawful act, not appropriating to the master his expenses for acquiring the slave.

Or oweth thee ought - this implies aside from running away, the servant also took something of importance, or was lent

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money. Not just the act of escaping, but also the collateral damage, was assumed by the Apostle.

Put that on mine account - Charge it to me, count it to me. I will be responsible for it. I assume it all, and count the evil and damages done as mine doings. I consent to have it imputed on me. This is a display of great love and care. **1 John 3:18** “*We need to love not in word, neither in tongue; but in deed*”. For one to be willing to be legally and personally accountable for another’s debts. Sounds familiar doesn’t it? Yes, this is an illustration of the great love of God to us. This will be discussed further in the next section.

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19 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.

*I Paul have written it with mine own hand - Paul usually wrote his letters through a scribe, or a secretary, if you may. For example, in Romans; **Romans 16:22** “*Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord*”. In his letter to the Corinthians, it may also be incurred that somebody else penned it, as he only wrote his own salutation written by his own hand in the end, **1 Corinthians 16:21** “*The Salutation of me Paul with mine own hand.*” He also wrote the letter to the Galatians with his own hand, **Galatians 6:11** “*Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.*”.*

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Here Paul expressed how sincere he was and how special Philemon was to him, but most importantly to assure Philemon that he indeed vouches for Onisemus, and that if needed, he will really pay for his debts. It was a sort of an oath, and to prove its solemnity, Paul wrote the letter with his own hand. From this, many commentators have inferred that Paul might had some kind of a weakness of the nerves, some kind of a disease, or, others like Doddridge, Jerome, Theophylact, have inferred Paul was not that versed in writing in Greek, writing in large letters, being accustomed to it as an Hebrew, but is considered crude in the Greek way of writing.⁶

I will repay it – should you require me, I will certainly do. Philemon had this letter

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written by Paul's own hand as a proof, or a promissory letter if you may, a sworn oath, a legal document that can be used to enforce payment, should Philemon demand it.

Albeit I do not say – this is an internal proof that Paul was the cause of Philemon's conversion, his knowing of the Lord Jesus Christ, which Paul indicated to be equivalent to Philemon's own self or life. There is really nothing more important in this world, and in this life than a Christian's conversion. No riches, fame, honour or prestige could ever be compared to it. That's why Paul said in **Philippians 3:7-8** *“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have*

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suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”

Here Paul was saying that should Philemon require him, he would be willing to pay, but, is somehow confident that Philemon would not, as Paul was the cause of his conversion, owing to him his self. This Philemon would surely take into consideration. Such a request was indeed a big one, but compared to his knowing of the Lord, considering as well the afflictions and hardships the Apostle endured for the preaching of this gospel that brings about salvation, it would just be so little for him not to grant.

20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

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Here Paul was saying that Philemon granting his request would be recognized by Paul to be “in the Lord”, meaning a favor, a joy he would receive from the Lord himself, through Philemon. What dedication and unselfishness Paul had, for his joy to come from things outside his own benefit, but for others! Many find joy and happiness from benefits they have received for themselves, but here Paul demonstrated the true joy of a Christian – the joy that comes from pursuing the welfare of others, and in serving the Lord.

Refresh my bowels – as above stated, bowels refer to the seat of affections, so here, Paul regarded Onesimus well being, as Philemon’s way of giving rest, or freedom from cares or sorrow to him.

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21 Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

Paul knew Philemon's obedience, and he was confident about it, that, although what he requested to him was indeed a great favor, he will do it. Paul knew the hospitality of this man, but here he was placing his trust not just on his natural affection, but rather the more on his obedience to him, as his leader in the faith. But Paul knew his generous heart would not just stop in obeying the request of Paul, he would do more! Obeying the law is just the minimum requirement, but love would make us do more than is required!

Matthew 5:43-44 *“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say*

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unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” Obeying the law would make one love his neighbor and hate his enemies, but here the Lord turned the notch one step higher – true love would make one not just obey the command of loving his neighbor; but would extend this love even to his enemies, those that curse, hate, despitefully use, and persecute him. To grant Paul’s request would require obedience from Philemon, but Paul knew his loving heart would do even more than was requested.

22 But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

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There's some arguments regarding Paul's probable release from prison in Rome, and a second imprisonment, and many suppose that this hope of the apostle to have come to Philemon's place might had happened in between. But some believe it did not happen, that Paul was not released from imprisonment until his execution by the emperor Nero. But here Paul expressed his desire to go to Colossae for a visit, and even asked Philemon to prepare for him a lodging, or a guest room, if you may.

Regarding a release and second imprisonment, it may be argued that: during the first imprisonment, Paul was expecting a soon release, such as here in the letter to Philemon (v 22) and also in his letter to the Philippians, **Philippians 2:24** *“But I trust in the Lord that I also myself*

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shall come shortly". But in his second imprisonment, there was no such an expectation, as in his second letter to Timothy, **Philippians 2:24** "*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand*". It seemed on the second imprisonment, Paul was ready to die, and this was where Demas forsook him. **2 Timothy 4:10** "*For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.*"

23 *There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus.*

Epaphras who was instrumental in building the church in Collosae, was stated here by Paul as a fellowprisoner; no internal indication on which circumstance he was

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jailed, but it was for sure, because of the gospel, as *in Christ Jesus*. Coming to Paul to Rome from Colossae, he might have been imprisoned for preaching the gospel, so this letter might had been sent through Tychichus and Onesimus.

The Lord is faithful, already declaring from the beginning the things his followers would suffer because of the gospel. True enough, Paul and others have suffered persecution, imprisonment and even death because of preaching the good news.

24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

Marcus here is the same as Mark the evangelist, Barnabas' nephew, as Paul requested Timothy for him, **2 Timothy 4:11** "*Only Luke is with me. Take Mark,*

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and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.” He was with Paul and Barnabas in the first missionary journey, **Acts 12:25** “*And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.*”, but he departed and went back to Jerusalem **Acts 13:13** “*Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.*”. This became the reason for the sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas, and their separation, **Acts 15:38-41**. “*And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought nit good to take him with them, who departed from them from*

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Pamphylia, and went not with them with the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.”.

Aristarchus was also called by Paul as a fellowprisoner (**Colossians 4:10**), he was from Thessalonica (**Acts 20:4**), and was arrested with Gaius by the mob in Ephesus (**Acts 19:29**). He might have been imprisoned with Paul, and was executed as well by the emperor Nero.

Demas was also Paul's companion, was with them on Paul's first imprisonment, as evident in this letter and also in the letter to

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the Colossians; **Colossians 4:14** “*Luke the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.*”, but have departed from them and went back to Thessalonica by the second imprisonment of Paul in Rome; **2 Timothy 4:10** “*For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia*”. There is a variety as how to commentators interpret Demas’ departure, some giving him the benefit of the doubt that he just wanted to live longer, not willing to be martyred with Paul in Rome, others maintaining the idea that he went to apostasy. But the phrases *forsaken me* and *loved this present world*, has a negative connotation. “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If*

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any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” **1 John 2:15.**

Lucas was the beloved physician (**Colossians 4:14**), and the writer of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Believed to be a Syrian, Antioch-born proselyte to the Jewish religion, his use of the third person pronoun “we” in Paul’s missionary journeys in the Book of Acts indicates he personally accompanied Paul during those journeys.

25 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

A short subscript in form of a prayer. What more can someone pray for another about, but the grace of the Lord? His grace is sufficient, his strength is made perfect in weakness (**2 Corinthians 12:9**). To have

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the grace of God sustaining the spirit of a believer allows strength and compassion at the same time, a keeping and changing power simultaneously.

CHAPTER 3:
Key Themes of
the Letter

Slaves to Sin



⁴Spoliarium, a painting of Juan Luna, shows dead gladiators being dragged out of the Colosseum, after entertaining the Roman audience. Gladiators are fighter slaves in the Ancient Roman times.

Onesimus was a run-away slave, and chances were, also a thief. Such a dark past would easily make someone to be absorbed into oblivion. The state of being a slave is not a good place to start your life with, as a slave does not

⁴ “Spoliarium of Juan Luna displayed at Philippine National Museum of Fine Arts” by Julian Shirwod Nueva / CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)

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have his own rights. *Doulos* is the Greek word used for bondservants or slaves, those who have been bought to serve involuntarily. They will eat, and sleep, as the master says so. Slaves don't have a choice, and they will be regarded as properties of the master. Their welfare really depend on who their master is. If one is fortunate enough to have a good and kind master, good for him; but if his master happened to be a bad master, and one who exploits his servants, then he will be in a bad shape for the rest of his life, *or* until somebody buys his freedom. Slaves were considered in the antiquities to be below the level of free men. Some were sold into slavery, while others were born to it. Slavery is portrayed in the Bible as an institution, one that will perish in the coming Kingdom of God, just as other earthly institutions.

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Slavery in the modern world ended pretty much just recently, just more than 100 years ago. It was also one of, if not the main reason of the American Civil War(1850-1865). In a time of tremendous economic growth in the United States, the difference of economies of the Northern from the Southern States was apparent: Northern states were small farming dependent, while the southern ones largely depended on Black enslaved people growing cotton and tobacco. Within three months of the election of Abraham Lincoln, seven southern states seceded from the US, fearing their northern neighbors endanger this institution that so far sustained them.⁷

In United Kingdom, John Newton, the Anglican priest/minister who wrote the famous hymn “Amazing Grace” was involved in slave trading in England before his conversion. In his

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autobiography, he wrote regarding a slave's life, *“Tortures....Perhaps [the slaves] would wish to spend the rest of their days on ship-board, could they know beforehand the nature of the servitude which awaits them on shore; and that the dreadful hardships and sufferings they have already endured [on the Middle Passage] would, for the most of them, only end in the excessive toil, hunger and the excruciating tortures of the cart-whip, inflicted at the whim of an unfeeling overseer, proud of the power allowed him to punish whom, and when, and how he pleases.”*⁸

He became main influence on William Wilberforce, a British Parliament Member that led the campaign against slave trade, until the passing of Slave Trade Act of 1807, which prohibited slave trade in the British Empire.

