

# **Pondering in Philemon**

**A thought sermon**

- INTRODUCTION
- I have a great fascination with the short, one chapter books of the New Testament, and always teach them first in any program on which I embark.
- My love relationship with the book of Philemon began in 1977, when I first studied this gem to teach its truths to the young people of Mona Heights Chapel at a weekend camp that was to have been convened to celebrate my return home to Barbados from among these Brethren with whom I served while a medical student in Kingston, Jamaica.

- There is much to capture our imagination in this book. For example, there are the seven pictures of the believer. In Philemon the believer is pictured as :-

- A PRISONER (9,13) SUFFERING.
- A LABOURER (1,24) SERVING
- A SOLDIER (2) SUBMITTING
- A SON (3) SAFE & SECURE
- A FATHER (10) SELFLESS
- A PARTNER (11) SHARING
- A BROTHER (1,7,16,20) SIBLING

- In Philemon too, we see
- the POWER OF THE GRACE OF GOD
- the POWER OF THE LOVE OF GOD
- the POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD &
- the POWER OF TACTFUL REASONING

- **OUTLINE: (McGee)**
- **I. Genial greeting to Philemon and his family, [vv. 1-3](#)**
- **II. Good reputation of Philemon, [vv. 4-7](#)**
- **III. Gracious plea for Onesimus, [vv. 8-16](#)**
- **IV. Guiltless substitutes for guilty, [v. 17](#)**
- **V. Glorious illustration of imputation, [v. 18](#)**
- **VI. General and personal items and requests, [vv. 19-25](#)**

- We have begun with some lovely outlines of Philemon, which I hope you may find useful.
- However, today, we wont follow any of these, because I want to touch briefly on .....
- **THE MEN OF CHRIST IN PHILEMON.**
- **THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST IN PHILEMON, &**
- **THE MESSAGE of the GOSPEL OF CHRIST IN PHILEMON.**
- In this short, simple letter, we can see the gospel of Christ displayed in a special way via the life of a few of the saints mentioned therein .

**The MEN OF CHRIST  
in the Epistle to Philemon.**

- Here is a list of the men who served Christ named in Philemon.
- **PHILEMON**- a servant , loving because of Christ.
- **PAUL** - a servant, serving and suffering because of Christ
- **ONESIMUS**-a useless servant who became useful because of Christ.
- I love to teach verses 23 & 24
- **<sup>23</sup> There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;**
- **<sup>24</sup> Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.**
- But today we will concentrate our thoughts to comments only on Philemon, Paul & Onesimus, and present just a few thoughts on the other men.
- **EPAPHRAS** -a servant, fervently and faithfully praying for the Church Of Christ. There are two things to note about Epaphras' prayers for the church.
- THE CONSTANCY OR QUANTITY OF HIS PRAYERS and
- THE CONTENT OR QUALITY OF HIS PRAYERS.
- In Colossians 4, we learn that he was a servant of Christ who laboured fervently in prayers that the saints should stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.
- **MARCUS** -a servant restored for the work of Christ.
- **ARISTARCHUS** - a servant-- courageously suffering for the cause of Christ. A man to be remembered for the company he kept and the courage he showed.
- **DEMAS**- a servant- who desired the world, and deserted the work & the workers.
- **LUCAS** - a servant---constant and meticulous for the cause of Christ.



**The MIRACLES OF CHRIST  
in the Epistle to Philemon**

- **PHILEMON**

- Careful study of the book of Philemon reveals that the man whose name is the title of the book, was a wealthy man with slaves and servants and a big mansion where the church in his area met.
- It was very easy for him, like many rich folk today and like the rich man of whom Jesus taught in Luke 16, to be selfish, stand-offish, and sensual. But Philemon, whose name means loving, knew Christ as his personal saviour, and this knowledge changed him, because **God wrought a miracle in his life producing in him a Godly Christian character.**
- **When ever Christ saves a man and transforms his thoughts and ideas and direction, it is a miracle!**
- **In Philemon we see that Christ made of Philemon—a SERVANT LOVING BECAUSE OF CHRIST.**
- In verses 5-7, we see his Christian LOVE, FAITH, FELLOWSHIP, and FERVOUR, exhibited towards Christ and towards Christians.
- In verse 7, we are told that he caused the apostle Paul to experience joy or much happiness because of his display of practical love towards the saints. He was also a source of consolation and refreshment.
- In verse 21, we see that his Christlike obedience went the extra mile—it did more than is normally to be expected. His Christlike humility and forgiveness is also displayed.
- **That Christ could accomplish all this in the life of Philemon is truly a miracle.**

- As we reflect on these features of Philemon's character, in the contemporary church, our response ought to be What has Christ made of me?
- What can Christ make of me if I would yield to the Holy Spirit?
- If we would allow God to work miracles in our lives, Christ can do the same in our lives today.
- We need not be as wealthy as Philemon was, because the widow of Zarephath was not wealthy but she was still able to render a useful and kind service to Elijah.(1 Kings 17).
- We can all mimic saints like her, and Philemon.

