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COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY ON
PHILEMON

by Adam Clarke.

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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A COMMENTARY AND CRITICAL NOTES

ON THE

HOLY BIBLE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

DESIGNED AS A HELP TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE SACRED WRITINGS

BY ADAM CLARKE, LL.D., F.S.A., &c.

A NEW EDITION, WITH THE
AUTHOR'S FINAL CORRECTIONS

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.—Rom. 15:4.

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PREFACE TO THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO PHILEMON.

IT may be thought strange that a short letter, written entirely on a *private subject*, without reference to the proof or defence of any *doctrine* of the Gospel, should, by the general consent of the Church of God, from the highest Christian antiquity, have been received into the sacred canon, not only as a genuine production of St. Paul, but as a piece designed by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the Church. However, such is the fact; and we may add, that this very piece was held so sacred that even the ancient heretics did not attempt to impugn its authenticity or corrupt its matter, while making dangerously free with the four gospels, and all the other epistles!

Philemon, the person to whom it is addressed, was undoubtedly, at the time in which this epistle was sent, an inhabitant of *Colosse*, (concerning which city, see the preface to the Epistle to the Colossians,) and was probably a Colossian by birth, though some suppose that he was of Ephesus. It is evident, from ^{<5019>}**Philemon 1:19** of this epistle, that he was converted to the Christian faith by St. Paul; this is agreed on all hands; but as some suppose that the apostle had not visited *Colosse* previously to the writing of this epistle, they think it probable that he might have met with him at Ephesus, or in some other part of Asia Minor, where he formed an acquaintance with him, and became the means of his conversion. But there is no need for this supposition, as it is most probable that the apostle had not only visited *Colosse* prior to this, but that the Gospel was planted in that city, as in all other parts of *Phrygia*, by himself. See the preface to the Colossians, and the note on ^{<5100>}**Colossians 2:1**.

That *Philemon* was a person of some consideration in his own city, and in the Church in that place, is very evident from this epistle. He had a Church in his house, ^{<5100>}**Philemon 1:2**, and was so opulent as to be extensive in works of charity, and in entertaining those Christians who from different quarters had occasion to visit *Colosse*. See ^{<5100>}**Philemon 1:5-7**.

Whether he had any *office* in the Church is not clear: some think he was a bishop, others an *elder* or *deacon*; but of this there is no evidence. He was probably no more than a *private member*, whose house, hand, and property

were consecrated to God, his Church, and the poor. He who, by the good *providence* of God, has *property* and *influence* thus to employ, and a *heart* to do it, need not envy the state of the highest ecclesiastic in the Church of Christ. Both the *heart* and the *means* to do secular good are possessed by few, whereas multitudes are found willing both to *teach* in and *govern* the Church.

The *occasion* of writing this letter was the following: *Onesimus*, a slave, had on some pretence or other run away from his master Philemon, and had come to Rome, where St. Paul was at that time in prison, though not in close confinement, for he dwelt in his own hired house, in which he assiduously preached the Gospel, being guarded only by one soldier. See ~~42816~~ **Acts 28:16, 23.**

It appears that Onesimus sought out Paul, whose public preaching, both to Jews and Gentiles, had rendered him famous in the city; and it is very likely that he was led to visit the apostle from having formerly seen him at his master's house in Colosse, and the word of life, preached by the apostle, became the means of his conversion. Being thus brought back to God, he became affectionately attached to his spiritual father, and served him zealously as his son in the Gospel. Onesimus, being thus brought to the acknowledgment of the truth which is according to godliness, gave the apostle a full account of his elopement from his master, and no doubt intimated his wish to return and repair the breach which he had made. Though he was now both *dear* and *necessary* to St. Paul, yet, as justice required that reparation should be made, he resolved to send him back; and to remove all suspicion from the mind of Philemon, and to reconcile him to his once unfaithful servant, he wrote the following letter, in which, as Dr. Macknight expresses it, "with the greatest softness of expression, warmth of affection, and delicacy of address, he not only interceded for Onesimus's pardon, but urged Philemon to esteem him, and put confidence in him as a sincere Christian; and because *restitution*, by repairing the injury that had been done, restores the person who did it to the character he had lost, the apostle, to enable Onesimus to appear in Philemon's family with some degree of reputation, bound himself in this epistle, by his handwriting, ~~57018~~ **Philemon 1:18, 19**, not only to repay all that Onesimus owed to Philemon, but to make full reparation also for whatever injury he had done to him by running away."