Slavery in the Philippines

On a local note, slavery in the Philippines was existent prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. *Datus* and *Sultans* usually had slaves, even the families of royal lineage, called *Maharlika*. Upon the conquest of Spain, they just let this system go on, and even got slaves for themselves. They even exported some Filipino slaves, calling them *chinos*. Because of the spread of Christian principles, slavery was commanded by the King of Spain to be aborted, though not widely obeyed. Spaniards did not take slavery as unchristian and inhumane, as they believed in inequality among the created beings. So they deemed it legal to trade non-Christian war captives as slaves. Also, since the King declared all Philippine natives to be his subjects, they cannot be made slaves, so the Spaniards in the Philippines imported African

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slaves, so there were two types of slaves at that time: the imported African slaves; and the non-Christian war captives - the Moro slaves. Slavery in the country declined after the end of slavery in Spain in 1820.⁹

Slavery in Israel

Slavery was allowed in the nation of Israel, even times before the formation of the nation; we can find in the Bible that even back in the times of Abraham and Job (believed to be contemporaries with Abraham), there already were slaves or bondservants. But the first instance in the Bible that the word servant was mentioned was in **Genesis 9:25**; and it pertained to the curse Noah gave to Ham, and his son, Canaan. “*And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.*” The original word was the Hebrew */ebed/* (Strong’s H5650), a slave,

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a bondservant, which is equivalent to the Greek *doulos*.

Ham was one of Noah's sons. He was cursed by his father, because he saw his father's nakedness, then went out to tell about it to his brothers Shem and Japhet. The two covered his father's nakedness without seeing it. We can read the account in **Genesis 9:20-24**,

“And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah

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awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.”

Noah uttered the first prophetic unktion from a man, and it was a kind of a curse, that a father bestowed upon Canaan, the youngest son of his own son, Ham. In the Bible, and more particularly in those times, dishonoring parents was a great crime, and at times can be viewed as a way of usurping their authority (see the example of Absalom taking David’s concubines in **2 Samuel 16:21-22**, as a sign of his revolt). So here, Ham’s son’s lineage (Canaan’s) was declared to be servants because of Ham’s dishonoring his father, and usurping his authority, by telling it to his brothers outside the tent. So we must note that Ham’s sin was first, sexual in nature (seeing his father’s nakedness) and also usurping his father’s authority, or rebellion. (There may be varying interpretation as to what

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really was meant by ‘seeing his father’s nakedness’, but we won’t tackle that in depth and detail)

Noah’s prophetic utterance, declaring Canaan would be cursed, is indicative that Canaan’s lineage would be walking in the same sins as of Ham. We could attest this to be true, regarding the Canaanites in the times of the Old Testament. They were people who were rebellious against God, by worshipping idols and doing abominations against God, like offering their children on the fire to Molech, and this the Israelites imitated, **Jeremiah 32:35**, “*And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.*” Also they

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were noted by the Bible to be people who indulged in perversion and sexual sins, as *going after strange flesh*, **Jude 7**, “*Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*”

So as Noah had declared, Canaan was cursed because these people walked in the same sins of Ham their father, and so they were to become servant of servants. They were drove away by Joshua in his conquest, though not entirely, and some of them who remained were forced to serve Israel, such as the Gibeonites (**Joshua 9:23**), while some of them became tributaries (**Judges 1:30, 33**), and these became problems in the future for the nation, as *thorns in their sides* (**Judges 2:3**).

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This “Ham’s Curse” became the Biblical justification of the slavery of the African people, who believed to be Ham’s descendants. But a careful study of the passages would arrive at a different conclusion, as not the entire descendants of Ham were cursed, but only Canaan. Ham had other sons, namely, Cush, Mizraim and Phut; and they were not included in the curse, just Canaan, because this people would walk in the same sins of Ham. Meaning to say, African slavery was not justified by the Bible.

The Africans, believed to be descendants of Ham, became preferred slaves from the not so distant past, not because of this ‘curse’, but because they are well known for their body endurance. Also, their relatively primitive culture in the times past made them to be prone to exploitation by the European merchants during those times. But many people used the above-

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discussed passage to provide Biblical and moral justification to African slavery.

If the institution of slavery originated from this curse, we cannot be certain, but it was a well established institution by the time of the Law, and so, the Law in the time of Moses had provisions regarding owning slaves. We can find it in **Exodus 21:2-6**,

“If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then

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his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.”

So according to the Law of Moses, a Hebrew servant will only serve six years, and he will be freed on the seventh or sabbatical year, or on the year of jubilee, whichever comes first. (Jubilee or jubile in Leviticus 25, is also called the Sabbath of Sabbaths, and happens every 50 years. During jubilee, not just Hebrew slaves but even foreign slaves were freed and all debts were cancelled.) If he entered slavery without a wife or a family, he will be freed the same way; or if he was married, his wife will be freed with him. But if he was given a wife and had children in the period of his bondage, he alone will be freed, the wife and the children belongs to his master.

Other Option for the Slave: To Serve a Master Forever

But if the servant loved his master, that he/she would not want to depart from the master (verse 5), he/she also has the option to swear before the judges in the city posts, as before God; that he and his family will serve his master permanently or forever. And as a sign, he will be pierced or *bore* (Hebrew */ratsal/* meaning to pierce) to the ear. Earrings had such connotation and implication in the ancient times, though it may not be the only usage for body piercings, more particularly in the ears. So a slave and his family, if he has one, that would like to serve his master permanently would be swearing before the leaders of the city and this would also mean before God, as a sign of loyalty, and he will be pierced in the ears. The earring is a sign of

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permanent servitude of a slave to his master. This was sometimes done when a slave has a kind master that takes care of slaves as if part of his household. A slave would be very lucky to have such a master. Besides, there may be instances where being a slave to a rich and kind master is better than being free, but unemployed. For financial and security reasons, a slave is allowed to decide so.

It is good to note that when we have been freed by the Lord Jesus Christ from slavery of sin, we also committed to be his servant, his slave, forever. Being such, we were also “pierced” in our ears;

Psalms 40:6 *“Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.”*

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The word translated here as opened, is the Hebrew */karah/* (Strong's H3738), which means to dig, or to bore, just as making a hole through it. So a person who wants to serve God, in the same manner, as a slave is pierced through the ear, a Christian also is pierced in the ears, or the ears were opened, ever ready to listen to God's Word.

Slavery in the Greco-Roman Context

But since we are reading this from the New Testament, then we need to consider the cultural and historical context of slavery in the time this was written by the Apostle, which was the Roman Empire Era. Though Paul was a Jew, we need to use the Greco-Roman cultural context, as Philemon and Onesimus were both Gentiles, as they were both from the city of Colossae. Also, this is indicated by them having these Greek

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names. How did the slaves fare during those times?

*“Slavery was an ever-present feature of the Roman. Slaves served in households, agriculture, mines, the military, manufacturing workshops, construction and a wide range of services within the city. As many as 1 in 3 of the population in Italy 1 in 5 across the empire were slaves and upon this foundation of forced labour was built the entire edifice of the Roman state and society”*¹⁰ Slavery was an institution even by that time, and much of the empire’s work and economy stands upon it. Estimates of up to 25% or the entire population of the Roman empire were slaves.¹¹ They were treated as the lowest kind, and have no rights of their own..

Marking or branding slaves was used to indicate ownership of the slaves. Irons seared in

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fire are used to mark a permanent scar on the skin of the slave, which indicates the symbol of the name of his/her master.



⁵ A replica of iron used to brand slaves

We can find Apostle Paul making an allusion to it regarding his commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ;

⁵ "Slave branding iron (replica), Museum of Liverpool" by Reptonix free Creative Commons licensed photos / CC BY (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>)

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Galatians 6:17 *“From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”*

The marks, or */stigma/* in Greek (Strong’s G4742), means scar of service, marks punched or incised upon the skin and flesh of slaves signifying ownership. This was done to prevent a slave from escaping his owner. Here, Paul was saying he has the brand of his Master – the scars he had, probably from scourging and beatings he received because of preaching the gospel, he referred to them as his brand for being the slave of Jesus Christ. He wanted nobody to trouble him, to distract and lure him away to other things aside from the works he was doing for his Master. Branding of slaves was a norm in that time so the Apostle used it as illustration to describe his loyalty to the Lord. This tradition is believed to come from branding of livestock.

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Sin as Man's Master

Were not we all in the same condition? We have been sold under sin (**Romans 7:14**). Even from the Old Testament, this has already been foreshadowed in the Egyptian slavery of the Israelites. When the first man, Adam sinned against God, all of us being of the same descent, have inherited the sinful nature, the inclination, the bent or tendency to sin. **Romans 5:12** *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”*

It is in our flesh, as Paul stated in **Romans 7:15-20**, *“For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I*

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*know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, **but sin that dwelleth in me.**"*

We became servants of sin that dwells in us. Our flesh was under bondage of sin, that is why what we want to do, we do not; and what we do not want to do, that we do. Slavery is clearly that – having to do the will of another, being enforced on someone. Our tendency, our bent, has been defaulted to do corrupt things that are against the Word of God, since our bodies were subjected to corruption because of sin.

Paul clearly discussed man's enslaved nature in **Romans 6:16** "*Know ye not, that to*

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whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Paul was saying here that we are servants to whom we obey, whether we obey sin, or obey God; we become servants, slaves, *doulos*, to whom we obey. Let not any man think who lives in sin, and pleasures of the world, that he is a free man. The alcoholic is not a free man; he is a slave of alcohol. The drug addict is not a free man. So are the covetous, and liars, and fornicators. The truth is man is a slave of sin and the lusts thereof. The lusts of sins, we are all compelled to obey, because it has become our master. We have by default inherited the sinful nature of the first man, Adam. It was a shock for the Jews to hear from the Lord, **John 8:32** “*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*” The Lord revealed to them that though they were

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Abraham's seed, and they were proud of it, they were not truly free.