- **PAUL**
- All students of the Bible know that the apostle Paul was formerly a persecutor of the church and that he was gloriously and miraculously saved on the Damascus road.(Acts 8,9;Galatians 1:13 -14; 1Tim1:13).
- **But look how God made of Paul—a servant , serving because of Christ.**
- **The miracle in Paul’s life was that Christ enabled him, and counted him faithful and put him into the ministry, who considered himself the chief of sinners (1Tim1:12,15).**
- Similarly, the miracle in our lives is that we were like Paul, foolish, disobedient, deceived, diverse and deviant in our past pre- salvation lives as taught in Titus 3:3, but now, Christ having saved us has also enabled us, and counted us faithful and has put us into the ministry of reconciling others such as we were to Himself 2Corinthians 5:19-20).
- Now like Paul, we are given the important role as ambassadors for God.

## • **ONESIMUS**

- **Onesimus was a slave in Philemon's household who failed to effect his responsibilities and fulfill his obligations. The name "Onesimus" is actually derived from a Greek word, eu-chrestos, meaning "useful" or "profitable," and Paul in a play on words in verse 11 points out that Onesimus had really been such a bad worker as to be virtually useless or unprofitable (a-chrestos).**
- **Philemon v 18 reads "If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me".**
- **Many interpreters understand this verse to imply that Onesimus had stolen quite a bit of money from Philemon, as this was a common crime among household slaves.**
- **Onesimus might also have caused some significant loss to Philemon in other ways, such as through poor management of household resources, or destruction or loss of property, whether intentionally or unintentionally, through negligence, sloth, or malice.**
- **Since under Roman law, masters had the right to punish slaves severely, even with heavy beatings, and death, Onesimus had good reason to be afraid of Philemon, who had a right to be angry. In order to avoid such punishment, and Philemon's wrath, Onesimus fled from Philemon's household in fear, and ran away to Rome, where he thought himself safe from pursuit, and where he expected his identity and past life to be swallowed up by the great metropolis.**
- **Onesimus, who had perhaps heard the gospel several times in his master's house, but had not accepted the Saviour, was eventually, one day directed by the Holy Spirit to a gathering where Paul was preaching and this time the Holy Spirit regenerated him making him a new creature in Christ (2 Cor 5 17).**

- Suddenly Onesimus became so willing to work, so useful, so profitable to Paul that the apostle would have liked to have kept him with him.
- In fact Paul now considered Onesimus so profitable, that in writing to the church at Colosse, Paul commends him and calls him **“the faithful and beloved brother”** (Colossians 4:9). No where else in scripture does Paul commend any brother so highly.
- In Romans 16:23 he refers to Quartus as “A” brother, and in 2 Corinthians 8:18 as “THE” brother. He calls Epaphroditus “ MY” brother in Philippians 2:25.
- Timothy is dubbed “OUR” brother in verse 1 of this book, and Tychicus “BELOVED” brother in Colossians 4:7. Silvanus was thought by Peter to be a “faithful brother,” (1 Peter 5:12).
- **But off all the brethren commended in the New Testament only Onesimus is called both faithful and beloved! What a change!**
- **From a-chrestos to eu-chrestos, from useless to useful, from unprofitable to profitable! A change to the extent that he earns the highest commendation given to a Christian brother in the New Testament . We call that a miracle!**
- Surely then the scripture in Hebrews 7:25 is true which tells us that Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him. We like to say that he can save from the guttermost to the uttermost.
- **The watershed between the two halves of Onesimus’ life was through his conversion to Christ by the word of God via the agency of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of Paul. So thorough was his conversion that he became the exact opposite of his former self. He became so trustworthy, that Paul could send him back to his master alone carrying this letter. We call that a miracle! The most useless person can become useful to both others and to God when Christ becomes his saviour and owner.**

- What did Christ make of Onesimus?
- **He made him useful. Christ was able to extract the latent talent, the intrinsic utility, the previous unrevealed profit which was always resident in Onesimus and for which he was named and use it for the benefit of the saints and the church.**
- **When ever this happens in a life it is a miracle.**
- Would to God that contemporary believers in the church today would allow Christ to extract the latent talent, the utility and the profitability of the members!
- This then is the miracle of Christ in the life of Onesimus as revealed in the book of Philemon.
- The question remains for us today and the contemporary church, “Are we truly converted? Well why then is it that Christ is unable to fully extract the profitability and usefulness that lies resident in all of us that name the Name of Christ?”

**The GOSPEL MESSAGE  
in the Epistle to Philemon**

**An imperfect illustration- but a  
very good one**



- Philemon, the briefest of all of Paul's writings, is one of the most magnificent illustrations of redemption, reconciliation, compassion, grace and forgiveness in the Bible.
- Paul definitely shows us the message of the cross and the importance of reconciliation, in this epistle, with a warmly evangelical tone, as seen from the fact that there are eleven references to the Lord Jesus by name.
- In this short epistle the name of '*Christ Jesus*' occurs more often than in the same number of verses anywhere else in Scripture.
- Christ is prominently held up as the grand object of gospel faith in Philemon, where we are taught that this faith, if real, must invariably work by love, and attest its presence by practical Christian fellowship, forgivingness, and goodness.