It is generally thought that Onesimus had *robbed* his master; but there is certainly nothing in the epistle from which this can be legitimately inferred; the words, “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on mine account,” ^{<57018>}**Philemon 1:18**, certainly do not *prove* it; they only state a possible case, that he might have wronged his master, or have been under some *pecuniary* obligation to him; and the apostle, by appearing to assume this, greatly strengthened his own argument, and met the last objection which Philemon could be supposed capable of making. There is neither justice nor piety in making things worse than they appear to be, or in drawing the most unfavourable conclusions from premises which, without constraint, will afford others more consonant to the spirit of charity.

That this epistle was written about the same time with those to the *Philippians* and *Colossians* is proved by several coincidences. “As the letter to Philemon and that to the Colossians were written,” says Dr. Paley, “at the same time, and sent by the same messenger, the one to a particular inhabitant, the other to the Church of Colosse, it may be expected that the same or nearly the same persons would be about St. Paul, and join with him, as was the practice, in the salutations of the epistle. Accordingly we find the names of *Aristarchus*, *Marcus*, *Epaphras*, *Luke*, and *Demas*, in both epistles. *Timothy*, who is joined with St. Paul in the superscription of the Epistle to the Colossians, is joined with him in this. *Tychicus* did not salute Philemon because he accompanied the epistle to Colosse, and would undoubtedly there see him.” It will not be forgotten that Onesimus, the bearer of this epistle, was one of the bearers of that sent to the Colossians, ^{<51049>}**Colossians 4:9**; that when the apostle wrote that he was in *bonds*, ^{<51048>}**Colossians 4:3, 18**, which was his case also when he wrote this; (see ^{<57010>}**Philemon 1:1, 10, 13, 23**;) from which, and various other circumstances, we may conclude that they were written about the same time, viz. the ninth year of Nero, A. D. 62. Other particulars relative to this epistle will be pointed out in the course of the notes, and particularly the *uses* which the Church of God and the private Christian may derive from it.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO PHILEMON.

Chronological Notes relative to this Epistle.

- Year of the Constantinopolitan era of the world, or that used by the Byzantine historians, 5570.
- Year of the Alexandrian era of the world, 5563.
- Year of the Antiochian era of the world, 5554.
- Year of the Julian period, 4773.
- Year of the world, according to Archbishop Usher, 4066.
- Year of the world, according to Eusebius, in his Chronicon, 4290.
- Year of the minor Jewish era of the world, or that in common use, 3822.
- Year of the Greater Rabbinical era of the world, 4421.
- Year from the Flood, according to Archbishop Usher, and the English Bible, 2410.
- Year of the Cali yuga, or Indian era of the Deluge, 3164.
- Year of the era of Iphitus, or since the first commencement of the Olympic games, 1002.
- Year of the era of Nabonassar, king of Babylon, 809.
- Year of the CCXth Olympiad, 2.
- Year from the building of Rome, according to Fabius Pictor, 809.
- Year from the building of Rome, according to Frontinus, 813.
- Year from the building of Rome, according to the Fasti Capitolini, 814.
- Year from the building of Rome, according to Varro, which was that most generally used, 815.
- Year of the era of the Seleucidæ, 374.
- Year of the Cæsarean era of Antioch, 110.
- Year of the Julian era, 107.
- Year of the Spanish era, 100.
- Year from the birth of Jesus Christ according to Archbishop Usher, 66.
- Year of the vulgar era of Christ's nativity, 62.
- Year of Albinus, governor of the Jews, 1.
- Year of Vologesus, king of the Parthians, 13.

- Year of Domitus Corbulo, governor of Syria, 3.
- Jesus, high priest of the Jews, 3.
- Year of the Dionysian period, or Easter Cycle, 63.
- Year of the Grecian Cycle of nineteen years, or Common Golden Number, 6; or the first after the second embolismic.
- Year of the Jewish Cycle of nineteen years, 3, or the first embolismic.
- Year of the Solar Cycle, 15.
- Dominical Letter, it being the second after the Bissextile, or Leap Year, C.
- Day of the Jewish Passover, according to the Roman computation of time, the IVth of the ides of April, or, in our common mode of reckoning, the tenth of April, which happened in this year on the day after the Jewish Sabbath.
- Easter Sunday, the IIIId of the ides of April, named by the Jews the 22d of Nisan or Abib; and by Europeans in general, the 11th of April.
- Epact, or age of the moon on the 22d of March, (the day of the earliest Easter Sunday possible,) 25.
- Epact, according to the present mode of computation, or the moon's age on New Year's day, or the Calends of January, 2.
- Monthly Epacts, or age of the moon on the Calends of each month respectively, (beginning with January,) 2, 4, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 9, 11, 11.
- Number of Direction, or the number of days from the twenty-first of March to the Jewish Passover, 20.
- Year of the reign of Caius Tiberius Claudius Nero. Cæsar, the fifth Roman emperor, computing from Augustus Cæsar, 9.
- Roman Consuls, P. Marius Celsus and L. Asinius Gallus, who were succeeded by L. Annæus Seneca and Trebellius Maximus, on the 1st of July.