It is a law of nature that creatures beget its own kind. **Genesis 1:12** “*And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed **after his kind**, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, **after his kind**: and God saw that it was good.*” **Genesis 1:21** “*And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, **after their kind**, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.*” **Genesis 1:25** “*And God made the beast of the earth **after his kind**, and cattle **after their kind**, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth **after his kind**: and God saw that it was good.*” So is man, since Adam because of sin has fallen into sinful nature, he also produced men after the same kind, after the same fallen nature. So, all have inherited the

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same sinful nature, for we are all from the same mold. **Psalms 51:5** *“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*

This sin that resides in the human flesh, became man’s cruel master. How cruel is sin as to having deprived us of life and relationship from the Creator! Filling our thoughts day and night with evil things, urging us to do works for *him*, even to the peril of our own soul and bodies! This is the sad truth about the human condition. Though we have free will, our bodies were under captivity, to indulge in sin. Our will is not strong enough to overrule our bodies, and we comply to its every whim. From the time we wake up, even until we close our eyes to sleep, this cruel master urges us to serve him. Our flesh goes along with it, because sin is pleasurable to the flesh.

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Man is plagued with sin in his heart. **1Kings 8:38** *“What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know **every man the plague of his own heart**, and spread forth his hands toward this house:”* It is what’s wrong with us people. Sin overwhelmed our desires, it captivated our minds, it placed under subjection our bodies. That is the reason why we have cemeteries, hospitals and prison houses. That is the reason why we read crimes being done everyday, wars and violence continues, greed and exploitation victimize many people; all because of this plague of the heart, that is sin.

And yet people turn away from Him who could heal this plague! Only God can free us from this bondage that has been oppressing us!

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Romans 6:17-18 *“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”*

But thanks be to God! When we received and obeyed the gospel, the doctrine that was preached and by divine provision and appointment, was delivered unto us, we were delivered and made free from the bondage of sin! We have been bought with a price, free from the bondage of sin, and also from the vain lifestyles and traditions. *”Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:”* **1 Peter 1:18-19**

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Just as the only way for a slave to be free is either to buy his own freedom, (which is unlikely to happen); or that somebody else would pay the price, the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price for our freedom, since we cannot afford to buy it ourselves.

When the Lord Jesus Christ said on the cross, “*It is finished*” (**John 19:30**), He meant the payment was made in full. The Greek phrase is *teletestai*, which can be seen stamped in receipts when somebody paid off a loan in full. On the cross, the Lord made the full payment for our debts, so we can be free to serve Him. He deemed us lost souls to be very valuable, and paid the price for redemption, by dying on the cross.

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⁶ An Artist depiction of a Slave Auction

Here is a beautiful illustration shared by Tim Smith in sermoncentral.com;

“At the center of town, there is a commotion as a crowd gathers for a public auction to watch the proceedings. In the crowd is an uncouth, foulmouthed, loud, boisterous man who is the meanest, cruelest, most hateful man around. In the

⁶ Public Domain Image, 1861, Library of Congress Collection

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crowd is another man who stands out for his dignity, genteel mannerisms and soft-spoken tone, and is one the most kind, gentle, and gracious man. Both men, along with the crowd wait for the auction to begin. The auctioneer steps to the podium and begins rattling his words as the first item to be sold is brought to the auction block. On the block is a beautiful young black girl, about 20 years of age. Her dress is old and torn, but remarkably clean. She is obviously filled with anxiety and fear as the bidding begins.

From the outset the loud obnoxious man seemed to have his evil, lecherous eyes set on this lovely, innocent, young lady. She cringed in fear as he opened the bidding. When the kind gentleman saw her fear, he too placed a bid. Soon only these

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two men were involved in the bidding as the price of the girl rose higher and higher. Finally, the evil man bowed out of the bidding when he realized that the price of the girl was more than he was willing to pay.

When the auctioneer closed the bidding, the kind gentleman paid the price for his purchase, was handed the Bill-of-Sale and turned to leave. The young girl started to follow her new master. He then turned to her and asked, “Where are you going?” “Why, I’m going with you,” she responded; “You bought me and I belong to you.” “O! You misunderstood,” the man said, “I didn’t buy you to make you my slave, I bought you to set you free.” Then he took the Bill-of-Sale and wrote across in big block letters – FREE! – signed his

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*name and gave it to the girl. "I don't understand," the girl said. "You mean I am FREE!" "Yes, you are FREE!" "I can go wherever I want and do as I please." "Exactly, You are FREE!" "Sir, I don't know who you are, but no one has ever shown such love and kindness to me. If I am free to do as I please, nothing would please me more than to go with you and serve you till the day I die." And that day she went home with him, not as his slave but as his willing servant."*¹²

Praise God! What else is there to do, than to serve Him who loved us enough to set us free? Who would better care for us than the loving Saviour who willingly died in our stead so we could live?

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Romans 6:18-19 *“Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.”*

When we were slaves of sin, as in the time past, we used the members of our bodies as instrument for sin; but now that we were freed from sin, and are serving God, we must now use the members of our body as instruments and servants of righteousness unto holiness. If we were using our strength before, our resources, our bodies, just to serve a cruel master, we must do the same now that we are serving the Good Master. We used to spend our time, energy, and money for sinful activities and vices; we must use these and all we have now, to please Him who set

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us free. Now that we have been set free from sin, we have become servants of God, and we must serve and love Him with all our being. As an old song says, “I am free to be the servant of the Lord!”

As P.T. Forsyth said, “The first duty of every soul is to find not its freedom but its Master.” No man is truly free until he becomes the servant of his proper Master, his Maker - God.

In these verses in Romans 6, Paul explained that we are just either servants of God, or servants of sin; *but servants nonetheless*. One must need to consider and choose which master he will serve. Would we rather choose to serve sin, or serve God? Would we rather yield the members of our bodies as instruments of sin that will eventually lead to death, both physically and

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spiritually? Or would we rather yield the members of our bodies as instruments to righteousness that will lead to holiness and life? Sin is indeed an evil master, for it despairs the body, torments the soul, and kills the spirit, for a little pleasure. There is pleasures in sin (**Hebrews 11:25**), but is this worth the degeneration of the body, which God intended to be the temple of the Holy Spirit? Is it worth the torment of guilt it imposes on the human soul? Is it worth not having peace, being in rebellion against God? Is it worth not having true joy that only comes from communion with the Maker, which is not possible if we are serving sin with our bodies? Is it worth the death of our spirit? Is the little pleasure, that doesn't last, that leaves us emptier than when before the deed was done, worth being dead spiritually, as a person that liveth in pleasure is

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dead even while that person liveth (**1 Timothy 5:6**)? Oh dear reader, we should choose wisely!

Romans 6:21 *“What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.”*

Paul was even asking, what fruit, what result, what outcome did our employment under sin gave to us? Did not it only give us shame and guilt? It only led to shame and ultimately will lead to death. There is no future glory to it, it only has a downward trajectory, it all comes down to the grave. Sin is indeed a cruel master, for it brings its servants to destruction.

Romans 6:22-23 *“But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of*

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God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

On the other hand, us serving God, has the fruits of holiness, that leads to everlasting life. Paul here is effectively contrasting for us these two masters, sin vs. God. Serving God will bring forth holiness and everlasting life. God is a Master who is concerned with our well being. He is a Master that has good plans for those who choose to serve Him. **Jeremiah 29:11** *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”*

As if to further help us choose which master to serve, he tells us what is the compensation each master gives to their servants (v23). The wages of sin is death. Sin indeed was a cruel master, for the wages it gives to its servants

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is death. Wages here is the Greek */opsonion/* (Strong's G3800), meaning stipend, or a soldier's ration, his compensation, his salary. This is what someone earns when he works. Divine justice would demand proper compensation be given to a man's works and doings. By being a servant of sin, this is what a man deserves to get. It must be exacted to him, by all means. The salary that sin gives to his servants is nothing but death. Would we rather serve this kind of master? After living and working all our lives, doing what sin urges us to do, and for what compensation? The wages is death; at the end of it all, that's what sin brings a man down to. "*the soul that sinneth, it shall die.*"

But on the other hand, *the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord* (v23). How great and good is this Master to his servants! If we choose to serve God, what He gives us is not wages, for we did not even earn it,

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it's not something we have merited because of our works - it is a gift, somebody else paid for it. A gift is not a gift if you paid for it. The gift God gives to his servants is eternal life through the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This gift was made possible and available to us through the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. Jesus paid for the gift of eternal life.

From Slaves to Friends to Children

So we can say that Onesimus' former condition of being a slave is a parallel to the former condition of all Christians before new birth. We were all in the shameful and dire condition of being slaves to a terrible master. But thanks be to God, He redeemed us, but since we are bought with a price, we are now servants of the Most High God. Hallelujah! We were born to slavery to a terrible Master, and just as God sent

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Moses, to free His people from Egypt, so He sent His Son, meaning, He became the Son, God manifested in the flesh, to free His people from sin.

Matthew 1:21 *“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”*

This is just like when the Lord freed the Israelites in the time of Moses, this was His promise:

Exodus 6:6-8 *“Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments:*

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And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.”

But the goodness and generosity of our Great Benefactor did not stop there! Also, our God is too good, that though we are rightfully servants, He considers us friends.

John 15:15“*Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*”

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Being reconciled to God, and obtaining peace through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross, we became his friends, and no longer as rebels and enemies.

2 Corinthians 5:19 *“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”*

Under sin, we were under rebellion against God. We used to be enemies with God because of the indwelling sin. And because of this, we were not really in peace, because how can we be in peace when we are in rebellion against the Creator? How dreadful it is to stand in the opposite camp of the King of kings? True peace cannot be attained by owning the best things of the world. It cannot be bought in any malls, it cannot be found in a very secured house and

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comfy beds. True peace can be found if we have been reconciled with God, because He is the Prince of Peace. And when we were reconciled, we have become friends again, and have relationship with God.