- **That Christ is definitely to be seen in Philemon cannot be denied, because the variety of the titles for Jesus used in this short letter is amazing.**
- **Notice:**
- **Christ Jesus; v. 1;**
- **the Lord Jesus, Christ, v. 3;**
- **the Lord Jesus, v. 5;**
- **Christ, v. 8;**
- **Christ Jesus, v. 9;**
- **the Lord, and Christ, v. 20;**
- **Christ Jesus, v. 23; and**
- **the Lord Jesus Christ, v. 25.**
- "Christ" is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew term "*messiah*," which means "an anointed one". It implied "one called and equipped by God for a specific task."
- In the OT three groups of leaders were anointed: priests, kings, and prophets. Jesus fulfilled all three of these anointed offices (cf. Heb. 1:2-3).
- "Jesus" meant "YHWH saves" or "salvation is of YHWH" (cf. Matt. 1:21). It was the OT name "Joshua." "Jesus" is derived from the Hebrew word for salvation, "*hosea*," suffixed to the covenant name for God, "YHWH".

- Just as "Christ" is the obvious key word in the chapter, the phrases that contain the words **"receive him"** are worthy of great meditation, as they capsule the gospel message in Philemon.
- In verse 12, Paul's word concerning Onesimus is **"receive him."** He was not to be ignored or to be rejected, on his return to Philemon, but to be received. Is this not the gospel promise in Jude 24? How fully and really has God received us who have believed.
- In verse 15, the stand out phrase is **"receive him for ever."**
- Formerly the relations between Onesimus and his master were of a sort that could be broken, and in fact were broken by the misconduct of Onesimus. Now there were to be new relations of an order that could not be broken.
- In like manner, so is God's gracious dealings with us. As the fruit of Christ's work we stand before Him in relations that are indefectible and eternal as also clearly promised in Jude 24.
- Next, in verse 17 we have Paul making this request to Philemon. **"If thou count me a partner, "receive him as myself."**
- The repetition of the word RECEIVE in verse 12, 15, and 17 is noteworthy. Each time it is used, Paul strikes a louder note and a higher key; for just as Jesus was received up to glory at his ascension, one day He will return in like manner and receive all those who are looking for his appearing to share in his glory.
- God has done this for us. Every believer, including the weakest of us and those most recently converted, has no other standing before God than **"accepted in the Beloved."**
- We have been received in all the acceptance and favour of Christ Himself—a thing amazing beyond words, and utterly incredible were it not so stated in the Word of God.

- I think we can perceive the Gospel message in this book by recognizing that the relationship between the three main characters in the chapter presents a number of beautiful analogies to illustrate Christ's mediation between God, the Father and humanity, and that Paul's mediation between Philemon and Onesimus illustrates, even though imperfectly, what Christ has done for us.
- We will find also that the link between Paul, the mediator, and Onesimus, the offender, was love, and so it is with Christ, our mediator, and us poor sinners.
- We will find also that the link between Paul and Philemon, the offended party, was partnership.
- And so it is with the Lord Jesus and the Heavenly Father.

- **Having introduced the people most closely related to the subject of Paul's letter, we are now in a position to address Paul's intercessory intervention to the problem itself, and fully explore the message of the gospel of Christ that this epistle seeks to stamp home in our hearts.**
- **For illustrative analogies, let us first replace Philemon's name with "God the Father", for in this imperfect analogous illustration, Philemon is a picture of God, our Heavenly Father, to whom our intercessor, and Advocate or paraclete-the Lord Jesus Christ pleads.**
- **It is noteworthy that God's character in Philemon is portrayed as forgiving - verses 16, 17, and impartial - verse 16**

- Philemon was rich, as his name implies.
- He loved the saints and he cared for the church, which met in his mansion. He is thus an example of one of those of whom Paul says in 1Corinthians 1:26 that “not many mighty, not many noble are called.”
- **Christ was also rich.**
- The Bible teaches that Christ, who **owns the cattle on a thousand hills and the wealth in every mine** (Psalm 50:10) is the same person about whom the scripture also declares **“for ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich he became poor that that ye through his poverty might be rich** ( 2 Corinthians 8:9).
- In Philippians 2:5-6 we are taught that Jesus thought it not robbery to be equal with God.
- Just as Philemon shared his riches with the church, Christ left his riches to come down to earth to die for sinners and in so doing he created the church and shared all of his wealth with us by making us joint heirs with himself and causing us to sit in heavenly places with himself ( Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:3; 2:6; 3:10), made us partakers of the heavenly calling ( Hebrews 3:10) and has destined us to a heavenly country (Hebrews 11:16) to which he will one day soon take us.
- He has promised to return for us, Himself to take us to the heavenly abiding places or mansions he has prepared for us.( John 14:3).
- The gospel message in the epistle to Philemon, is that Christ came from riches to rags as it were to raise us sinners from the rags of sin to wear the rich robes of righteousness in heaven, because of faith in him and because of his unmerited favour bestowed upon us through his death on the cross.
- Philemon had bought some servants or slaves with money, but Christ has bought us again; but not with corruptible things such as silver and gold but with his precious blood shed on Calvary’s cross ( 1 Peter 1:18 & 19).