PHILEMON

Paul's salutation to Philemon, and the Church at his house, 1-3. He extols his faith, love, and Christian charity, 4-7. Entreats forgiveness for his servant Onesimus, 8-14. Urges motives to

induce Philemon to forgive him, 15-17. Promises to repair any wrong he had done to his master, 18, 19. Expresses his confidence that Philemon will comply with his request, 20, 21. Directs Philemon to prepare him a lodging, 22. Salutations and apostolical benediction, 23-25.

NOTES ON PHILEMON.

Verse 1. Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ] It has already been noted, in the preface, that Paul was a prisoner at Rome when he wrote this epistle, and those to the Colossians and Philippians. But some think that the term *prisoner* does not sufficiently point out the apostle's *state*, and that the original word **δεσμιος** should be translated *bound with a chain*: this is certainly its meaning; and it shows us in some measure his circumstances—one arm was bound with a chain to the arm of the soldier to whose custody he had been delivered.

It has also been remarked that Paul does not call himself an *apostle* here, because the letter was a letter of *friendship*, and on *private concerns*. But the MSS. are not entirely agreed on this subject. Two MSS. have **δουλος**, a *servant*; the *Codex Claromontanus* and the *Codex Sangermanensis*, both in the *Greek* and *Latin*, have **αποστολος**, *apostle*; and *Cassiodorus* has **αποστολος δεσμιος**, Paul, *an imprisoned apostle* of Jesus Christ. They, however, generally agree in the omission of the word **αποστολος**.

Unto Philemon our dearly beloved] There is a peculiarity in the use of *proper names* in this epistle which is not found in any other part of St. Paul's writings. The names to which we refer are *Philemon*, *Apphia*, *Archippus*, and *Onesimus*.

PHILEMON, **φιλημων**. *Affectionate* or *beloved*, from **φιλημα**, a *kiss*; this led the apostle to say: *To Philemon our DEARLY BELOVED.*

Verse 2. APPHIA. αφια. Under the word **αφρα** *Suidas* says: **αδελφης και αδελφου υπακορισμα**. *Appha* is the affectionate address of a brother or sister; or the diminutive of a brother and sister, used to express kindness and affection. Hence the apostle, referring to the meaning of the word, says: **και αφια τη αδελφη αγαπητη**. *And to Apphia the beloved sister*. Though **αδελου**, *sister*, be not in our common text, it is found in AD*EFG, several others, the *Itala*, *Vulgate*, *Slavonic*, &c.; and is undoubtedly genuine.

ARCHIPPUS, **αρχιπιπος**. The ruler or master of the horse; from **αρχων**, a chief, and **ιππος**, a horse. HEROES of old were, both among the Greeks and Trojans, celebrated for their skill in *managing* and *taming the horse*, and employing him in *war*; this frequently occurs in Homer. The import of the name of *Archippus* might suggest this idea to the apostle's mind, and lead him to say: *Archippus our FELLOW SOLDIER*.

Suidas mentions a person of this name, who was once *victor* at the games, in the *ninety-first Olympiad*.

There was one of the pupils of Pythagoras of this name; and I introduce him here for the sake of a quotation from St. Jerome, (Apol. adv. Ruffin.,) relative to the doctrines taught by him and his fellow disciple, *Lysis*:
φευκτεον πανταπασι και εκκοπτεον ασθeneian μεν του σωματος, απαιδευσιαν δε της ψυχης, ακολασιαν δε της γαστρος, στασιν δε της πολεως, την δε διαφωνιαν απο της οικιας, και κοινη απο παντων το ακρατες. “By all means and methods these evils are to be shunned and cut off: *effeminacy* from the *body*; *IGNORANCE* from the *soul*; *delicacies* from the *belly*; *sedition* from the *city*; *discord* from the *house*; and, in general, *intemperance* from *all things*.” Vid. FAB. Thes. Erud. Schol.

ONESIMUS, **ονησιμος**. *Useful* or *profitable*; from **ονημι**, to help. The import of this name led the apostle to play upon the word thus: *I beseech thee for any son Onesimus-which in time past was to thee UNPROFITABLE, but now PROFITABLE to thee and me*.

To the Church in thy house] The congregation of Christians frequently assembling in Philemon's house; for at this time the Christians had neither temples, churches, nor chapels. See Clarke's note on “~~516~~ **Romans 16:5**”, and the reference there.

It is very probable that *Apphia* was the wife of Philemon, and Archippus, their son, the pastor of the Church at Philemon's house.

