

# **Philemon**

## Redemption Dramatized

By Mary M. Bodie

### **Remembrance**

At road's end where the shadows played,  
Beneath the hawthorne shade,  
He turned and went the path of woe  
Alone, yet unafraid.  
There yellow sumacs lazily nod,  
Each on its dusty stem;  
He remembers those ways He trod,  
And I remember them.

There on the top, where birds swung low,  
In circles to and fro,  
They halted cortege of dark death:  
The storm began to blow –  
The grey winds beat their ruthless wings  
Against the hapless hill.  
He remembers those blinding stings,  
And I remember still

A hot, dry sun shone angry red  
That April day long dead.  
He stood serene by rugged cross –  
The Lamb to slaughter led.  
They stripped and hung Him on the tree,  
The God-Man, royal Jew.  
He still remembers Calvary,  
And I remember too.

## PREFACE

The Apostle Paul's letter to Philemon is a sort of supplement to his epistle to the Colossians. The church in Colosse met in Philemon's home.

The letter was written in behalf of Onesimus, whom the Apostle terms his spiritual son. The authoress of these notes has captured the epistle and made it the vehicle of some precious spiritual lessons. Read and rejoice.

### REFERENCES USED IN THIS PUBLICATION

- **American Standard Version** (ASV or AV) is a version of the Bible that was released in 1901. It soon came to have other names such as the American Revised Version, the American Standard Revision, the American Standard Revised Bible, and the American Standard Edition. By the time its copyright was renewed in 1929, it had come to be known by its present name, the American Standard Version.
- **Diaglott** is a two-language polyglot translation, of the New Testament by Benjamin Wilson, first published in 1864. It is an interlinear translation with the original Greek text and a word-for-word English translation in the left column, and a full English translation in the right column.
- **King James Version** (KJV) references are used throughout this publication unless otherwise noted.
- **Revised Version** (RV) (or English Revised Version) of the Bible is a late 19th-century British revision of the King James Version of 1611. It was the first and remains the only officially authorized and recognized revision of the King James Bible.
- **Wuest:** Kenneth Samuel Wuest (1893–1962) was a noted New Testament Greek (Κοινή) scholar of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century...produced his own English translation of the New Testament (the Wuest Expanded Translation – abbreviated WET) based on Nestle's critical text.

**Note:** *Definitions of references pulled from Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, January 2013.*

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Paul a prisoner of Jesus Christ and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved and fellowlaborer. And to our beloved Apphia and Archippus, our fellowsoldiers, and to the church which is in thy house; Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." [Phm.1:1-3]*

The Apostle Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote this letter to his friend Philemon. He sent it by the hand of Tychicus and Onesimus at the same time that he sent the epistle to Colosse [Col.4:7-8].

Timothy was associated with the Apostle Paul in writing this letter, as was the case in several of his epistles. He was likeminded with the Apostle Paul, as the latter declares [Phi.2:20].

## SALUTATION

As was a custom of the Apostle, he pronounced grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, upon those to whom he wrote; for Apphia and Archippus were also mentioned at the opening of the letter. The Apostle Paul was always profuse in his thanksgiving to God for the grace shown to him, as well as His blessings upon others, as is the case here. He was also a man of prayer, mentioning the saints always before the throne of grace, especially when he heard of their love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints. We naturally would think that such overcoming folk, filled with love and faith, needed no prayers; but not so did our dear spiritual father, the Apostle Paul, infer. He knew the wiles of Satan. He had experienced something, and somewhat of his darts. He realized that his power is exerted and his devilish hate manifested in great measure against those that are going in the way of victory; hence, he prayed for all these at all times. And the following tells us to what purpose he entreated for them.

That the communication, or fellowship of thy faith, may become effectual ("*workable*"); that is, that others may be benefited. Others may be written over every page of the Apostle Paul's writings. It was his deep-seated desire, yea, the absorbing passion of his life, to do good to others. He insisted that he was a debtor to all men, and he desired to pay all that he owed [Rom.1:14]. He also wanted all saints to realize their obligation in this direction. It is good to have faith and love in us; but that is not enough. The Apostle Paul desired it to be fruitful, or communicated to others. Thus their faith and love would not be in word, but in deed also.

The Christian life must make progress. So the Apostle always taught. The latter comes by way of knowledge of God's purposes for us, these being accepted and made practical in our life as is here stated ...

*"By the acknowledgement (knowledge) of every good thing which is in us, as well as in you, in Christ Jesus." [Phm.1:6]*

The mutual joy and consolation experience upon this Christian pathway is wonderful. The depth of our being is refreshed when we hear of the uplifting and blessing of the Gospel in the lives of others. The saints comfort one another by their progress, thus growing up into Christ in all things. The Apostle Paul was strengthened and comforted through the love manifest by Philemon and the other overcomers at Colosse [Phm.1:7].