The Virtue of Adoption

And yet, it doesn't stop there. From being friends, we were also given the power to become children of God, by the virtue of adoption. It was like when Paul asked Philemon to accept Onesimus not as a slave, but as a part of the family. In the New Testament times, adoption of slaves was pretty common. Not just for the common or middle class citizens, but even from the ranks of nobles, even emperors. For example, Augustus Caesar, was Julius Caesar's adopted heir, so when he died, he succeeded the throne, and not Caesar's biological son, because that was

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what's written in his will. This was also done to slaves, therefore granting the slave not just freedom, but even a change in social status. And that is exactly what the Lord gives us as Christians, not just freedom from sin, but even a change of status into becoming children of God!

John 1:12 *“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”* We have been made accepted to the Beloved, and even gave us the power to become children of God, by the virtue of adoption through the Holy Spirit,

Romans 8:15-17 *“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received **the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.** The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:*

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And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

Not only this Good Master gives freedom to His servants, but also gives them a change in status: from slaves to children, and being children, they are also heirs. Hallelujah!

Here are some notes on the process of adoption during the Greco-Roman era:

Jade Gardner regarding Roman Law and Life; *"Once a child had been adopted, everything from their past was erased. While they still have blood connections with their former parents, the legal and family ties to them were entirely severed. An adoptee in roman society was endowed with all of the rights, privileges and responsibilities of his new family as if he*

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was a natural born son. The adoptee was expected to respect and honor his new parents.”¹³

We are still human, and we are still waiting for the complete adoption, to wit the redemption of our body (**Romans 8:23**), but *if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new!* (**2 Corinthians 5:17**) As adopted sons and daughters, we have been given privileges, rights, and also responsibilities.

Francis Lyall in *Roman Law in the Writings of Paul*,

“The adoptee is taken out of his previous state and is placed in his new paterfamilias. All his old debts were cancelled, and in effect starts a new life. From that time, the paterfamilias owns all

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the property and acquisitions of the adoptee, controls his personal relationships, and has rights of discipline. On the other hand, he is involved in liability by the actions of the adoptee and owes reciprocal duties of support and maintenance”¹⁴

Our old debts were cancelled, as they were all paid in full by the Lord in the cross, and as the Lord Jesus Christ *was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* (**Romans 6:4**). Also, our Father has the right to discipline us, and is involved in all matters of our lives, even personal relationships and undertakings.

Adam Clarke on adopted being heirs;

“The child thus adopted ceased to belong to his own family, and was in every

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*respect bound to the person who had adopted him, as if he were his own child; and in consequence of the death of his adopting father he possessed his estates. If a person after he had adopted a child happened to have children of his own, then the estate was equally divided between the adopted and real children. The Romans had regular forms of law, by which all these matters were settled.”*¹⁵

From being slaves of sin, to being God’s willing servants; to friends, and ultimately being children and co-heirs – this is how good is our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. The law makes sure the adoptee will receive his heritage as co-heir.

Romans 8:11 *“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he*

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that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

1 John 3:2 *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”*

Being sons and daughters, we will be glorified together when the Lord returns! We will be receiving the same glorified body, that is completely free from corruption, to forever be with the Lord in the coming eternity.

God is indeed a good Master, for letting us have all these promises. That is why, we must choose to serve and love Him, with all our being.

Charged to the Account of Jesus



Imagine you have a credit card account. Then, you bought the latest iPhone. Then having enough credit line, you again swiped it to get the latest iPad. You even went to buy latest Macbook. You were pretty confident with your

⁷ "Credit Cards21" by Alpha Stock Images CC BY-SA 3.0-
<http://alphastockimages.com/>

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salary, that you are well able to pay them all. But then, the pandemic hit the country, then something came up with work, and you got laid off. All these debts piled up and with previous charges, you were unable to pay it. Along with penalty dues and interests, it amounted to something you would not be able to pay in the next few years. Imagine the desperation; emails and calls from the bank have never been before so uncomfortable. The debt also affected your whole life, as due dates and disconnection notices coming. Plus, there's no sign of you having a new job any time soon. Your stress and anxiety levels shooting up, and it makes your health deteriorate.

Then one day the bank called you to inform you it was all settled! Someone generous and kind, (and very rich, of course), who has a very large account in the bank, paid it all, and the

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debt was charged to this person's account instead.
How would you feel?

Man's Sin Requires Just Payment - Death

Paul's statement in the letter, "*If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;*" is a beautiful illustration of the redemptive work of the Lord. How Jesus Christ satisfied both the justice and mercy of God, will forever be the greatest wonder of the ages.

To better understand this, we need to look back to the fall of man. Adam's fall to sin, as stated in the previous section, made the entire human race to be sold under sinful nature. We can see that in the inspired writings of David in **Psalms 51:5** "*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" Also in

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Psalms 58:3, *“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”* So this problem of sin is a universal one, *death reigned from Adam to Moses, even those that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression* (**Romans 5:14**). And the just exaction, the rightful compensation, the wages of sin, is death. For God’s divine justice to be satisfied, death needs to be imposed upon those who sinned, which are all men; the justice of God demands sin to be punished. Justice is God’s divine attribute, it cannot be set aside, it needs to be imposed and implemented, or God will not be God, as this is his Divine Character; it is who He is. All justice, and sense of right and wrong, and righteousness, and morality, comes from God, the Divine Moral Giver, the Divine Judge, the Source of all Truthfulness and Appropriation; and so this

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attribute needs to be satiated, it needs to be satisfied. Sin needs be punished.

God's Another Divine Nature - Love

But then, the God of all Justice is also the God of all Love, *for God is love* (**1 John 4:8**). His justice demands the sinner be punished, but also his mercy and grace, so loved the man, whose image is His. How would that be then? How could God manage to exercise both characters of Justice and Love, when the object of Justice, which is sin, is found on God's object of love, which is man? This is such a great dilemma, the *Dilemma of all the Ages* if you may – but only if seen through human perspective which is frail and limited. But in Divine Perspective, in His Wonderful Economy, and Everlasting Provision; in His Unsearchable Wisdom, God Himself provided for Him a body, as prophesied by the

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ancient Abraham to his asking son, **Genesis 22:7-8** *“Father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering:”*

Hebrews 10:5 *“Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:”*

Jesus Christ, the *“Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”*, became the sin offering.

If the sinner be immediately spared, where is God’s justice? But if immediately condemned, where is God’s love? Behold, the Cross of the Christ, behold God’s Justice and Love, both satisfied – sin was punished, and the sinner spared, if he believes!

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Romans 8:3 *“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:”*

Through the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Transaction, the Great Exchange was made. Our sins were imputed to Him, and His righteousness imputed to us. Sin was condemned or punished on the cross. The Suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53** was indeed a perfect description of the Messiah ;

*” For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. **He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was***

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despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

Who among the prophets fulfilled this? Which great person ever became an exact representation of these passages? If not the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom did this inspired writings pertain to? No, not even one of the great prophets, these were ascribed to. Not Moses, nor Isaiah, nor Elijah. Not Jeremiah! Our griefs and sorrows, he did bear. He was wounded and bruised for our transgressions and iniquities. All these heavy burdens of sins, were all casted upon Him. Upon His walk in the *Via Dolorosa*, what He carried was not just a 45-kilo wooden cross -

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it was way heavier than that; what He carried was the sin of the world! No, it was not the punishment for a Nazarene seditious and blasphemous that He endured; but rather the punishment of all our iniquities combined. **1 John 2:2** *“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”*

The Cross – Our Sins Charged to Jesus

Just as Paul voluntarily claimed all charges and debts the slave Onesimus had, so did the Lord Jesus Christ, making the will of the Father his own, gave his life as ransom for the sins of many. **John 10:17-18** *“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down,*

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and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

The Lord Jesus chose to lay down his life, it was not taken away from Him. The charge cannot be imposed upon any person other than the debtor, without the agreeing of that other person. No person can be charged of somebody else's debts without his permission. But if a person agreed, by his own volition, to charge upon himself another person's debts and charges, the creditor will be free to do so, if he assesses the person is able to pay the amount, or if he assessed his whole life value is good enough to cover the payment.

In Paul's case he has a large account, large enough to cover payment for Onesimus' dues, and even more than that; to buy his freedom, because Philemon owed him a lot, *even his own self besides* (**Philemon 19**), Paul being instrumental to his conversion and discovery of

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the greatest treasure – the Lord Jesus Christ. Could this Treasure be compared to the finest jewels? Could any belonging, no matter how rich in value outweigh the glory of the Son of God? Does not His Majesty outshine even the brightest stars put together in their luminosity? Could any amount of gold even be at par with the richness of value of the precious blood of God by which he paid our sin in the cross? No, it won't suffice. This man Paul became the instrument God used to turn Philemon's life around, no, not around, but it was rather turned new. The gospel of truth which is God's power unto salvation of the believers is Philemon's greatest treasure in life. This Paul hath created a large account by this, thus, yes, he could ask for this request regarding Onesimus, and undoubtedly Philemon would be willing to do it.

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Imagine it like as the above example, an account in the bank. If you want to open a bank account, you will be required to deposit at least a certain amount, against which you can withdraw funds in the future. For example, some banks require a minimum deposit, plus many other requirements to open an account with them(also depending on the type of account you would like to open, deposit may be higher).

Paul ministered to Philemon the gospel, therefore he was saved, and this is like Paul opening a huge account, because Philemon was somehow indebted to Paul for sharing him the gospel. Philemon in turn knew about the Lord Jesus Christ, he believed and obeyed, and therefore has eternal life. This is such a great gain for Philemon! And although Paul was not really bragging about it, nor he required Philemon to compensate him for his ministry, now that Paul

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would need to ask a favor to Philemon regarding Onesimus, Paul was like, “Alright, Philemon, I know what I am asking is not a little thing, for I know it requires payment before a slave can be freed. But you know, I have a large account in you, you gained the Lord Jesus Christ because of my ministry. Just charge Onesimus’ debt on my account.” (This is me paraphrasing for better understanding). Paul did not use the ministry for his own profit, he did not capitalize on his ministry to gain favors for himself, but he did this for the sake of a beloved son in the faith, who trying to begin a new life in Christ.