Verse 4. I thank my God] For all the good he has bestowed upon you, *making mention of thee always in my prayers*, that thou mayest hold fast all that thou hast got, and get all that thou dost farther need.

Verse 5. Hearing of thy love and faith] His *faith* in Christ Jesus, his *love* to the saints. Several excellent MSS. and some versions put *faith* before *love*, which makes a more natural reading. There is no figure of speech

which would vindicate our saying *faith in the saints*; so that, if we do not allow of the arrangement in the MSS. referred to, we shall be obliged to have recourse to the transposition, because *faith* must refer to *Jesus Christ*, and *love* to the *saints*.

Verse 6. That the communication of thy faith] The words **η κοιινωνια της πιστεως σου**, the *fellowship* or *communication of thy faith*, may be understood as referring to the *work of love* towards the *saints*-the poor Christians, which his *faith* in Christ enabled him to perform, *faith* being taken here for its *effects*; and indeed the word **κοινωνια** itself is not unfrequently used to denote *liberality*, *almsgiving*; and this is very properly remarked by *Theophylact* here: **κοινωνιαν πιστεως ελεημοσυνην καλει, ως απο πιστεως πολλης γενομενην**. He terms *almsgiving* the *communication of faith*, because it is the fruit of much faith.”

May become effectual] Dr. Macknight understands these words thus: “That the many good offices which thou dost to the saints *may become effectual* in bringing others *to the acknowledgment of every good disposition* which is in you towards Christ Jesus, or towards his members.”

Instead of **ενεργης**, *energetic* or *effectual*, the *Vulgate* and some of the *fathers*, as well as several Latin MSS., have read **εναργης**, *evident*. This makes a very good sense, and seems to agree best with the scope of the place.

Instead of **εν υμιν**, *in YOU*, **εν ημιν** *in US*, is the reading of all the best MSS., as well as of several versions and fathers.

Verse 7. For we have great joy] This verse does not read harmoniously. The Greek authorizes the following arrangement: *For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, O brother, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee*. The apostle speaks here of the works of charity in which Philemon abounded towards poor Christians.

Verse 8. Wherefore, though I might be much bold] It would be better to read: *Wherefore, although I have much authority through Christ, to command thee to do what is proper; yet, on account of my love to thee, I entreat thee*.

The tenderness and delicacy of this epistle, says Dr. Paley, have long been admired: “Though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which

is convenient; yet, for love's sake, I rather beseech thee, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus, I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds."

There is something certainly very melting and persuasive in this and every part of the epistle. Yet, in my opinion, the character of St. Paul prevails in it throughout. The warm, affectionate, authoritative teacher is interceding with an absent *friend* for a beloved *convert*. He urges his suit with an earnestness befitting, perhaps, not so much the occasion as the ardour and sensibility of his own mind. Here also, as everywhere, he shows himself conscious of the weight and dignity of his mission; nor does he suffer Philemon, for a moment, to forget it: "I *might* be much bold in Christ, to enjoin thee that which is convenient." He is careful also to recall, though obliquely, to Philemon's memory, the sacred obligation under which he had laid him, by bringing him to the knowledge of Christ: "I do not say to thee, how thou owest to me even thine own self besides." Without laying aside, therefore, the apostolic character, our author softens the imperative style of his address, by mixing with it every sentiment and consideration that could move the heart of his correspondent. Aged, and in prison, he is content to supplicate and entreat. Onesimus was rendered dear to him by his conversation and his services; the child of his affliction, and "ministering unto him in the bonds of the Gospel." This ought to recommend him, whatever had been his fault, to Philemon's forgiveness: "Receive him as myself, as my own bowels." Every thing, however, should be voluntary. St. Paul was determined that Philemon's compliance should flow from his own bounty; "Without thy mind would I do nothing, that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly;" trusting, nevertheless, to his gratitude and attachment for the performance of all that he requested, and for more: "Having confidence in thy obedience, I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say."

St. Paul's discourse at Miletus; his speech before Agrippa; his Epistle to the Romans; that to the Galatians, ^{<40411>}**Galatians 4:11-20**; to the Philippians, ^{<30129>}**Philippians 1:29; 2:2**; the second to the Corinthians, ^{<40601>}**2 Corinthians 6:1-13**; and indeed some part or other of almost every epistle, exhibit examples of a similar application to the feelings and affections of the persons whom he addresses. And it is observable that these pathetic effusions, drawn for the most part from his own sufferings and situation, usually precede a *command*, soften a *rebuke*, or mitigate the *harshness* of some *disagreeable truth*. Horæ Paulinæ, p. 334.