## A TACTFUL ENTREATY

He further writes,

*"Wherefore, tho' I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin you that which is convenient, yet for love's sake, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ, I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds." [Phm.1:8-10]*

The Apostle Paul declared that he had authority to command the obedience of Philemon and other saints; but he did not use the power. Oh, what a marvelous condition of soul! What a great victory the Apostle enjoyed over the despotic, "bossy" old man. He relinquished the authority he might have insisted upon, and asked Philemon's obedience as a favor to himself. He called attention, not so much to his age, as it would appear from the text, but to his dignity as an elder of the Church, and an ambassador of Christ (though at the time of writing he says he was His prisoner). He was beseeching that favor be shown to Onesimus, a former slave, by Philemon. Onesimus, he said, was the fruit of his labor while he was in bonds. That is, he was saved in Rome while the Apostle Paul was in prison there.

He further stated that Onesimus was not profitable before, but is now so changed that he is profitable, not only to the Apostle Paul, but will be so in the future to Philemon. Onesimus means "*profitable*." The Apostle apparently makes a play upon words here. He said,

*"Onesimus had not lived up to his name, heretofore: but now he will be profitable, or useful in the fullest degree." [Phm.1:11]*

The Apostle Paul besought Philemon to receive him, even as he, the Apostle Paul, and so deal with him. For though he desired to keep Onesimus with him, yet he would not do so without Philemon's permission. He did not desire, as he said formerly, to insist on his authority; but wanted Philemon voluntarily to yield and receive Onesimus, no more as a servant; but as he, the Apostle Paul, had received him, a brother, beloved.

Oh, yes, sin has leveled all men. "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" [Rom.3:23] but grace also levels, or makes all men equal. In the new creation, all who believe are brethren, beloved of God and of one another. Hence, the Apostle Paul wrote, "*If you count me a partner (or comrade), receive him as myself.*" What condescending love and fellowship exhibited to that erstwhile, erring runaway slave! It is divine. The Apostle also said that probably Onesimus had departed for a season that he might be received back, not for a short time, but forever. He further stated, "*If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.*" And he affirmed emphatically with his own hand in writing, "*I will repay it*" [Phm.1:18-19a].

That was truly grace shown out in a wonderful degree. The Apostle Paul put Philemon under obligation to obey him, not by authority; but by the constraint of love.

*"Albeit, I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides" [Phm.1:19b].*

Oh, yes, this is diplomatic, surely, and marvelously so. The Apostle Paul was writing by the Holy Spirit. He was catching Philemon with guile; but it was Divine Guile that does not harm, but rather does good. That was the only kind of guile in which the Apostle Paul dealt—Holy Spirit guile. He added,

*"Yea brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord. Refresh my bowels in the Lord" [Phm.1:20]*

It is always in order to be courteous. Some folk imagine that to be true to God and the Word we should be rough and ready. They think politeness is not a necessary asset in the Christian life; but the Apostle Paul did not so think. According to this letter, he actually spread on the honey and made no apology for it. He said in another letter, *"If meat maketh my brother to offend", that is to be disturbed or hindered on the Christian race course, "I will eat no flesh while the world standeth"* [1Co.8:13]. And he might have added,

*If kindness, or praise or courtesy makes my brother happier or more victorious, I will not spare my words on this line.*

The Apostle Paul made himself all things to all men that he might by all means save some. Spurgeon said, *"Many preachers and self-appointed leaders make themselves all things to all men that they may save a sum"* but not so our Apostle. He labored at his own expense for the welfare of others; hence, he could exhort with the authority that comes from the throne above. He courteously entreated. We may often cause people to disobey the admonitions of the Scriptures by our manner of exhortation. The lack of spiritual diplomacy is often keenly felt. Holy Spirit tact is a wonderful mollifier, as the Apostle Paul learned. It is like unto the ointment that was poured upon Aaron's head and ran down unto the skirts of his garments. It often heals friction and causes the brethren to *"dwell together in unity"* [Psa.133:1].

## A HOPE OF FREEDOM

*"But withal prepare me also a lodging; for I trust that through your prayers, I shall be given unto you."*  
[Phm.1:22]

The Apostle Paul was expecting to be set at liberty, which he no doubt experienced later; but he was again apprehended as we learn from history, and died under the reign of Nero, a Roman emperor. He was beheaded by the sword outside the city, even as his beloved Lord was taken and died outside the city of Jerusalem.