- **Christ was loving**
- Philemon was loving just as his name implies, but Christ is love itself (1John 4:8).
- So loving was Christ that he commended his love toward us that while we were yet sinners he died for us ( Romans 5:8).
- Just as Philemon displayed love to the church, which met in his house and to the saints who loved him and testified of him, Christ also loved sinners and made them saints. He not only loves the church but he created the church.
- We read in Romans 5:10, that when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. We read also in John 3:16 that Christ's death, and God's gift was based on his love.
- Philemon was faithful and fervent in his fellowship with the saints.
- **Christ was faithful and fervent in foraging for the saints.**
- Philemon was obedient to God's man Paul and willing to please him. Christ was obedient to God's mandate and not willing that any should perish.
- **Christ the obedient Son of God**, and the perfect pattern for saints always said **"Not my will, but thine be done."** ( Matt 26:42) He was so obedient and willing to accomplish God's plan in this respect that he died for us, as taught in Philippians 2.

- When we reflect upon the ability of Philemon to forgive Onesimus, we see a picture of Christ who is love, forgiving us unprofitable wandering sheep who had gone astray from the love of the Father but are now returned to the shepherd and bishop of our souls. ( 1Peter 2:25)
- When we recall the humility of Philemon, we can not help but reflect upon the fact Christ “ **made himself of no reputation, but 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.** (Philipians 2:7-8).
- Philemon’s willingness to please Paul reminds us of the obedient Son of God, who was willing to please His Father, and unwilling that any should perish but that all should come to repentance ( 2Peter3:8).
- **When we study the life of Philemon we see the miracle of Christ in Philemon. When we reflect on the Christ like attributes of Philemon we get the message of the gospel of Christ in Philemon.**
- The question to us as believers in the contemporary church is, “What do folk think of, and what do they remember when they see or think of us today? Do they think of Christ?”



- **Let us now replace Onesimus' name with our own, and see ourselves depicted as a picture of Onesimus and his sad history.**
- **We too were “unprofitable, “wronged” God and consequently were His debtors, owing what we could not pay.**
- **We too “departed” from Him as runaway slaves, since we feared Him and desired to be as far as possible removed from His presence.**
- **Our alienation was the fruit of our sin from birth.**

- Firstly Onesimus was a slave. He may have been born into slavery or he may have been bought and thus brought into slavery.
- In any case he was a slave and thus in bondage. He was owned and controlled by another. He is therefore the perfect picture of the unregenerate sinner in bondage to sin- born into sin and brought into sin by our natural lusts and desires.
- Without Christ we are all like Onesimus, needy slaves in bondage to sin and Satan. (John 8:34;44; Acts 8:23; Romans 6:16; 7:23; 8:2; Galatians 2:4;3:13; 4:3; 1Tim 3:7; 2Tim2:26; Heb2:14; 2Peter2:19;etc)
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- Secondly, Onesimus was a useless unprofitable slave even though his name meant useful and profitable. Like us, Onesimus had within him the capacity to be useful and profitable to God, but our servitude to sin like his, renders us as it rendered him useless and unprofitable.
- Scripture tells us all that “ there is none righteous, no, not one,”( Romans 3:10) and that our righteousneses are as filthy rags ( Isa 64:6)-- useless and unprofitable to God.
- Without Christ, in our servitude to sin, our best works availeth us nothing.
- Ephesians 2:12 paints a picture of the sinner which may be summarizes that we were Christ-less, hopeless and Godless.
- In Titus 3:3 we are described in the unregenerated state as being duncy( foolish), disobedient, deceived, and diverse in our diabolical deviance and as despising and despicable!