Verse 9. Paul the aged] If we allow St. Paul to have been about 25 years of age at the utmost, in the year 31, when he was assisting at the martyrdom of Stephen, ~~4078~~ **Acts 7:58**; as this epistle was written about A. D. 62, he could not have been at this time more than about 56 years old. This could not constitute him an *aged* man in our sense of the term; yet, when the whole length of his life is taken in, being martyred about four years after this, he may not improperly be considered an *aged* or *elderly man*, though it is generally allowed that his martyrdom took place in the 66th year of our Lord.

But the word **πρεσβυς** signifies, not only an *old man*, but also an *ambassador*; because *old* or *elderly* men were chosen to fulfil such an office, because of their experience and solidity; and **πρεσβυτης**, for **πρεσβευτης**, is used in the same sense and for the same reason by the Septuagint; hence some have thought that we should translate here, *Paul the ambassador*. This would agree very well with the scope and even the design of the place.

Verse 10. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus] It is evident from this that Onesimus was converted by St. Paul while he was prisoner at Rome, and perhaps not long before he wrote this epistle.

Verse 11. Was to thee unprofitable] Alluding to the meaning of Onesimus's name, as has been already noted; though the apostle uses a different Greek word to express the same idea.

Verse 12. Whom I have sent again] The Christian religion never cancels any civil relations; a *slave*, on being converted, and becoming a free man of Christ, has no right to claim, on that ground, emancipation from the service of his master. *Justice*, therefore, required St. Paul to send back Onesimus to his master, and *conscience* obliged Onesimus to agree in the propriety of the measure; but *love* to the *servant* induced the apostle to write this conciliating letter to the *master*.

Verse 13. That in thy stead he might have ministered unto me] As Philemon was one of Paul's converts, he became thereby his spiritual father, and had a right to his services when in need. This was a strong argument, not only to induce Philemon to forgive his servant, but to send him back to the apostle, that he might minister to him in his master's stead.

Verse 14. That thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity] If the apostle had kept Onesimus in his service, and written to Philemon to forgive him and permit him to stay, to this it is probable he would have agreed; but the *benefit* thus conceded might have lost much of its real worth by the consideration that, had he been at Colosse, Philemon would not have sent him to Rome; but, being there and in the apostle's service, he could not with propriety order him home: thus the benefit to the apostle would have appeared to have been of *necessity*. The apostle, therefore, by sending him back again, gave Philemon the opportunity to do all as if *self-moved* to it. This is a very delicate touch.

Verse 15. He-departed for a season] This is another most delicate stroke. He departed thy *slave*, thy *unfaithful slave*; he departed *for a short time*; but so has the mercy of God operated in his behalf, and the providence of God in thine, that he now returns, not an unfaithful *slave*, in whom thou couldst repose no confidence, but as a *brother*, a *beloved brother in the Lord*, to be in the same heavenly family with thee for *ever*. Thou hast, therefore, reason to be thankful to God that he did depart, that he might be restored to thee again infinitely better than he was when he left thee. God has permitted his unfaithfulness, and overruled the whole both to his advantage and thine. The apology for Onesimus is very similar to that made by Joseph for his brethren, ^{<01456>}**Genesis 45:5.**

Verse 16. Not now as a servant?] Do not receive him merely as thy *slave*, nor treat him according to that condition; *but as a brother*-as a genuine Christian, and particularly dear to me.

Both in the flesh and in the Lord?] There is no reason to believe that Onesimus was of the *kindred* of Philemon; and we must take the term *flesh*, here, as referring to the *right* which Philemon had in him. He was a *part* of his *property* and of his *family*; as a *slave*, this was his condition; but he now stood in a twofold relation to Philemon: 1. According to the *flesh*, as above explained, he was one of his family. 2. *In the Lord*; he was now also a member of the *heavenly family*, and of the *Church* at Philemon's house. Philemon's interest in him was now doubled, in consequence of his conversion to Christianity.

Verse 17. If thou count me therefore a partner] If thou dost consider me as a *friend*; if I have still the place of a friend in thy affection, *receive him as myself*; for, as I feel him as my own soul, in receiving *him* thou receivest *me*.

There is a fine model of recommending a friend to the attention of a great man in the epistle of *Horace* to *Claudius Nero*, in behalf of his friend *Septimius*, Epistolar. lib. i., Ep. 9, which contains several strokes not unlike some of those in the Epistle to Philemon. It is written with much art; but is greatly exceeded by that of St. Paul. As it is very short I shall insert it:—

*Septimius, Claudi, nimirum intelligit unus,
Quanti me facias; nam cum rogat, et prece cogit
Scilicet, ut tibi se laudare, et tradere coner,
Dignum mente domoque legentis honesta Neronis,
Munere cum fungi propioris censet amici;
Quid possim videt, ac novit me valdius ipso.
Multa quidem dixi, cur excusatus abirem:
Sed timui, mea ne finxisse minora putarer,
Dissimulator opis propriae, mihi commodus uni.
Sic ego, majoris fugiens opprobria culpae,
Frontis ad urbanae descendi praemia. Quod si
Depositum laudas, ob amici jussa, pudorem;
Scribe tui gregis hunc, et fortem crede bonumque.*