Epaphras was with the Apostle Paul in Rome when he wrote to Philemon, but not a prisoner in the same sense as was the Apostle. He perhaps voluntarily shared the Apostle's imprisonment by taking up his residence with him for a while; hence, he saluted Philemon, as did also Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas and Lucas. Those were his fellow-laborers as he writes [Phm.1:23-24]. Dear noblemen of God! They shared the Apostle Paul's sorrows, and pain, and they will share in his reward.

Then followed the benediction which was customary in so many of his epistles,

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

## WHAT OCCASIONED THIS EPISTLE?

This letter was written as the result of the Apostle Paul's deep interest in Onesimus, a slave who had fled from Colosse to Rome to escape from Philemon, his master, a rich and influential man of that city. We say that was the reason, but only on the surface. The greater reason for this letter lies hidden. The Lord always used circumstances or providences in some assembly, or as with this case, in some individual life, to call forth a letter on a special line, or need. So also with the Philemon epistle, which we will learn as we note some facts.

It is claimed that the Phrygian slave was the lowest and most debased of all types to be found in heathendom. They displayed the very worst traits of character which their servile condition developed. Onesimus probably was no exception. We would infer from the Apostle Paul's words that he helped himself to his master's goods when he ran away. Somehow, he reached Rome, the great centre of the empire of that name, with a youthful yearning no doubt to see the greatest city in splendor and vice that the world had to offer.

### CAPTURED BY THE SPIRIT

But God had his eye on that stripling youth. He might escape Philemon; but he could not get away from the great Master, the Lord. He came in touch with the Apostle Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, a prisoner in Rome for the sake of the Gospel, as he declared. Onesimus was cast into the same prison, probably for some crime which he had committed. He received the due reward for his sins; while it may be written of the Apostle Paul and his imprisonment, even as was said of Jesus on the cross, "*This man hath done nothing amiss*" [Luk.23:41]. But God was in all of those circumstances which worked well for the Apostle Paul as well as for the repentant Onesimus. The runaway slave of Philemon no doubt unburdened himself to his fellow prisoner, the slave of Jehovah, who could not run away from his Master, and would not if he could. He was persuaded to accept the Gospel which he had so often heard in his master's house, and he was saved.

It is not stated how long he remained with the Apostle Paul in prison; however, this much is clear, it was long enough for the Apostle to realize that Onesimus was no ordinary criminal regardless of the fact of his former record. He made himself almost indispensable to the Apostle Paul, as we are able to read between the lines. Paul learned to love and appreciate him as a brother in the Lord; but he did not feel that he could conscientiously keep him without Philemon's consent. Hence he sent him back to his former master. He also desired his friend to see and appreciate the great change that had been made in his erstwhile slave by his acceptance of Christ. Therefore, he wrote this letter and gave it to Onesimus to deliver to Philemon. That was another strategic stroke on the Apostle Paul's part. Here is a prolific spiritual lesson. We carry in our hands the very promises of Christ, which demand access to God's grace. We may present them to the Father and receive their fulfillment in our lives. For example, Jesus said in His prayer "*The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them and thou in me*" [Joh.17:22-23]. Let us hold this word before the Father and enjoy the glory.

Scholars claim that this little letter is a masterpiece of diction, as well as of diplomacy. Politeness is here combined with naturalness, which is truly captivating. Its manly and straightforward statement of facts, with its marvelous expression of appeal, charms and persuades as a breath of perfume from a garden of flowers. It is a beautiful example of Christian love. May we learn its lessons.

## WHO WAS PHILEMON?

**Philemon** (*"one that kisses"*) was an influential Christian man. The Church at Colosse met in his house, as we read in Philemon 1:2. **Apphia** (*"a dear one"* or *"one that produces"*), the woman mentioned in connection with him was probably his wife. She was a fruitful, useful saint of that assembly.

**Archippus** (*"governor of the horses, or racers"*), the third character mentioned here, was probably the pastor of the assembly gathered in Philemon's house, at least in the absence of Epaphras [Col.4:12]; we would infer this from the meaning of his name. Also from the fact that the Apostle Paul warns him to *"take heed to the ministry, which he had received"* [Col.4:17].

## SYMBOLIC ILLUMINATION

All these facts are interesting; but it is when we see the spiritual value of this little letter that it assumes some real importance. Then we are transported with delight at its truth. Oh, it makes the Scriptures so perfect, so dependable, so satisfying, and so instructive.

Some one has dared to say that there are no typical teachings in the Apostle Paul's letters, or in the whole of the New Testament. Others, just as ignorantly bold, have taken up the saying and repeated it as Gospel truth. But such are entirely mistaken. Herein are hidden some great treasures in spiritual lore. Here typical teaching opens up and reveals itself as we meditate upon the Epistle.

