

Philemon

(Transcript)

By Wray Zehrung – 8/23/2014

Philemon is an epistle of Paul as clearly indicated in several verses within the book and is one of the so called "prison epistles" written during his incarceration at Rome. It is Paul's shortest letter and we are often left wondering why God saw it fit to include it in the Holy Scriptures.

Here is what we can expect to find in the letter to Philemon. This is a letter of tact, diplomacy and proper persuasion. Paul exudes brotherly care and concern while at the same time maintaining authority but without wielding it like an axe.

Philemon is a carefully orchestrated letter, and written to achieve a desired result based on Paul's discernment of the situation combined with his intricate knowledge of God's Word. It also provides for some insight into some of the finer principles of Christian living.

The sermon format for today is in the structure of a commentary since the Book of Philemon is rarely spoken on. Let's see the purpose of the book of Philemon.

Philemon 1:

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer,

Paul was not a prisoner of Jesus Christ – but a prisoner at Rome in the cause of Jesus Christ; [incarcerated and held captive.] Paul was told by Christ to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles; The Jews did not like this very much at all:

Acts 22:

21 Then He [Jesus] said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'

Philemon was a Gentile.

Acts 22:

22 And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!"

23 Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air,

Acts 23:

11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

So pretty much from here to the end of the chapter Paul is accused of many things, but nothing worthy of death. Most of the leaders who dealt with him could find no wrong: They pushed the problem onto another leader.

Paul finally makes it to Rome, and is put under house arrest and while there writes this letter to Philemon.

One point to consider is that Paul does not call himself, as in other Epistles, "Paul an apostle," as he is writing familiarly – and not authoritatively. [We will see why later]. This is a **personal** letter unlike the others that are directed to the whole church. [To the churches of Galatia; To the saints who are in Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae.]

And Timothy our brother [in Christ]- Paul often has **Timothy's** name with his own in his epistles;

2 Corinthians 1:

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:

Colossians 1:

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother,

1 Thessalonians 1:

1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:

1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Timothy was from that area of the country, and having spent so much time with Paul probably knew Philemon and was familiar with him and his situation.

Paul extensively employs a **play on names and words** [with purpose and meaning]: For example:

Philemon means: Affectionate or beloved, and 'Philemon' comes from a word meaning **kiss**; This led the apostle Paul to say: "To Philemon our Dearly Beloved."

Fellow laborer: It appears that Philemon was an **elder**, a **fellow worker** in God's field along with Paul.

1 Corinthians 3:

9 For we [Apollos and Paul] are God's **fellow workers**; you are God's field, you are God's building.

Paul continues with the **name play**...

Philemon 1:

2 To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the Church in your house:

Some manuscripts have "Apphia Appha." It is commonly held that Apphia was the wife of Philemon, which seems likely because of the order of the names Philemon, her and then the other minister. The Alexandrian copy reads, "to sister Apphia"; and the Vulgate Latin version, "to the beloved **sister** Apphia. 'Apphia' is an affectionate greeting.

'Appha' is the affectionate address of a brother or sister; so a sister in this case. Whether this is interpolated because of the rest of the play on names remains to be seen.

Paul engages Apphia early in the letter probably knowing that she would be a part of the process anyway. I think most of us know from experience how much a wife can influence a decision. So Paul pulls her in and gets her involved in the letter.

Then we come to Archippus commentaries suppose him to be the son of Philemon and Apphia. He is also a minister as Colossians 4:17 points out:

Colossians 4:

17 And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." [So the order of address is Philemon and his wife, the minister, and the church.]

Now the play on Archippus' name: It means: The master of the horse or horse ruler; from a chief [arch], and a horse [hippus; hippodrome; hippopotamus: river horse].

CITE: Adam Clark: 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**.

The reason for the play on their names will become clear a little later. I do not believe that Paul is necessarily just being playful and lighthearted, but he has a **purpose** in mind which we will get to a little later in the chapter.

Philemon 1:

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

This is a very common salutation that Paul uses throughout his epistles; we will comment on it a little later.

Philemon 1:

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

Even with all that he was going through even at that moment being imprisoned and bound by a chain. Paul made it a habit of praying on the behalf of others; Paul prayed in an intercessory fashion and he did specifically and personally and always. He mentioned them by name and they always on his mind. He said this of all the saints that were in Ephesus:

Ephesians 1:

16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making **mention** of you in my prayers:

This of course is another way in which we are to imitate Paul – by mentioning all the saints we know in our prayers by name.

Philemon 1:

5 hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,

Hearing of thy love and faith – their reputation had made it back to Paul, who knows it perhaps by person [Onesimus] who is the object of this letter who will be introduced to later.