“O Claudius Septimius alone knows what value thou hast for me; for he asks and earnestly entreats me to recommend him to thee, as a man worthy of the service and confidence of Nero, who is so correct a judge of merit. When he imagines that I possess the honour of being one of thy most intimate friends, he sees and knows me more particularly than I do myself. I said indeed many things to induce him to excuse me; but I feared lest I should be thought to dissemble my interest with thee, that I might reserve it all for my own advantage. Therefore, in order to shun the reproach of a greater fault, I have assumed all the consequence of a courtier, and have, at the request of my friend, laid aside becoming modesty; which if thou canst pardon, receive this man into the list of thy domestics, and believe him to be a person of probity and worth.”

This is not only greatly outdone by St. Paul, but also by a letter of *Pliny* to his friend *Sabinianus*, in behalf of his servant, who, by some means, had incurred his master’s displeasure. See it at the conclusion of these notes.

Verse 18. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought] Had the apostle been assured that Onesimus had *robbed* his master, he certainly would not have spoken in this hypothetical way; he only puts a possible

case: If he have wronged thee, or owe thee aught, place all to my account; I will discharge all he owes thee.

Verse 19. I Paul have written it with mine own hand] It is likely that the whole of the letter was written by St. Paul himself, which was not his usual custom. See Clarke on “^{<3317>}2 Thessalonians 3:17”. But by thus speaking he bound Philemon to do what he requested, as an act of common civility, if he could not feel a higher motive from what he had already urged.

Albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me] I ask thee to do this thing to *oblige* me, though I will not say how much thou owest unto me; *even thine own self*, as having been the means of thy conversion.

Verse 20. Yea, brother] It is even so, that thou art thus indebted to me. *Let me have joy of thee*, in forgiving Onesimus, and receiving him into thy favour. In the words *εγε σου οναμην*, which we should translate, *let me have PROFIT of thee*, there is an evident *paronomasia*, or play on the name of *Onesimus*. See on ^{<500D>}Philemon 1:2, 11.

Refresh my bowels] Gratify the earnest longing of my soul in this. I ask neither thy money nor goods; I ask what will *enrich*, not *impoverish*, thee to give.

Verse 21. Having confidence in thy obedience] I know that it will please thee thus to oblige thy friend, and I know that thou wilt do more than I request, because thou feelest the affection of a son to thy spiritual father. Some think that the apostle hints to Philemon that he should manumit Onesimus.

Verse 22. But withal prepare me also a lodging] Does not the apostle mention this as conferring an obligation on Philemon? I will begin to repay thee by taking up my abode at thy house, as soon as I shall be enlarged from prison. But some think he wished Philemon to *hire* him a house, that he might have a *lodging of his own* when he returned to Colosse.

For I trust that through your prayers] It is very likely that this epistle was written a short time before the liberation of the apostle from his first imprisonment at Rome. See ^{<4230>}Acts 28:30, and ^{<57124>}Philippians 2:24; and that he had that liberation now in full prospect.

Verse 23. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner] Epaphras was a Colossian, as we learn from ^{<51042>}Colossians 4:12: *Epaphras, who is one of you*. But

there is no account there of his being in prison, though the not mentioning of it does not necessarily imply that he was not. Some time or other he had suffered imprisonment for the truth of the Gospel; and on that account St. Paul might, in a general way, call him his *fellow prisoner*.

Verse 24. Marcus, Aristarchus, &c.] These were all acquaintances of Philemon, and probably Colossians; and may be all considered as joining here with St. Paul in his request for Onesimus. Some think that *Marcus* was either the evangelist, or *John Mark*, the nephew of Barnabas, ^{<41212>}**Acts 12:12, 25.** *Aristarchus* was probably the same with him mentioned ^{<41929>}**Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2.** See ^{<510410>}**Colossians 4:10.**

Demas] Is supposed to be the same who continued in his attachment to Paul till his last imprisonment at Rome; after which he left him for what is supposed to have been the *love of the world*, ^{<50410>}**2 Timothy 4:10;** but see the note.

Lucas] Is supposed to be *Luke the evangelist*, and *author of the Acts of the Apostles*. On these suppositions little confidence can be placed: they may be correct; they may be otherwise.

Verse 25. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit] By using the *plural*, **ὑμῶν**, *your*, the apostle in effect directs or addresses the epistle, not only to Philemon, but *to all the Church at his house*.