God’s Saving Account

The same thing with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world (**Revelation 13:8**). So precious is the blood, and every stripe, and every wound,

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inflicted upon that anointed body; that the blood shed on Calvary that fateful day opened an enormous saving account, that even if the all sins of the entire world, from Adam up to the last human being that will be born, be charged on the account of the blood of Christ, it would suffice, and more than that, it is worth way more than that. So when the penitent goes to Jesus and believed on Him, and put his trust on Him, applied the gospel (death, burial, resurrection) of Jesus Christ in his life, all his iniquities was not credited for him to pay, but was charged on the blood.

Just like in our example, imagine God opening a very large saving account in the bank. This is the account through which a man could access salvation, thus, a “saving” account. But to open this saving account requires substantial payment. What’s needed is blood, that is pure and

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sinless. The requirement is perfect righteousness and obedience, before someone can open a saving account. And many people are trying to open their own saving account in their name, with their own works and righteousness, but it won't do. Our own works fell short, our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. **Romans 3:10** "*As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:*" **Romans 3:23** "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*"

Imagine a man trying to save himself is like a man trying open an account and filing an application form;

Saving Account Form			
Name:	Juan Dela Cruz		
Applying for:	Salvation		
Deposit/Payment:	Good	Works,	Own
	Righteousness, man-made religion		

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Remarks: REJECTED
Reason for Rejection: ‘good works’ not good enough, righteousness is as filthy rags, obedience to the law is not perfect
Final Verdict: Cannot save himself, needs a Savior

This man if will not hear and obey the gospel, and will continue to trust himself, will be surprised in the Day of Judgment that his saving account was rejected. His ‘good works’, self righteousness and imperfect obedience to the law could not merit him salvation.

God knew this well, that none of us could merit our own salvation. Not one of us could open his own saving account. So He Himself became man, and did it!

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Saving Account Form	
Name:	Jesus Christ
Applying For:	atonement for sins and salvation for whosoever will believe
Deposit/Payment:	Perfect Obedience, Perfect Righteousness (God's Righteousness), Shed pure and sinless blood on the cross
Remarks:	APPROVED
Reason for Approval:	Fulfilled the law entirely; obedience unto death even death of the cross; blood shed was so precious, that it became propitiation of sins of the whole world; perfect righteousness
Final Verdict:	Lamb of God which taketh away of the world; Lord and Saviour

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Hallelujah! Man must abandon his own attempt of making his own saving account, we will never qualify to have one on our name, **Ephesians 2:8-9** *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

What a man must do is to forsake self trust, and put all this trust to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must access God’s Saving Account, and if you want the Account number, let me give it to you now, so you can access it. Are you ready? Here is the account number:

Saving Account Number: 33-35-238

33 is **John 3:3** – *“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

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35 is **John 3:5** – *“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”*

238 is **Acts 2:38** – *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*

Are you asking what the Account Name is?
It is neither on your name nor mine;

Saving Account Name: JESUS CHRIST

Acts 4:12 *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”*

Believe that He died on the cross bearing our sins; and that He was buried; and that He rose

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from the dead. By believing this and appropriating the gospel to our lives by repentance (death), baptism in water in Jesus name (burial), and baptism of the Holy Spirit (resurrection), we gain access to this saving account. When a man does this, his sins are washed away through the saving account of the Lord Jesus Christ – man’s sin was credited to the Lord, and God’s righteousness was credited to the believer.

Sin Not Imputed on Us

David spoke of the blessedness of such a transaction. **Psalms 32:1** “*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*”

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We can see here four words David used to pertain to his wrongdoings;

1) *transgression*; /*pasha*/ (Strong's H6588) means rebellion, or revolt. It is an open defiance against authority;

2) *sin*; /*chataah*/ (Strong's H2401) meaning to miss the mark or goal

3) *iniquity*; is /*avon*/ (Strong's H5771) meaning *perversity or mischief*.

4) *guile*; /*remiyah*/ (Strong's H7423) means deceit, fraud or treachery

But what did the Lord do? God did forgive our rebellions (*pasha*), covered our missed marks and insufficiencies (*chataah*), did not impute on us our mischief and perversities (*avon*), and he was regarded by the people as a fraud for our

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sakes, so that we won't have guile (*remiyah*) on our spirits!

Since God is the God of all Justice, all those sins and transgressions, iniquities and guile can't be ignored. Each one needs to be accounted for. They cannot not just be gone all of a sudden, no, God's holiness won't let sin go unpunished. Where did all the transgressions, sins, iniquities and guile go? **They were all charged on Jesus' cross.**

Hebrews 9:22 *"And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."*

Hebrews 2:9 *"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."*

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He was wounded for our transgressions that we may be forgiven. He was bruised for our iniquities, so they may not be imputed to us. His righteousness covered all our missing marks. *No guile was found in his mouth* (1 Peter 2:22), but he was treated as a deceiver for our sakes. The Righteous Servant justified many, for God was satisfied, the payment for sin was satisfied, because it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: God made His soul an offering for sin.

The Merit of the Redemptive Work of Jesus, and not of Men

We must take note that only the Lord Jesus Christ' work has merit to salvation, because only He is qualified, and also, His work on the cross is already more than complete and sufficient, that no other men needed to add to it. The belief that

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men can also work to merit salvation and even share their own merit to other people, is called *supererogation*, which is a part of the Roman Catholic doctrine on Treasure of Merits. Supererogation means doing more than what is required. From the Latin *supererogare*, from the words *super* meaning beyond, and *erogare* meaning to pay. And according to this false doctrine, heaven has this treasure of merits, from the superabundant works of the Lord Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary and the saints. Accordingly, this is because also Mary and the ‘saints’ did good works more than what was required for their own salvation, so this *excess* of merits were gathered in a treasury, which the people can access for themselves by praying to Mary, the saints, and also doing penances or indulgences. This is the definition in [www. Catholicculture.org](http://www.Catholicculture.org) – “*Also called the Treasury of the Church. It consists of*

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*the superabundant merits of Jesus Christ and his faithful ones. Such a treasury implies that good works benefit others, and that the Communion of Saints is also an intercommunication of merits, not only when a good work is performed but, under God's Providence, for all future time.”*¹⁶

This is not Biblical, as no man can save his own soul by his own good works, much more the souls of other men. This also makes these “faithful ones” to be mediators between God and men, where the Bible says, **1 Timothy 2:5**, “*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*”. Salvation can only be found through saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel. You cannot charge anything on the account of Virgin Mary, or charge any sin on the account of St. Francis de Assisi, or charge your iniquity on the account of the works of St. Lorenzo Ruiz. So we don't pray

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to saints, we don't pray to people, we pray only to God, and we only had access to God, through the Lord Jesus Christ; not that they are separate persons, but that God manifested himself in the flesh for the purpose of reconciling man to Him.

2 Corinthians 5:19, *"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."*

John 14:6 *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

Diseases Charged on His Stripes

Not only sins, healing from diseases was also charged on the account of Jesus' work on the cross. **Isaiah 53:5**, *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and*

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with his stripes we are healed."He did not just die on the cross for our sins, the stripes he had was for the healing of our body. We can see that in Acts 3, when Peter and John went to the temple and healed the lame at Gate Beautiful. **Acts 3:6**, "*Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*" When the men of Jerusalem wondered how this happened, here's what Peter said, **Acts 3:12** " *And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?*" v16, "*And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*"

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So the lame was healed not by the account of the power and holiness of Peter and John, but by the faith in the name of Jesus Christ. Healing was charged on the account of Jesus, by invoking the name of Jesus, when healing was declared. That is why, we do everything we do by His name. **Colossians 3:17**, *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”*

That’s why prayers should be made by His name, healing should be invoked in His name, we baptize in His name, we preach repentance and remission of sins in His name **Luke 24:47** *“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”*

The Tree that Absorbed the Bitter Waters

Remember the tree on Mara? In **Exodus 15:23-25**, we find Israel led by Moses through the wilderness, not having water to drink for three days, only to find some in Mara, but that water there was bitter, so they could not drink it. The place was called Mara because the word means bitter in the Hebrew language. So the Lord shewed to Moses a tree, which he cast into the waters, and the *waters were made sweet* (v 25). It seemed the tree absorbed all the bitterness of the water, and released into it sweetness.

That tree is symbolic of the cross, **1 Peter 2:24** "*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*"

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On the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ absorbed all the bitterness and poison of sin in our lives. All our sins, transgressions, iniquities and guiles were charged to Him. And then out of Him was released into our lives all sweetness – salvation, healing, righteousness, hope, joy, peace. That’s what the cross did for us.

His blood is too precious, too valuable, that even when all our sins were charged into it, the account remains current! The blood is still fresh today, it is still powerful and sinners can still come to the cross and be cleansed by the virtue and redeeming power of the blood of Jesus.

Imputed Righteousness

In the previous example about credit card debt, imagine upon knowing that your debt has been paid in full, you were informed that the same person not just paid the debt by charging it all on his account, but also out of the same account, he credited your bank account with P1 Million Pesos. What would be your reaction?

Righteousness Defined

In the letter, Paul was not just asking Philemon to release Onesimus from his debts and make him a free man; he even asked Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul. As if saying, treat him and look at him, as if it was Paul himself. This is an illustration of imputed righteousness on the believers.

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The first mention of righteousness in the Bible is in **Genesis 15:6**, "*And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*" This pertained to Abraham who believed in the promise of God for an heir. This is an Old Testament foreshadow of imputed righteousness by faith. Righteousness is /*tsedaqah*/ (Strong's H6666), meaning being upright. How can a man be upright before a Holy God? God's standard is surely high, **Psalms 130:3** "*If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*" **Job 4:18** "*Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly:*" No man can really be upright in His eyes, for what He demands is perfect righteousness. The law demands the perfect observance of its entirety,

Deuteronomy 6:25 , "*And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these*

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commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us."

James 2:10, "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*"

So we all fell short of the standard of righteousness, because we are unable to fulfill all the law, and being guilty of just one, makes us guilty of it entirely.