- Next we see Onesimus running away—going his own way as far as he could from his loving master and owner, Philemon (love) who is a picture of the loving shepherd saviour.
- As we follow him on his way we see our former selves as described in Isaiah 53:6. **“ All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.”**
- We were as described in Proverbs 14:12 & 16:25, where we are told that that **“there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death.”**
- Like Onesimus, we were all unregenerate sinners who believed erroneously that our way is the right way ( Prov 12:15; 21:2), and we tended to chose any way that led us from our owner and master by creation.
- Like Onesimus we were useless, rebellious slaves in sin’s servitude and generally unprofitable to both God and man, and running away down the broad way that leads to eternal destruction, having departed from the strait way which leads to life.
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- Just as God watched and allowed Onesimus to run away and allowed him to reach Rome where he heard the glorious gospel and was saved, He allows sinners today to access the modern highways of sin, bondage and worthlessness, and along this road he has erected a placard or billboard, that displayed the truth told in Hebrews 9:26 that Christ once appeared or was placarded or placed on a billboard for all to get the message of salvation and in verse 28 that he was offered to bear the sins of many and that unto them that look for him, he will the second time without sin unto salvation. The billboards on the highways to hell have on them JESUS SAVES, if the wandering wayward sinner sheep like Onesimus would only take notice.
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- Just as Paul found Onesimus wandering from his master, so too has Christ found us as erring sheep wandering away from God and returned us back to the fold as taught in 1 Peter 2:25, through himself the door (John 10:9).
- This is in keeping with the truths taught in Psalm 23:6, that the goodness and mercy of God pursues us actively in an attempt to bring us into the house of the Lord forever. This is the repetitive message of the Bible. The more we see men running from God, the more we see him making a provision whereby he can protect him until he can restore him.
- This is God’s method for all sinners whether regenerated or unregenerated; for where sin did abound , grace did much more abound. ( Romans 5:20b) If it was not Noah’s ark, it was the angels in Genesis 19, or the brazen serpent to look up to in Numbers 22, or the prepared fish and other prepared teaching aids that God used in Jonah’s case.

- Next, we see that after Onesimus' conversion, that he convincingly proved the genuineness of his salvation and regeneration by his subsequent service to Paul for which he was so highly commended. The lesson here is that salvation must be followed by service, or as James puts it, "Faith without works is dead" ( James 2:17&26). We read in Ephesians 2:10 that "we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works" The necessity for the evidencing of faith by good works is also taught in Titus 2:14 and Titus 3:8&14.
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- After Onesimus provided his worth Paul wants to send him back to his real owner and master.
- So too when are found worthy having appropriated Christ's righteousness, Jude tells us in verse 24 that the Lord Jesus who is now preventing us from falling (see also 1 Corinthians 10:13) will PRESENT US AS FAULTLESS; and highly commended!
- Paul returns Onesimus to Philemon with the understanding that he is to be received by Philemon as he would receive Paul himself (12). He is to be received for ever (15), he is to be received " not now as a servant , but above a servant, but above a servant , a brother beloved.
- This is the principle of God's restoration as taught in Luke 15. The Prodigal son was content to return to the father's house as a servant; he knew that he did not deserve better.
- However, the ever watchful father saw him afar off and restored him to full favour and rank with the gift of a robe, a ring and a feast with a fatted calf.

- Likewise, as the song writer penned “ When a sinner comes as a sinner may, there is JOY!”
- The sinner who truly repents of his evil way and “returns to God in the gospel way”; when he returns to God his master, owner and redeemer, he is accepted by the Father as he receives his son.
- He is received for ever, for that is what everlasting or eternal life means. He is received not as a bondservant in servitude as he deserves , but above a servant— as a son of God ( John1:12)
- He is now a beloved brother and a joint heir with Christ. He is clothed with Christ’s righteousness, and is said to be justified—which means in the simplest terms “ just as if he had never sinned”
- What an exaltation. Instead of waiting for the scraps of his former master’s table, he is seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. What a gospel message!
- The story of the useless unprofitable run away slave who was converted to Christ and returned to his master’s house to be received forever as a brother beloved is the story of every unregenerate sinner who was saved from the bondage of sin and exalted to citizenship in heaven ( Phil3:20-21)
- This then is the gospel message of Christ which we must grasp from the epistle to Philemon.

- According to R.G Lee, in his Outlined Bible, “ This story of Onesimus is thus an analogy of our redemption. The sinner is God’s property and he has not only run away from his master but robbed him.
- The law affords him no right of asylum, but grace concedes him the right of appeal. He flees to for refuge to Jesus, whom God counts as Partner. In Him he has begotten anew as a son and finds both an intercessor and a Father.
- He returns to God and is received not as a slave but as Christ himself and all the debt is put to Christ’s account.”
- So it is that the saviour changes useless sinners to useful saints for service.
- So it is that He receives undone sinners as His brothers and joint heirs.
- Now he intercedes for us, having offered himself as our substitute and having offered and paid the debt for our sins, and as another, song writer says “ What he has done for others, he can do for me.”

- How is the Gospel message to be seen via Paul in Philemon is the next and most reasonable question.
- **Let us now substitute Paul's name with "Jesus Christ", for Paul is here a picture of our intercessor, and Advocate or paraclete-the Lord Jesus Christ, who pleads for us to God, our Heavenly Father.**
- **In this chapter, Paul—the apostle and author of this letter, makes an appeal to Philemon by alluding to one of the most powerful truths a person can possess, i.e a correct knowledge of the doctrine of redemption.**
- **Paul knew that this Christian slave owner was completely within his legal rights to have the runaway killed, just as we deserve the wrath of God, for the wages of sin is death.**
- **Yet the great Apostle appealed to Philemon not only to forego such legally allowed retribution, but also implored Philemon to forgive the slave and even welcome this new follower of Christ to the same communion table.**
- **Wow!.**