Let us look upon **Philemon** (*"he that kisses"*), that godly, influential gentleman of Colosse, as a type of God. Does that surprise you? Why should it? Abraham [Gen.22 and 24] and Pharaoh, in connection with Joseph [Gen.41], are types of God. This all Bible students admit. Philemon's name most beautifully expresses the God of all grace. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to redeem humanity, and take them who believe to His heart of love and kiss them into life.

**Onesimus** (*"the profitable"*) figures each one of Adam's race who hears the Gospel, repents and believes, and thus comes into fellowship with Christ and God. We were not profitable to God, neither were we living in the power of our name in our ruined estate; but, after we were reconciled, we became profitable...even as Onesimus...to God as well as men. We then became His slave forever, not by constraint, but of love.

**Paul** (*"the little man"*) represents Christ, the go-between, the daysman. He interposed Himself. He filled up the breach that separated God from man, and brought them together. Thus we have the reconciliation, effected by Christ on the cross, figured most wondrously by this little letter to Philemon.

Let us note some more proof-positive facts along the line of correspondence. The Apostle Paul, type of Christ, was a common friend of both Philemon and Onesimus. He loved them both, although he was acquainted with Philemon (a type of God) years before he met Onesimus. He knew him from the beginning, as it were, as his equal, his partner, his comrade, and friend.

Onesimus he met later in prison, where he had become identified with him as a wrong doer (although it was not because of any fault of his that he was there.) Onesimus was a criminal and not at all the equal of the Apostle Paul (the man of letters and refinement), either morally, socially, or spiritually. He was a robber, a fugitive from justice, a runaway slave, while the

Apostle was the opposite of all that. He was a holy, God-fearing, free man when he met Onesimus. But when the latter accepted Christ, he became the Apostle Paul's equal before God, as to his standing, if not before man. They were then brothers in a new creation, joined in a bond of life that never can be broken.

## MAN BROUGHT TO GOD

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Furthermore, it was the Apostle Paul (figuring Christ) that brought Philemon and Onesimus together. He assumed the entire obligation that was upon the former slave with all its consequences, saying that he would repay all the debt. He gracefully reminded Philemon that he was under obligation to him. What favor the Apostle Paul had bestowed on Philemon, that put him into his debt, is not recorded. It is quite reasonable to suppose that he was saved from heathendom and sin under the Apostle Paul's untiring toils. Even so Christ can say to His Father and God that He is in His Son's debt. By His death on the cross, Jesus Christ, the Man, has put God in His debt as it were; for thereby He has brought man back to his Creator. Man, even as Onesimus, had departed from God for a season that he might be received back forever. Hallelujah!

Observe the diplomatic stroke of the Apostle Paul. He waived justice and simply begged that grace be shown to Onesimus. He acknowledged that he had failed his master; but he took him under his wing, as it were, and said to Philemon, take him back and forgive him for my sake. Oh, can you not see the parallel? It is surely fragrant of Calvary and its results to us. The Apostle Paul sent the unprofitable servant back to Philemon to be received as a partner of his, yes, even as himself. Hence, there was no other course open to Philemon. He perhaps must yield to the request of the little man to whom he owed so much. He was in the Apostle Paul's debt, as it were, although the latter only gracefully touched this point. It is a marvelous picture. All the debt of Onesimus with its attendant results were laid over upon the shoulders of the Apostle Paul. He wrote with his own hand, emphatically declaring, "*I will repay all that debt.*"

Who can say that this is not typical of the glorious victory of Calvary? There Christ, the mighty Kinsman Redeemer, made Himself a party of the first part to pay all the debt we owed to God. He took upon Himself all our obligations (as a defunct, mortgaged ruin); in that way, He has put all to rights between God and man. He has put all His assets as the incomparable God-Man to our credit on the ledger of God's book. He sets all these assets over against our debts and enquires of the heavenly tribunal, Is it not enough? And the answer is recorded, Yea, yea, it is more than sufficient to cover all their indebtedness. We may come to God with Christ's letter in our hands and say, "*He has written, He will repay.*" Hallelujah! Our hearts are joyful; praise wells up in our whole being at the wondrous grace which God has bestowed on man. We sing with great glee,

"Jesus all my debt has taken,  
came and loosed my every chain.  
This with love my heart doth waken.  
I'm set free from sin and pain.  
On His doing, I am standing.  
On His merits, His alone,  
I am resting, and I'm taking  
all my blessings from the throne."



### My Lover

I must keep tryst with my Lover divine.  
Each day His dear voice I must hear.  
To His breast as my refuge I'll lovingly cling.  
He dispels all my doubts and my fear.

I must walk with my Lover alone every day.  
His Words breathe a heavenly chime.  
And I humbly confess to His listening ear,  
How my heart is His own for all time.

I must stay with my Love and never depart  
From His tender encircling arm;  
For 'tis heaven below my Lord thus to know,  
Kept prisoner by love's boundless charm.

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