Amen.] Is wanting as usual in the best MSS.

The subscriptions are also various, as in preceding cases.

VERSIONS:

The Epistle to Philemon was written at Rome, and sent by the hand of Onesimus.-SYRIAC.

Through the help of God the epistle is finished. It was written at Rome by the hand of Onesimus, servant to Philemon. -ARABIC.

To the man Philemon.-ÆTHIOPIC.

It was written at Rome, and sent by Onesimus.-COPTIC.

VULGATE, nothing.

The Epistle to Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus: the end of the Epistle to Philemon and Apphia, the master and mistress of Onesimus; and to Archippus, the deacon of the Church at Colosse: it was written from Rome by Onesimus, a servant.-PHILOXENIAN SYRIAC.

MANUSCRIPTS:

To Philemon.-To Philemon is finished.-To Philemon, written from Rome by Onesimus-Onesiphorus.-From Paul, by Onesimus, a servant. -From the presence of Paul and Timothy.-The Epistle of Paul the apostle to Philemon.-*The common Greek text has*, To Philemon, written from Rome by Onesimus, a servant.

As some have thought it strange that a private letter, of a particular business and friendship, should have got a place in the sacred canon, others have been industrious to find out the general *uses* which may be made of it. The following are those which seem to come most naturally from the text:—

1. In a religious point of view, all genuine Christian converts are on a level; Onesimus, the slave, on his conversion becomes the apostle's beloved *son*, and Philemon's *brother*.
2. Christianity makes no change in men's civil affairs; even a slave did not become a freeman by Christian baptism.
3. No servant should be either taken or retained from his own master, without the master's consent, ^{<5013>}**Philemon 1:13, 14**.
4. We should do good unto all men, and not be above helping the meanest slave when we have the opportunity.
5. *Restitution* is due where an injury has been done, unless the injured party freely forgive, ^{<5018>}**Philemon 1:18**.
6. We should do all in our power to make up quarrels and differences, and reconcile those that are at variance.
7. We should be grateful to our benefactors, and be ready to compensate one good turn with another.
8. We should forgive the penitent who have offended us, and rejoice in the opportunity of being reconciled to them.

9. *Authority* is not always to be used; a prudent man who is possessed of it will rather use a mild and obliging manner, than have recourse to the authority of his office.

10. The ministers of the Gospel should learn to know the worth of an immortal soul, and be as ready to use their talents for the conversion of *slaves* and the *ignoble* as the *great* and *opulent*, and prize the converted *slave* as highly as the converted *lord*, showing no sinful respect of persons.

11. Christianity properly understood, and its doctrines properly applied, become the most powerful means of the melioration of men; the wicked and profligate, when brought under its influence, become useful members of society. It can transform a worthless slave into a pious, amiable, and useful man; and make him, not only happier and better in himself, but also a blessing to the community.

12. We should never despair of reclaiming the wicked. No man is out of the reach of God's mercy as long as he breathes. Pretending to say that such and such cases are *hopeless*, is only a colouring for our want of zeal, and a pretence to excuse our slothfulness.

13. The anxiety which the apostle showed for the welfare of Onesimus, in return for his affectionate services, could not fail to cherish good dispositions in the breast of Philemon. We do a man a great kindness when we even engage him in acts of mercy and benevolence.

14. From this epistle we learn what sort of man the apostle was in private life. He has here displayed qualities which are in the highest estimation among men; a noble spirit arising from a consciousness of his own dignity, consummate prudence, uncommon generosity, the warmest friendship, the most skilful address, and the greatest politeness, as well as purity of manners; qualities which are never found either in the enthusiast or impostor. See *Macknight* and *Dodd*.

There is extant an epistle of Pliny on the very same subject, directed to his friend *Sabinianus* in behalf of his manumitted slave who had offended him, and was consequently cast out of favour. Dr. Doddridge says that "that epistle, though penned by one who was allowed to excel in the epistolary style, and though it undoubtedly has many beauties, will be found by persons of taste much inferior to this animated composition of the Apostle Paul.

I have already introduced an epistle of Horace on a somewhat similar subject; but that of *Pliny* is so exactly *parallel*, and so truly excellent, that I am sure its insertion will gratify every intelligent reader, and I insert it the rather because the works of Pliny are in but few hands, and his epistles are known to very few except the learned.

C. PLINIUS SABINIANO suo, S.

Libertus tuus, cui succensere te dixeras, venit ad me, advolatusque pedibus meis, tanquam tuis, hæsit. Flevit multum, multum rogavit, multum etiam tacuit: in summa, fecit mihi fidem pœnitentiæ. Vere credo emendatum, quia deliquisse se sentit. Irasceris scio; et irasceris merito, id quoque scio: sed tunc præcipua mansuetudinis laus, cum iræ causa justissima est. Amasti hominem; et, spero, amabis: interim sufficit, ut exorari te sinas. Licebit rursus irasci, si meruerit: quod exoratus excusatius facies.