- Paul reminds us of Christ when we read Philemon, because first of all, we see that in verse 10 Paul led Onesimus to Christ.
- This reminds us of the **CONVERSION** that is wrought in the life of any, who would like the Thessalonians turn to God from our idols and idolatrous lives to serve the living and true God.
- In verse 9 & 10 especially we also see Paul interceding for Onesimus.
- This **INTERCESSION** reminds of the saviour's current work on our behalf as he sits in glorious session at His Father's right hand. The following verses all teach us that he is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God:- Acts 2:33; 1Peter 3:22; Heb 12:2; Heb1:3; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Eph 1:20. What is he doing there?
- --he is our only **MEDIATOR** 1Tim2:5
- --he is our **ADVOCATE**, he appears on our behalf Hebrews 9:24 .1John 2:1
- --he is our **INTERCESSOR & RECONCILER** Heb 2:17&18 ,3:1, 7:25-28, 9:11-17
- --he **PREVENTS US FROM FALLING & will PRESENT US AS FAULTLESS** (Jude 24 ).
- The consequences or implications or motivations as a result of Christ's vital session are well summarized in Hebrews 4:14-16, &10:11-25



- V 15 Now, in the Roman Empire, slaves who left their masters' households in this manner were not necessarily fugitives. If they fled with no intention of returning, they were fugitives. But the law also permitted slaves to leave their masters temporarily to find an advocate or mediator who might reconcile them to their masters.
- Roman law permitted slaves to run from their masters, so long as they were running to someone else for help and not trying to gain their freedom. So, if Onesimus fled in order to ask Paul to be his advocate and mediator with Philemon, he was not a fugitive.
- Paul alluded to this circumstance in Philemon 15, where he wrote these words: **Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good.**
- Apparently, Philemon himself had not intended for Onesimus to leave, and probably did not approve of his leaving. But Paul suggested that God had a positive reason for allowing the situation, because through this time of separation, God changed Onesimus so that he became a great benefit to Philemon.
- **THIS SPEAKS OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD**
- Onesimus, the runaway slave came to Rome where he met Paul who led him to Christ. It seems—though we cannot be certain—that he met Paul through his friendship with Philemon and that's why he sought him out in Rome. In any case we know that after Paul led Onesimus to Christ, he stayed in Rome, serving Paul with deep gratitude.
- That brings us to the central issue of this short letter. Paul now has a converted slave on his hands. What should he do? He decides to send Onesimus back to Philemon his master.
- But Onesimus is now a believer in Christ. When Onesimus left, he was a sinner, a slave, and a rebel.
- On his return, he was a saint and a brother to Philemon.
- Paul wants to make sure Philemon understands what has happened, and to request that Philemon receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ, because since Onesimus has become a believer, his status and relationship to Philemon are different. He is still a slave according to the Roman law, but he is more than that — he is a beloved brother. He is now really profitable, and has proved that he can live up to his name for the first time.

- After introducing all the characters involved in the mediation, Paul finally stated his petition in 17-20. Now that we have identified the people and problem that Paul addressed in his letter to Philemon, we turn to Paul's mediation between Philemon and Onesimus.
- In Paul's mediation, it seems that some how, Paul undertook the responsibility to become advocate for Onesimus.
- Whenever we read this epistle we must always notice the striking way in which the whole story illustrates what mediatorship means and involves; illustrating the statement, **“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man, Christ Jesus”** (1 Timothy 2:5). God is the One offended by sin: man, the offender: the Man Christ Jesus, the Mediator.

- **What is a mediator? How is Jesus our mediator?**
- **A mediator is a sort of go-between that assists with communication and negotiation between two or more different parties. In the New Testament, three different passages refer to Jesus as the mediator between God and people. A look at these three passages reveals much regarding Christ's work on our behalf.**

**1 Timothy 2:5** TIMOTHY shares, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Here the apostle Paul specifically teaches that Jesus is the one and only means of access between us and God the Father. This is corroborated by Acts 4:12, which adds, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

- **The second place in the New Testament that mentions Christ as our mediator is Hebrews 9:15: "Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant."**
- **Here Jesus is presented as the mediator of a new covenant. The first covenant (the Mosaic Law) provided a means for the condemnation of people. Through it, we can clearly see we have sinned and stand in need of forgiveness and redemption. The new covenant mediated or presented through Jesus offers this forgiveness of sins and presents us as just and right before God—something no person could ever earn through works. It is a gift of God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10).**
- **The third place the New Testament that mentions Christ as our mediator is found in Hebrews 12:24. There, we simply read, "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant..." Affirming the previous mention of Jesus as mediator given in Hebrews 9:15, we again see Jesus presented as the One and only mediator of God's new covenant that provides forgiveness of sins and right status before God.**
- **Since we, like Onesimus, also stand in need of God's grace and forgiveness, these verses are all a welcome declaration of the cleansing available to us all through Jesus, our mediator who has come to set us free with his offer of forgiveness!**
- **Through faith in Him, sin can be eternally forgiven, offering access to God and right standing before Him.**
- **Through Jesus, a perfect sacrifice, we can be made right with God through faith in Christ Jesus.**
- **c f 2 Corinthians 5:21 here?**