Because of this high demand, *no man is righteous, no not one, and we all fell short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:10,23). Isaiah 64:6*
"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

The Righteousness of God

So man's righteousness is like a filthy rag, it won't help anyone clean himself up. What we need is the righteousness of God! It is more important than food, clothing and shelter. We need to make our search for God's righteousness a priority, and God promises all our needs will be taken care of if we do so. **Matthew 6:33**, "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

But if this kind of righteousness cannot be found by doing good and charitable works, if we cannot work our way to being right before God, because fault will always be found in us, where can we find it?

Romans 1:16-17, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God*

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unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

Therein, that is, in the gospel, is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith. So God's righteousness, the perfect righteousness that God demands, is revealed in the gospel of Christ. And the gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ; His redemption work. So if we look to the redemption work of the Lord on the cross, and have faith in Him - that is not just a mental assent, but rather a saving faith, made evident by our obedience to the gospel, we became recipient of this righteousness.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 *"In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God,*

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and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:"

Hebrews 5:9, *“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”*

We must be sure to point this out, that faith includes the appropriate actions that make the faith true. The contrast between faith and works that the Apostle Paul discussed in the book of Romans, is faith against **the works of the law**, which is the ceremonies and rituals of the Old Testament, and even good works men do, that they think would be valid grounds for their salvation or being accounted righteous before God (see **Romans 9:30-32**); it is not faith versus works or actions done in accordance to that faith, such as repentance, baptism in water in Jesus name and the seeking for the baptism of the Holy

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Spirit. Saving faith requires that those actions proceed, to validate the faith. Having this saving faith would make someone act it out, and this saving faith will make a man accounted as righteous, justified before God, and the basis is not his own good works, but this faith in the Lord.

Romans 3:22 *“Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:”*

Romans 9:30, *“What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.”*

Philippians 3:9 *“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the*

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law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith"

So by faith, the believer became righteous, because the righteousness of Christ, by His perfect obedience, even until death of the cross, is imputed to him. **2 Corinthians 5:21**, "*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.*"

Isaiah 53:11, "*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*"

Justify here is */tsadaq/* (Strong's H6663) meaning made upright. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Righteous Servant shall justify (make upright) many, for he bear their iniquities. The believers in the sight of God are justified and righteous, in

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account of the perfect righteousness of Jesus imputed over them.

Galatians 3:27, “ *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*”

Imputing is like putting on a clothe, or can also be used in Accounting terms as *crediting*. The account of the life of Jesus is clean and zero sin; but it has perfect or 100% righteousness and obedience. But on the cross, the sin of the world was credited to His account; and His perfect righteousness was credited to us. So that is how we acquire God’s righteousness – by putting on Christ.

Man needs to be saved first by saving faith, before he can ever be upright before God, then out of this righteousness and salvation, will come out naturally, good works.

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Ephesians 2:8-10 *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

We must need to continue to walk unto good works after the righteousness of Jesus was imputed on us though faith.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed,*

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but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

So there was a great transaction: our sins were imputed to the Lord Jesus, and His righteousness was imputed to us. Just as Onesimus' debts and payment for freedom was charged on Paul's account, while the good treatment and reception Paul should have from Philemon, was entreated to Onesimus. What great grace we received from the Lord! This kind of righteousness was already mentioned by the prophets of the Old Testament:

Isaiah 45:24, *"Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed."*

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One of the titles of Jehovah in the Old Testament, JEHOVAH TSIDKENU, was taken from this verse in Jeremiah;

Jeremiah 23:6, *“In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**”*

Also, the Lord promised that his servants’ righteousness is on Him;

Isaiah 54:17, *“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.”*

To be imputed with the Lord’s righteousness is like being clothed with a white

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garment, we must keep it clean. **Galatians 3:27**,
*“For as many of you as have been baptized into
Christ have put on Christ”*

FORESHADOWED IN THE GARDEN

This righteousness of Christ that was put on us was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, in the times of Adam and Eve. When they sinned against God, they felt a sense of shame, knowing they were naked. **Genesis 3:7** *“And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.”*

Sins would put us to shame. And in our own desperate attempt to cover our shames, we try to put on fig leaves as aprons to cover us. The aprons that could barely cover us represent our

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own righteousness. That's why God considers them as filthy rags. It is our pathetic attempt to cover our sins. Trying to do what we think as 'good works', trying to appease and bargain with our conscience. But no, these are just fig leaves sewn together. They won't last, it would be destroyed, and they do not really cover us, especially in the sight of God.

So then God punished them, but see His goodness, **Genesis 3:21** "*Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*"

God made them coats of skin, in Hebrew /or/ (Strong's H5785), meaning leather, or animal skin. God sacrificed an animal, and the skin of this animal was made into coat that covered Adam and Eve. We can see here the start of the sacrificial offering of animals foreshadowing the

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coming ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. There in God's garden Eden, blood was shed and man's shame covered by the skin of an animal that was pure and without blemish. So is the Son of God, having perfect obedience and righteousness, as a lamb without spot and blemish, His perfect righteousness was put on us like a coat, covering our nakedness and shame.

Isaiah 61:10, *“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.”*

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Galatians 3:27 *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*

Now that we have been made righteous, justified and washed, it is our duty to keep our walks right before the Lord, for he already enabled us to do so. Just as Paul already did for Onesimus a great favor, making sure he will be having a new start in his life in the Lord - something that by himself he could not do; it was up to him to make sure this new start would not be wasted, and to take it as a privilege, a wonderful gift he received, and needed to be protected by all cost. So is our salvation, the Lord already did his part on our salvation, he already paid the price of the debt of sin, something that we could not pay without the expense of our own peril – but now it is our duty to keep it, and

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protect it as a precious gift. See the Apostle's admonition,

Philippians 2:12-13, "*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.** For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*"

Salvation is already given, we need to work it out! We did not work our way *to it*, it was the Lord who did. But now that we have it, we need to *work it out*, with **fear and trembling**; but be not discouraged that this is such a hard and impossible thing to do, because as we *work out*, it is God who *works in* our spirit. He gives us the power, the grace to work it out; it is the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us, nevertheless, we still need to work it out, to act it out.

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While justification is purely God's work, walking in the newness of life is more of a partnership between us and God. **Romans 8:1** *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”*

We have already seen how the Lord provided us with salvation, by paying the penalty for our sins. And not just that, He imputed us with His own righteousness, that when God looks at us, it is not our past wrongdoings and mistakes that He sees, but rather the perfect righteousness of Christ that was put on us. Now that we received such a precious salvation, we must not neglect it!

Hebrews 2:3, *“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first*

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began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;"

O, Onesimus! Forget not, that what you received is not just a petty and so little a thing – **it is so great salvation!** It is so great because the Author is so great, so is the price so great, and also is the reward so great. If we neglect this so great salvation, Paul was asking here a rhetorical question: How do we suppose to escape such a horrendous neglect? If those offenders of the Old Covenant were severely punished, how much more they who will neglect this new and better covenant?

Hebrews 10:28-29, *“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath*

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counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Forgiveness Among Believers

Another key theme in this little book is how believers should live in love and forgiveness. The preserving of this letter, and its inclusion to the canon of our Bible, indicates Onesimus was received by Philemon, and by *the oikos* or house church in Colossae. Indeed he was forgiven on the account and request of the apostle, but it requires genuine love to continue to live in harmony with a person who had done you wrong in the past.

Forgiveness among brethren is a crucial part of our Christian walk, since offences would come, and conflicts even within the church cannot be totally avoided. What does the Bible say about forgiveness?

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Matthew 18:21-22, *“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.”*

So here the Lord instructs us to forgive, not just seven times, but seventy times seven times! Alfred Barnes said regarding this, *“The Jews taught that a man was to forgive another three times, but not the fourth. Peter more than doubled this, and asked whether forgiveness was to be exercised to so great an extent. I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. The meaning is, that we are not to limit our forgiveness to any fixed number of times.”*¹⁷

Then the Lord went on to tell them the parable of the unforgiving servant; a servant

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whose great debts were forgiven by the king, but went on to put his fellow servant in prison, not forgiving his small debt to him. The king knew about it and was angry, and put the unforgiving servant to prison, until all his debts be paid in full. This teaches us the lesson of learning to forgive our brothers and sisters who may have wronged us.

Matthew 6:12 *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."*

This indicates our forgiving of those who wronged us is a prerequisite of God's forgiveness to us. What big a mistake our brothers had done to us that can be compared to the mountains of sins that God forgave us of? We see, if we keep in mind that we were also sinners who were forgiven, we would be able to forgive others also.

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On that perspective, we can say that we also need to forgive, not just for the person who offended us, but also for our own sakes. Unforgiveness makes someone bitter. It creates a blockade against the fullness of God's blessing and fellowship among the believers. Unforgiveness can be discerned in the spirit, it hinders the genuine move of the Holy Spirit. Surely, offences and unforgiveness among believers have been some of the oldest and most effective tools that Satan uses against the church. We must be aware of this. Unforgiveness was the context when Paul said;

2 Corinthians 2:11, *“Lest Satan should take advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”*

This was pertaining to a brother that committed the sin of adultery with his

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stepmother, whom Paul rebuked and disciplined in his first letter to them (*see 1 Corinthians 5*). At first, this brother was proud and non-repentant, so Paul in his letter declared a disciplinary sanction on him.

1 Corinthians 5:3-5 *“For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,*

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

What the apostle pertained here as delivering unto Satan, is widely accepted and

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interpreted as disfellowship. For the mean time that the person was unrepentant, and proud, do not let him attend the gathering, until he realizes his sin is destroying his body and even his life and those around him; and maybe then he will repent and his soul be saved, and he be restored. It was a disciplinary action done by the leader to maintain the integrity of the body, lest the whole lump be leavened. This is a strong, hard, and yet loving decision made by the apostle, not just for the church in Corinth, but also for the sinning brother.

And so this brother repented of his sin, and in Paul's second letter, he instructed the church to forgive and restore him.