... toward all the saints :5 [the holy ones] – this could be part of Paul's setup for some of the points he wants to make later and at the very least goes towards the entire argument of the letter and what Paul is trying to achieve and get Philemon to see...that there is **a way to treat the brethren**, the ones that God has set apart with a calling.

Philemon 1:

6 that the sharing of your faith **may become** effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

Paul mentions that Philemon's faith is not as effective as it should be.

It was part of Paul's prayers that Philemon would completely understand that he is what he is today because of Christ in him. Philemon like all of us started out his journey like we all did as a carnal being. If he can fully realize this he can become more effective in his ministry and the sharing of his faith towards **ALL** the saints.

This appears to be a part of Paul setup in order to make the main point to Philemon. At this point Philemon has to be asking himself to a certain degree, why did Paul say that he could be lacking in this area? This will become clear a little later as we come to the crux of the matter. Paul goes on to commend Philemon in :7.

Philemon 1:

7 For we have great **joy** and consolation in your love, because the hearts [bowels] of the saints have been refreshed by you, **brother**.

Joy is the same exact word as grace [*charis*] in verse :3.

Paul in :3 says "Grace to you," and now recognizes that Philemon acts in this way towards many others. It is just that Philemon has this **one issue** that must be dealt with – in spite of the fact that Philemon was doing so much right in the way he cared for the saints. Philemon extends *charis* to **most** but not **all**.

'*Charis*' – It is God that extends this **grace** or favor or graciousness first to us like Paul was mentioning in :6. We are to in that same way to extend it to others and Philemon had been an example of that in the past to the extent that the King James Version puts it:

KJV: because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother...

Bowels: (the "spleen"); an intestine (plural); inward affection, + tender mercy. Today, in our culture, we associate emotions with our intestinal area: Some of the sayings we have are: gut feeling, stomach in knots, and butterflies. This same word is also used literally in speaking of Judas when he fell headlong and his bowels came out.

More often though this word for **heart** or bowels is used figuratively and this word that is similar to spleen is even translated "**inward affection**" and "tender mercy."

2 Corinthians 7:

15 And his **inward affection** is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him.

Luke 1:

78 Through the **tender mercy** of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

So when he says their bowels were refreshed, it is not to say that their bellies were filled with **food**, but the real intended meaning was that the church members hearts were filled with **gladness** because of him. They were meeting at Philemon's house for Sabbath services every week and being preached to and taught the word of God in and out of season.

Brother in verse :7 is put last, and it is perhaps to put Philemon in a frame of mind before Paul comes to verse :8. This also shows the familiarity and approach that Paul is taking in the letter.

Philemon 1:

8 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting,

NIV: Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do,

Now though Paul is still treading lightly, he has left some of the subtleties behind and begins to speak more plainly as we come to the heart of the matter.

Paul was in a position of authority **as an apostle** which if you remember he did not start this letter in the same fashion that he did many of this other epistles. Because he is taking a different approach with Philemon, in fact the **same** approach that he **wants** Philemon to take later on. He is leading by example.

Paul is also saying that he knew what the right things to do were, he was not in doubt about it and it would be within his purview to **command** such a thing, YET...

Philemon 1:

9 yet for love's sake I rather **appeal** to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—

Here is the different approach...like the one he talks about in:

1 Thessalonians 2:

6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made **demands** as apostles of Christ.

7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

Yet for love's sake - love would dictate that this is the right way the right thing to do; a better way of operating within the realm of Christian and brotherly relationships. Paul is also continuing to put Philemon in a state of mind to be more amenable to Paul's request.

Paul is saying to Philemon that he would rather appeal to you - rather than command you as mentioned in the verse above.

The aged - Paul may have been 53-63; more towards the latter age; it is hard to be very accurate. But more interestingly, the word for aged can signify, not only an old man, but also an ambassador, elder, as in office [as Thayer points out in his commentary.] Either one of these words would seemingly fit better in context and give a greater weight to what Paul is asking here.

And now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ - many commentaries take this phrase and the aged comment to be a pity play. They think it is like Paul is saying that Philemon should acquiesce to his request, because "woe is me!" I am old and in jail, so please Philemon do this for me, for these reasons.

To me that does **not** really sound like the Paul I know; Paul is of exceptional character - not a man to be trifled with. Think of what all that Paul had been through (a night in the deep; bitten by venomous snakes, stoned etc); how he handled conflict with others like we have seen in his letters - like in 1 Corinthians. Paul was powered by the Word of God - and he helped others to achieve that lofty goal.

Brethren, let's face it - every baptized member has authority. We are all in authority over someone - so do not read these verses as applying only to the ministry. What we are to learn is the right way to **approach** someone according to the word of God. We are to learn how to achieve God's desired aim.