- It is very clear that our analogies today falls far short of the reality we seek to illustrate.
- As we look up by faith to the glorified Man Christ Jesus, the one Mediator, we adoringly acknowledge that His link with God is that of PARTNERSHIP, for He is God.
- He is great enough therefore to “lay his hand upon us both” ([Job 9:33](#)). He can also lay His hand upon God Himself, being His “fellow” ([Zechariah 13:7](#)).
- Yet He has laid His hand upon us to our eternal blessing. He has brought us into His own place and relationship, linking us up in the strength of His eternal LOVE.
- From the outset I said that our analogous illustration is imperfect. This is because God did not need any such persuasion to exercise His grace as was needed in the case of Paul’s mediation to Philemon, as He is Himself the Source of grace.
- He does however need a righteous groundwork whereon to display His grace even as Paul provided Philemon with a righteous reason for grace in assuming all the liabilities of Onesimus, as is clearly taught in Romans 3.
- Mediatorship involves the acceptance of such liabilities if it is to be fully and effectively exercised, for only then can grace reign through righteousness.
- Praise be to God for the effective mediatorship of our Lord Jesus, the results of which is eternal.
- As to this our illustration helps us, for Paul freely accepted Onesimus's penalty in order to renew the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon, his former master.
- Having laid this solid background, let us now continue in our imperfect analogous illustration to further examine the advocacy exhibited by Paul in verses 17-21.

- **Specifically, where he asked Philemon in a twofold petition in which the guiltless substitutes for the guilty as summarized in Philemon 17-18 thus:**
- **<sup>17</sup> If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.**
- **<sup>18</sup> If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;**
- **<sup>19</sup> I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it:**
- **Here we see Paul in one of the grandest illustrations of plenary substitution and imputation, offering himself in verse 17, as a substitute for Onesimus (SUBSTITUTION) and in verses 18& 19 offering to pay Onesimus' debt**

- Listen to Paul's words of intercession to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus.
- If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.  
v. 17
- In Paul's personal promise of restitution towards Philemon, we see the guiltless substituting for the guilty, in one of the grandest illustrations of plenary substitution and imputation in the Bible.
- Behind Paul's plea is Christ's plea to the Father on behalf of the sinner who trusts Christ as the Savior, in which the sinner is received on the same standing that Christ is received. In other words, the saved sinner has as much right in heaven as Christ has, for he has been "accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).
- Paul's appeal is powerful because he stood beside a guilty man and said to the owner of the slave, "I know this man is a criminal and deserves punishment. Yet this slave is my friend, and I stand beside him to take his punishment."
- This is exactly what Jesus does for us before our master, God the Father.

- “If I am your partner in the gospel, then treat Onesimus like you would treat me.” Welcome him as you would welcome me v 17
- "If you agree," says Paul, "that I am your partner in the work of Christ and that Onesimus is my son in the faith, you must receive him as you would receive myself."“If I am your partner in the gospel, then treat Onesimus like you would treat me.”
- In all the New Testament, you will not find a better illustration of substitutionary atonement.
- In substitution, Jesus took our place!
- Substitution means that the sinner is received on the same standing that Christ is received. Behind Paul’s plea is Christ’s plea to the Father on behalf of the sinner who trusts Christ as the Savior.
- In other words, the saved sinner has as much right in heaven as Christ has, for he has *His* right and “accepted in the Beloved” ([Ephesians 1:6](#)).
- The reason the saved sinner is accepted in heaven is that Christ took his place down here. The sins of the sinner were put on Christ, and He paid the penalty. c.f Colossians 2:14
- Our entire sin debt was laid upon Jesus Christ because we are in no position before God to take the condemnatory death penalty on ourselves for the incalculable times we have sinned against Him.
- The scriptures teach in 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,” and in 1Peter 2:24, that Christ “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 are healed.
- These are a mere sprinkling of scriptures that attest to the fact of Christ’s substitutionary death for us.

- **18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;**
- **19 I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it:**
- **These verses describe the glorious illustration of imputation.**
- **As stated earlier, it appears that when Onesimus escaped he also stole from Philemon. This in itself was a capital crime.**
- **Now we don't know exactly how much Onesimus' debt was; but we may assume that it was quite a large amount. As Paul interceded for Onesimus to Philemon, Paul offered to pay Onesimus' entire debt.**
- **Paul asked that the value of what had been stolen be "charged" to his account.**
- **Paul essentially said "Put Onesimus' debt on my tab, Philemon..... charge it to me... I will pay it back. "**
- **Paul was so serious about assuming full responsibility for making proper restitution that he gave Philemon a personal IOU, or promissory note, written by his own hand.**
- **What Onesimus owed, Paul volunteered to pay. When Paul paid the debt, Philemon would be satisfied and Onesimus would be free of any obligation.**
- **This is analogous of what Jesus did on the cross for us. When Paul said to Philemon, "charge the wrong of Onesimus to my account," he essentially did for Onesimus what Jesus did for us in taking our sins to *His* account c.f. Hebrews 10:5-10).**
- **our entire sin debt was laid upon another and that other person is Jesus Christ**