2 Corinthians 2:7-11 *“So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and*

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comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;

Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

Paul having learned that the incestuous brother repented, instructed the church to forgive and comfort him, lest he may be swallowed with much sorrow. Many people and even Christian

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brethren are being overwhelmed by sorrows, due to unforgiveness. The guilt of their sins is already a heavy burden on their conscience, then there adds the fear of rejection and indifference he receives from people who refuse to forgive him. We must note that a person who has done wrong must repent, must change and correct the wrong done; he must also ask forgiveness from people involved, not just from God. But when the person already asked forgiveness and his action shows his willingness and determination to change, it is now our responsibility to forgive and to restore the person. Or, Satan may take advantage of bitter attitudes and use it against the church. We are no longer ignorant of this; we have seen it many times- Satan destroying lives, congregations, relationships because of unforgiveness. We must refuse to fall into this trap of Satan, where he had caused many a great people of God to walk into.

Mediating for Brotherly Disputes

Sometimes for forgiveness and restoration happen, especially during conflicts, there is a need for an elder of the church to mediate between two believers who are in a dispute. Paul being the common denominator between Onesimus and Philemon, (aside from the Lord Jesus Christ, of course), was willing to become the negotiator or arbiter. There will be times, for sure that such mediation will be needed to be done in the church.

Disputes among believers are common, it will happen, whether we like it or not. We can even remember Paul and Barnabas having a dispute (**Acts 15:36-39**), even between Paul and Peter (**Galatians 2:11-14**). See how the Lord instructs us on how to deal with disputes:

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Matthew 18:15-17, *“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”*

So first you talk with your brother alone, and tell him how he offended you. If things can be settled between the two of you then that should be the end of it. Speaking of offence done to you, to another person other than the person who did it, **will not help in any way**. It should be between the two of you first. Motivated by love

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and determination to keep the unity of the church, *we must initiate reconciliation with each other.*

How many disputes should have ended, if only, the involved persons really talked about it? And how many disputes grew to large scale division and quarrels, even lawsuits, just because the persons involved chose not to discuss it with each other? If only small misunderstandings were talked over; if only offences were dealt with the intention of reconciliation, and not proving the other side wrong; if only we always have the guts, or should we say, love, to boldly discuss and confront each other in a Christian way, instead of just being indifferent about it; maybe we have less quarrels, less divisions, less burned bridges among us today. This is true not just in the church, but also in all our other relationships, and even the society at large.

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This first step is a step of courage and honesty. Being courageous and honest enough to tell the other person how you feel, because the only way to settle things is to be honest about it. Because if we don't let the offending party know, chances are, they would do it again, and so the cycle never stops.

Now, if he will not hear it, or would not be willing to come to right terms with you, you can discuss it with a witness, probably someone you both trust, a common friend - somebody you both believe that will not take sides or be biased. Again, this must be done in the spirit and intention of reconciliation, to mend as soon as possible, the relationship and harmony within the body of Christ. This should not be done with the purpose of making one side the better, but should aim at doing necessary reconciliatory steps.

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Christians should be peacemakers. **Matthew 5:9** *“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”* Matured brethren or church elders should qualify to be witness; somebody who should maintain a neutral stance beforehand, for bias in the side of the arbiter/witness would defeat the purpose of reconciliation.

If still to no avail, then tell it to the church, the pastor/leader should be able to settle the matter. Because the church leader must be heard and regarded to be someone who speaks to both your lives, as the voice of the Lord, and a guide from God. Both parties being members of the church are expected to honor the leadership, and should heed to the advice of the Pastor, having the responsibility to execute righteous judgment to the benefit of the whole body of Christ. He

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should be hearing both sides and should not be biased.

Being the overseer of the flock, the Pastor is expected to judge and act, not for the benefit of a particular side, but for the benefit of the whole body of Christ. Having this in mind, both parties should be able to trust the judgment of their Pastor, and therefore submit to his advice.

There are times when the disputes are not just between brothers or sisters in the Lord. Sometimes it's between families.

Here's a testimony from Rev. Eugene Wilson;

“It was really bad and I can tell by the way they sat on the couch, they were very far from each other. I was looking at

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them and reading their body language. I said to them, 'Tell me what's going on.'

'We've been married for two and a half years. After one year of marriage, my husband had an affair. We stayed together but no one helped us work through it,' the wife said.

She could not take it any longer that's why she moved to another town. They had been living separately for over eight months and not talking to each other.

On our next appointment, I grabbed a chair and set it at the center of the office, stood behind it and asked them, 'Who's going to sit on this chair?'

There was only one chair so the both of them just looked at me confused. I

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walked around and sat on the chair. I asked the husband, 'Sir do you love God?'

'Yes,' he answered.

'Do you really love Him?'

'Yes.'

'Do you truly love Him?'

'Yes.'

'Do you love Him enough that if the two of you got back together and your wife made your life miserable for the next 30 years, you will still live for God? Will you still love and serve Him?'

He said, 'I love Him that much.' I said, 'I believe you' and then I asked his wife, 'Ma'am do you love God?'

'Yes Sir.'

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'Do you really love Him?'

'Yes Sir.'

'Do you truly love Him?'

'Yes.'

'Do you love Him enough that if the two of you got back together and your husband had another affair two years from now, will you still live for God? Will you forgive him?'

She said. 'Yes.'

I said. 'I believe you.' Then, I clapped my hands together and smiled, 'Congratulations! You guys are going to have a fabulous, outstanding and awesome marriage.'

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They were just looking at me. I explained. 'This is how you are going to have a great marriage. You just told me who is going to sit on this chair. It's neither of you. Instead, you're allowing God to sit on this chair and you both will orbit around it. And because God is sitting on the chair, sir, you will do everything you can to gain your wife's trust. You will be accountable and responsible in rebuilding her trust. And you ma'am, need to forgive and let go.'

This was many years ago when I taught this lesson to that couple. Today, the man is being used in his local church, and the chair principle remains timeless."¹⁸

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Now only if, the offending party does not regard the authority of the pastor, and the offence still presses, then you should do outside considerations of settling things, like the prevailing legal system and authorities of the land; but this should be the last resort. It will not be a good testimony for the unbelievers for brethren to file cases against each other in courts. We can see Paul rebuking *the Corinthian church regarding same matters*:

1 Corinthians 6:1-7, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge

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who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?"

Here Paul was like saying to their shame (my own paraphrasing, for clarity); *"Is there no one among you who can judge on this matter, that you had the need to go to the unbelievers just to settle disputes? The church is destined to judge even greater matters in the future, we will be judging the angels, and yet, no one among you is wise to impose judgment on this?"* Then Paul in the latter verse indicated how should they had reacted, *"why do ye not rather take wrong?"* It is

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like, why would you rather dishonor the church among unbelievers through this dispute, instead of just taking it as an injury, or damage to your own selves? Why not the offended just take the damage, and if possible, forgive the offender, or at least arrive at a point of agreement? Somebody may need to assume damages because of what have been done, but at least, the church, and implicatively, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would not be defrauded, or be in jeopardy in the midst of the unbelievers in a civil court. For that the name of the Lord be not tainted, sometimes, the believers would need to adjust, to sacrifice, and to set aside some rights.

Christ's Example of Humility

See Paul's admonition to the Philippians:

Philippians 2:5-11, *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being*

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in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The context here in the preceding verses is humility and harmony among the believers. And Paul admonished them to have the mind of Christ, his attitude, his mindset – that he being God in the flesh, still humbled himself, obeyed, and did not use his divine prerogatives, nor called

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it to execution or demanded for it to be honored. If Christ Himself did it, being God, He has got all Divine rights, but did not use it, why can't us? For the sake of love of God and of the brethren, look on the things of others, and not just for ourselves; can't we at times set aside our own little rights just so to serve and love God and the brethren? If we had been wronged, would it hurt so much to forgive? If the God incarnate was willing to be humbled, are we in a much lofted position than Him, that we cannot withstand our rights being passed by at times?

After the humility of Christ, was not He lifted up and glorified? So will us, if we humble ourselves, will be lifted up in due time.

1 Peter 5:5-6, *“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with*

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humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

Under divine inspiration, Paul wrote this letter to remind the believers of this important subject, and by Philemon granting Paul's request, he showed us an example of how the church is not a museum of perfect saints, but a hospital of sinners.

Luke 19:10, *"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

Power of Unity

Remember, that through offences and disputes, the devil would like to destroy something that is very powerful and *crucial for the body of Christ, and that is **unity**.*

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Psalms 133:1-3 “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”

Here we see the Bible describes the unity of brethren as good and pleasant! Not all good things are pleasant, and not all pleasant things are good, but unity among brethren is good and pleasant.

It is like the precious ointment, there is power in unity because it brings down the anointing of God! It was exactly what the 120

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disciples in the upper room were doing in the day of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost came down and baptized them all;

Acts 2:1 *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”*

The anointing of the Holy Spirit pours down when we are united together in one accord, while it can be hindered by disunity and division in the body of Christ, and that is what the devil wants to happen in our churches. Services and ministries are without the anointing because of divisions and disputes among the members of the body.

Take note that the anointing, that precious ointment, that signifies the blessing of God in the ministry of the priests, kings and prophets, flows from *the head, down to the beard, then to the*

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skirts of Aaron. Anointing flows through the body from the head down. We need to be in submission to proper authority and leadership of the church. Without submission to the rightful and God-designated authority, the anointing would not flow.

As the dew of Hermon, not just the anointing, but also there is blessing as denoted by the dew flowing down the mountains, also flow through the unity of the body of Christ. Blessings are hindered because of division, clashes and misunderstandings. But where there is unity, *there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore.*

All these are possible when there is forgiveness among believers. This is what Paul intended to do in Philemon's household. He was not just helping Onesimus, but also Philemon,

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that he would be able to clear this thing in his conscience, and be able to forgive the wrong done to him by his former slave Onesimus. This hindrance of unforgiveness needs to be removed and the mediation of Paul helped restore unity and love in the church in Colossae.

Acknowledging Every Good Thing Which is in You in Christ Jesus

From verse 6, *"That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus."*, we can find a key principle in making the sharing, communication of our faith effective. Let me discuss it in 2 ways:

1. When a Christian acknowledges the privileges, the grace, the anointing, the favour, the power he has in the Lord; this helps him in the effective sharing and living out of his faith. Instead of focusing on the weaknesses, and failures, and inabilities, focus on God's power and

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strength, the joy in the presence of the Lord: this gives such a man a glad disposition, a sense of contentment and rest. These set adequate atmosphere where faith in Christ can be effectively shared to unbelievers. Jesus name baptized and Holy Ghost filled believers were given power /*dunamis*/ (Strong's G1411) by God to become witnesses.