Remitte aliquid adolescentiæ ipsius; remitte lachrymis; remitte indulgentiæ tuæ; ne torseris illum, ne torseris etiam te. Torqueris enim, cum tam lenis irasceris. Vereor, ne videar non rogare, sed cogere, si precibus ejus meas junxero. Jungam tamen tanto plenius et effusius, quanto ipsum acrius severiusque corripui, districte minatus nunquam me postea rogaturum. Hoc illi, quem terreri oportebat; tibi non idem. Nam fortasse iterum rogabo, impetrabo iterum: sit modo tale, ut togare me, ut præstare te deceat.

Vale.-Epistolar. lib. ix., Ep. 21.

“CAIUS PLINIUS to SABINIANUS *his friend, health.*

“Thy freed man, with whom thou didst inform me thou wert incensed, came to me and threw himself at my feet, and grasped them as if they had been thine. He wept much, earnestly entreated, and yet said more by his silence. In short, he fully convinced me that he is a penitent. I do verily believe him reformed, because he feels his guilt. Thou art incensed against him I know, and I know that he has justly merited thy displeasure; but then, clemency has its chief praise when there is the greatest cause for irritation. Thou didst once love the man, and I hope thou wilt love him again. In the meantime permit thyself to be entreated in his behalf. Should he again merit thy displeasure thou wilt have the stronger excuse for indulging it, shouldst thou pardon him now. Consider his youth,

consider his tears, consider thy own gentleness of disposition. Do not torment him, do not torment thyself; for, with thy mild disposition, thou must be tormented if thou suffer thyself to be angry. I fear, were I to join my prayers to his, that I should rather seem to compel than to supplicate. Yet I will unite them, and the more largely and earnestly too, as I have sharply and severely reproved him, solemnly threatening, should he offend again, never more to intercede for him. This I said to him, it being necessary that I should alarm him; but I do not say the same to *thee*, for probably I may entreat thee again, and command thee again, should there be a sufficient reason to induce *me* to request, and *thee* to concede. Farewell.”

Nothing on the subject can be finer than this; but Paul has the advantage, because he had *Christian motives* to urge. If the energetic Roman had had these, we should have found it difficult to decide between his *Latin* and the apostle's *Greek*.

It may be now asked whether St. Paul's application in behalf of Onesimus was successful? We have no direct answer to this question, but we may fairly suppose that such pleading could not be in vain. Philemon was a Christian, and owed too much to his God and Saviour, and too much to the apostle, as the instrument of his salvation, not to concede a favour which it is congenial to the very spirit of Christianity to grant.

The application of *Horace* in behalf of *Septimius* was successful, and both Claudius Nero. and Augustus took him into their warmest confidence. But this was only a common case of recommendation, and had no difficulties in the way. But did the heathen Sabinianus yield to the entreaties of his friend, and forgive his slave? He did; and we have the record of it in another very elegant letter, in which Pliny expresses his obligation to his friend for his prompt attention to his request. I will transcribe it, and give a translation for the farther satisfaction of the reader.

C. PLINIUS SABINIANO suo, S.

Bene fecisti quod libertum aliquando tibi carum, reducentibus epistolis meis, in domum, in animum recepisti. Juvabit hoc te: me certe juvat; primum quod te talem video, ut in ira regi possis: deinde quod tantum mihi tribuis, ut vel auctoritati meæ pareas, vel precibus indulgeas. Igitur, et laudo, et gratias ago. Simul in

posterum moneo, ut te erroribus tuorum, etsi non fuerit, qui deprecetur, placabilem præstes. Vale.-Epistolar. lib. ix., Ep. 24.

“CAIUS PLINIUS *to his friend* SABINIANUS, *health.*

“Thou hast done well, that, in compliance with my letter, thou hast received thy freed man both into thy house and into thy heart. This must be pleasing to thyself, and it is certainly pleasing to me; first, because I find thee to be a person capable of being governed in thy anger; and secondly, because thou showest so much regard for me, as either to yield this to my authority, or concede it to my entreaties. Therefore I both praise and return thee thanks. ‘At the same time I admonish thee to be always ready to forgive the errors of thy servants, although there should be no one to intercede in their behalf. Farewell.’”

These letters contain such excellent lessons of instruction that it will be impossible to read them without profit. They are master pieces in their kind; and no Christian need be ashamed to be indebted to them, whether in regulating his own conduct in respect to forgiveness of injuries, or whether in interceding for them who have fallen under the displeasure of others. Reader, go thou and do likewise.

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