- From the outset we said that our analogous illustration is imperfect. For example, whereas Paul had to write “I will repay it” our risen Saviour does not use the future tense. His word to the Father on the cross was “Tetelestai!” Paid in full! “*I have* repaid it.”
- In regard to all that was due to us on account of our sins, He effectively said to God, “Cancel the debt, for “*I have* repaid it completely.” The value of the blood of Christ is so immense, that He could say as Paul did “Put that on Mine account.”
- On the cross Jesus’ vast account was charged with the debt incurred by our iniquities and He paid off all of the judgments and liens that were stacked up against us. And so we can truly sing Jesus paid it all! (c.f Colossians 2:14).
- Jesus went to the Cross, paid the price for our sins, so that God’s justice was satisfied once and for all.
- All that is left for us is to accept the work of Christ on our behalf.
- To say it another way, either you can pay for your sins by spending eternity in hell or you can trust completely in the fact that Jesus has already paid the debt on your behalf.

- Listen to the way Paul concluded his petition in Philemon 20:
- **In v. 20 as Paul pleads for Onesimus we see a picture of the advocacy of Christ, as taught in 1 John 2:1.**
- **Just as Paul stood between Onesimus' & Philemon, Jesus stands between us and God's wrath.**
- albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.
- **I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ (Philemon 20).**
- **Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.**
- **Paul hoped that Philemon would minister to the apostle by showing kindness, and extending mercy to his spiritual son, Onesimus.**
- **An advocate is a person who comes to our aid or pleads our case to a judge. Advocates offer support, strength, and counsel and intercede for us when necessary.**
- **The Bible says that Jesus is an Advocate for those who've put their trust in Him: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). In other verses, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our Advocate ([John 14:16](#), [26](#); [15:26](#); [16:7](#)).**
- **The English word *advocate* has been translated from the Greek word *parakleton*, which means "helper, adviser, or counselor."**

- **In a human court system, an advocate speaks for the rights of his or her client. We call them lawyers because they have studied the intricacies of the law and can navigate through those often complicated statutes with accuracy and precision. That is the picture John paints when he refers to Jesus as our “advocate with the Father.”**
- But God’s righteous law pronounces us guilty on all counts, because we have violated God’s standards, rejected His right to rule our lives, and continued to sin even after coming to a knowledge of the truth ([Hebrews 10:26](#); [Romans 1:21–23](#); [1 Timothy 2:4](#)). The only just punishment for such wickedness is an eternity in hell ([Revelation 14:10](#); [21:8](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9](#)). Jesus stands as the Advocate between our repentant hearts and the law. If His blood has been applied to our lives through faith and confession of Him as Lord ([Romans 10:9–10](#); [2 Corinthians 5:21](#)), He pleads our case with the Righteous Judge.
- We may imagine the conversation going something like this: “Father, I know this one has sinned and violated our commands. He is guilty as charged. However, you have said that my sacrifice is sufficient payment for the debt he owes. My righteousness was applied to his account when he trusted in me for salvation and forgiveness. I have paid the price, so he can be pronounced ‘Not guilty.’ There is no debt left for him to pay” ([Romans 8:1](#); [Colossians 2:14](#)).

- Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say. **verse 21**
- After presenting his petition to Philemon, Paul expressed a statement of confidence in verse 21 that Philemon would grant his request, and that Philemon would even do more than what he suggested, which was to take Onesimus back and receive him as a brother.
- Paul had two strong reasons for believing that Philemon would grant his request.
- First, Philemon loved Paul, and was therefore highly motivated to please him.
- In John 17:23, Jesus asked God to reveal two things to the world: that God sent Him and that God loves us as much as He loves Jesus Christ.
- On the authority of Jesus Christ, himself, the same Jesus who has been with God forever, we know the Father loves us "in the same way," "with the same love as," "as much as," and "just as much as" He loves Jesus.
- If we consider how much He must love Christ after spending a large number of years working together in perfect harmony, that is *exactly* how much He loves us. The true depth of that love is definitely beyond our comprehension. It takes faith to believe this simple statement of fact.
- This statement also shows Christ's unbelievable love for us. He has been with God forever, yet the Son feels no animosity that our Father loves us just as much, unlike the elder brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In fact, in His prayer Christ is asking God to broadcast this fact to the world! Christ is preeminent in position and responsibility—but not in the Father's love. As the perfect Parent, He does not love any one child more than the others.
- Secondly, Philemon loved the church, which Onesimus had just joined.
- SO DID JESUS. Ephesians 5:25 teaches that ..... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.
- Like the Prodigal son, and all the other persons reconciled in the Bible who all got more than they asked or that could be expected. – Philemon got more than Paul asked
- That's why we believe what Ephesians 3:10 says.
- Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.