Acts 1:8 *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, And unto the uttermost part of the earth"*

Mark 16:17-18 *"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak*

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with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

Not only this power, but also God has given to us authority /*exousia*/(Strong's G1849)

Luke 10:19 *"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you."*

Not only these, but God also gave to the church the five-fold ministry (**Ephesians 4:11**), and to sum it all up, He has already given to us all things pertaining to life and godliness,

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2 Peter 1:3 *"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:"*

It will do a Christian good, and it will make the sharing or communication of his faith effectual, effective, if he will acknowledge all these good things that he has in Christ Jesus our Lord. If one does not acknowledge these things, then he won't be utilizing them, then what good is it for him to have it in the first place? It will just be like the wicked and slothful servant that digged and hid his Master's money in the Parable of the Talents in **Matthew 25:14-30**.

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We are to acknowledge every good thing in us in Christ Jesus. The Lord has already given to us all things pertaining life and godliness! We must be aware of that, and be thankful. Having a grateful disposition would make our life attractive to the unbelievers. *What is it in him/her? That Christian seemed always grateful and content. Where is his joy coming from? Where does his contentment dwells?*

This world is already filled with discontentment and is always asking and thriving for more, and Christians must display a stance in life that is appreciative of the good things God has given us. **Colossians 2:10** *“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:”*

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Remember that the devil wants us to look at the things we don't have, and to not acknowledge and appreciate the things we have. In the garden of Eden, that is how he beguiled Eve to sin, that is by making her look at the only thing God hath refrained from them.

Genesis 3:1 *“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”*

This question is indeed very subtle and tricky. By asking this question, the serpent was trying to direct her attention to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The serpent was like, *“Yes, God may have provided you with many things, but not all.*

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He is withholding something from you.”

Instead of acknowledging and enjoying all God hath provided, the woman now was looking at the single tree God prevented them to eat from.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is not the only tree that has fruit which is good to the eyes and for food, all the other trees are also good to eat and pleasant to the eyes –

Genesis 2:9 *“And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”*

The same trick the devil use today against Christians to steal our joy. He

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wants us to focus on things that we don't have, instead of acknowledging and appreciating the things we have. When we start comparing ourselves with others who we perceive to be better or have more, we lose sight of the wonderful gifts we have, and it may lead us to be resentful, and unwilling to develop our God-given talents.

We must not let this happen, we must acknowledge and appreciate every good thing, which is in us, in Christ Jesus. Instead of wishing to be someone else, why not we develop our selves so that we would be able to be used by God, as He had particularly designed every one of us with a particular purpose in mind.

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Paul beautifully discussed this in 1 Corinthians 12, regarding different gifts in the church, and why we must not be envying each other, and we may summarize his thought in this one verse in that chapter;

1 Corinthians 12:12 *“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.”*

2. The communication of faith to the unbelievers will be made effectual, meaning it will produce lasting effects, if the Christian acknowledges in his life, the Lord Jesus Christ - to be the source, the fountain from which all good things spring out from. All good things that a believer has, he must acknowledge to be *in Christ Jesus*. One should always easily ascribe all goodness,

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benevolence, virtues, good will, to Christ, and not to himself. Such an attitude gives all glory and credit to Christ, thus promoting faith to Him, and not self advancing.

James 1:17 "*Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*"

1 Corinthians 4:7 " *For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"*

If a believer will ascribe to himself all credits of the good things, qualities, gifts he possesses, what glory does the Lord get out of it? And if the Lord not be glorified, why would He be involved and

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empower that believer for the further efficacy of his sharing the faith? That's why it is important to humble ourselves, so that the Lord be glorified in our lives, and if God be glorified in whatever we do, he will empower and anoint us, for more efficiency of the communication of the faith. There is this truth embedded in this passage, (though it literally pertains to the Lord's dying on the cross), **John 12:32** *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."*

We can see that as well when Paul said,

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 *"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base*

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things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."

God chooses the base things of this world, the weak, the foolish, the despised, so that no man should have the glory. So if we as believers choose to acknowledge, or recognize all good things which is in us to be in Christ Jesus, that these good things are not something to be proud of, but rather be thankful of; if we will have this kind of attitude, the Lord will bless and use us all the more, and the communication of faith will be more effective.

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Both interpretations though, would tell the reader that good *things given by the Lord need to be acknowledged.*

2 Timothy 1:6 *"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."*

Let us be sure to acknowledge whatever gift and good things God bestowed upon us, so that it will not be wasted. This was the prayer of Paul to the Ephesians; that God will give them spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the Lord; and that will consequently enlighten their eyes of understanding to know the hope of His calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance to the saints, and the exceeding greatness of his power toward the believers – that our position in Christ Jesus is far higher than all

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the powers of the enemy. (See *Ephesians 1:17-23*)

Hallelujah! Most of the times we don't acknowledge these things, so we need the wisdom, revelation and enlightenment of the eyes of our understanding. The world and its lusts and circumstances sometimes blind the believers. We sometimes don't see, and therefore fail to acknowledge what vast gifts God has given to the church. But if every believer will acknowledge these things that he possess in Christ Jesus, he will be effective in his Christian life. All believers are powerful because of the power of God; it's just that not everybody knows and believe it.

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CHAPTER 4
Conclusion:
Amazing Grace

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This letter is indeed a short one, it is one of the shortest books in the Bible with only one chapter. But such great themes and subjects can be discussed from this inspired writing. Understanding these great themes does not in any way affect, neither add nor reduce the efficacy of the grace and salvation we all received from God, but it somehow makes us appreciate this gift of salvation we received, that we don't take it for granted, nor make light of it. Also, this reminds us of how our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not just a set of beliefs, it is not just theology and a kind of food for the thought. It should so affect our lives that we would like to live it, to demonstrate it in all aspects of our lives, honor it, and communicate it to others, even at the expense of our own suffering. Sharing the gospel is not

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just uttering it, it is not just a culmination of words to strike the emotions of the listeners – it needs an active, living proof. It is about pleading for somebody else’s welfares and benefits, just so the gospel be put forward. It is accompanied by a full belief on its changing power, that we are willing to believe that it makes the people it touches a new creation. This letter is a demonstration of passion and compassion, of willingness to go distances for the good of a brother beloved. It is a story of how God changes lives.

Paul was sure of the gospel’s power unto salvation. He was willing to put his name on to it. He knows Onesimus was a changed man, and who could attest to it more, than someone who used to be a persecutor of the church? He knew the feeling of being questioned and frightened of.

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When he was converted, a lot of people were still in doubt; *was he really changed?*

Acts 9:21, *“But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?”*

Acts 9:26 *“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.”*

Paul was doubted at first when he was suddenly converted; he felt the fright of the people around him. He knew how others would doubt if it was possible for a man like him to be changed, but good thing, a Barnabas believed in him and brought him to the apostles, vouching for his conversion;

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Acts 9:27 "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

Oh how we need men like Barnabas! He so much believed in the power of an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ! He knew that all it took was one encounter with the Lord and the persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, would become a changed man! He willingly vouched for Paul, and believed in the New Birth. Wicked men can change – the drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, idolaters, the homosexuals and thieves, we can name it all, as we are all living testimonies of it! All people need, the only answer and hope, is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and some Barnabas willing to believe it.

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And now, Paul was willing to be a Barnabas to Onesimus; he who experienced the grace and mercy of God, would not miss a chance to be instrumental for the same God of mercy to work on another Saul. Paul was like saying, “*I know he used to be a run-away thief and slave. That’s how you know Onesimus, but I guarantee you, the Lord did a work on him, as He also did unto me - he’s different now, you can trust him, he’s been to the school of grace.*” What a reminder of the greatness of the gospel we believe!

2 Corinthians 5:17 *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*

All of these were made possible, not on the account of our works, but rather on the account of the finished work of Christ in the Cross of

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Calvary. This is the great wonder of the Christian faith. All other religions are all about man trying to go to heaven by his own works. False religions are represented by the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11; that is men trying to build a tower that would reach heaven. No tower could reach heaven, as no works of men would be able to make a way for his salvation. We know that the tower did not reach heaven, as also all our righteousness and works fell short of the glory of God.

We could not reach heaven on our own, and God knows this well, so He Himself came down to Earth. Christianity is not about men going up to heaven, but rather about God descending down to earth to make a way for those who would follow Him. Jesus is the manifestation of God in the flesh, the only way to the Father.

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John 14:6 *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*

Jesus was represented by the ladder in Jacob’s dream in Bethel. He is the only way to the kingdom of God. He made it possible by the cross, where he bear all our iniquities, our sins, transgressions and guile, for sin is what separates man from God.

Isaiah 59:1-2 *“Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”*

On the cross, our sins were charged, or credited to Jesus, receiving in our stead the just punishment for sin. Forgiveness and remission of

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sins were made possible, because of this, that an Innocent and Righteous man died; the only Righteous One, the only Holy One, because He is God Himself robed in flesh. And then, His perfect righteousness, in that He was obedient even unto death, this righteousness that no *good man* hath attained, but only the *God-Man* - Jesus' righteousness was imputed to us, it was charged or credited to our account. So now we have been made justified and righteous before God, we just need to walk in this righteousness and newness of life.

This was what Paul demonstrated in this small epistle, which he being inspired by the Holy Ghost, would like to transmit to us, as an example to emulate, so that our lives will be smaller versions of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, communicating the praise of the glory of the grace of God.

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1 Peter 2:9-10 *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

Let me end this book with a song, a song we all probably heard, as this would perfectly describe God’s grace in the life of Onesimus, who basically is everyone of us:

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I onced was lost, but now am found, t’was blind, but now I see.

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My chains are gone, I've been set free! My God my Saviour has ransomed me! And like a flood, His mercy rains. Unending Love, Amazing Grace. “19

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