Paul would not make it about him but about doing what the Bible says and what is **right!** Which to me is the whole point of Paul's letter to Philemon.

This is the second time that Paul says this in this short letter this time right before he is to make his main point... and he says that he is in bonds he is a slave in this respect being **held against his will**. Why is Paul reiterating this point. The answer is because he plans to utilize this very main point, that he is driving home, to help Philemon see the right spiritual perspective.

So when he makes some of the points that he is about to make he knows whereof he speaks – because Paul is in bonds, he is in chains – he can speak to the matter and substance of being at the mercy of others.

But this is not about Paul's chains – that is up to God – but this epistle is about Philemon's relationship to the converted member - the slave and bond servant, Onesimus. This is the point of Paul's writing to Philemon.

Philemon 1:

10 I appeal to you for my son **Onesimus**, whom I have begotten while in my chains,

Finally we get to the main point and why Paul is writing: Onesimus is a bond servant or a slave to Philemon; a *doulos*; he ran away and now it was time to face the music. So Paul begins:

I appeal to you – repeated [same word] from :9. He is now saying that in the same way that I would have you appeal to me, I appeal to you on behalf of Onesimus – my son Onesimus – figuratively as a spiritual father.

Paul calls Timothy and Titus a son, as well as makes reference to his nurturing of the church through the gospel.

1 Corinthians 4:

15 For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

My son – a term is chosen to elicit a specific idea and response in Philemon. Something not said of a servant or slave.

Begotten in my bonds – Paul obviously realized that he was only an instrument of Christ, but nonetheless it was through him while he was in prison. Paul clearly saw God in the picture – Paul's situation and that of Philemon. An example that of the fact that God can accomplish his purpose no matter what and really it would have to be God working in this situation.

I also have to wonder if Paul was saying this out loud if he would have said it with emphasis on "MY."

I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in **MY** chains.

In order to continue making the point that he **too** was in chains and what real bearing does this have on who the man is on the inside?

So finally after a considerable amount of setting the stage the matter at hand is finally brought to the fore...and even so at the very end of the sentence.

Now more to the core issue:

Philemon 1:

11 who once was unprofitable to you, but now is **profitable** to you and to me.

Unprofitable / profitable – Now back to play on words and why Paul may have worded the intro the way he did. **Onesimus means “profitable.”** It is unclear whether this name, which appears to be common during this time was more a title or an actual name.

But Paul now uses it to stress the point. Philemon no doubt got Onesimus in order that he would be **profitable** to him, but once he left he became “unprofitable to you” in the physical sense and even in a spiritual sense.

But now he profitable in the spiritual sense, BUT not just to Paul, he is emphasizing that he is Profitable as his name means to Philemon as well.

Philemon 1:

12 I am sending him back. You therefore **receive** him, that is, my own heart,

I am sending him back. – Realistically Paul did not have the ability to force Onesimus to return other than the same coercive dialogue that he is using in his letter to Philemon.

Nonetheless, you therefore receive him – What is going through Philemon's mind at this point? Philemon has his work cut out for him in how he would receive and how this would be perceived by other servants and other slave owners in the area.

He continues by saying that Onesimus is a part of him (Paul) – that is, my own heart –

New International Version (©1984)

I am sending him--who is **my very heart**--back to you.

New Living Translation (©2007)

I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

English Standard Version (©2001)

I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.

International Standard Version (©2008)

As I send him back, it's like I'm coming along with him.

GOD'S WORD® Translation (©1995)

I am sending him back to you. This is like sending you a part of myself.

Weymouth New Testament

I am sending him back to you, and in so doing I send part of myself.

In effect Paul is saying: If you love me, then love Onesimus, for he a part of me.

Philemon 1:

13 whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister **to me** in my chains for the gospel.

Paul – a type of Christ – has made a **great sacrifice** in giving up the run-away slave, Onesimus – because Paul needed Onesimus greatly.

As if to say I would love to keep him here with me, but this is the right thing to do – return Onesimus to you Philemon – the better way; this is the right thing to do, even though I, Paul, could have continued to use him.

Whom I wished to keep with me – perhaps a little hint.

That on your behalf Onesimus might minister to me – he is taking the place of what Philemon would have been doing had he been there.

Onesimus could have been helping Paul out with many things: Necessities of life, errands (since Paul was in chains) and even the ministering of the Word of God and Paul is saying that credit would go to Philemon for allowing this great service – if Onesimus were able to return and help Paul in the gospel.

Philemon 1:

14 But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.

This sums up the tone and approach of the whole letter. Paul is seeking to persuade with Godly reason rather than resorting to his God given authority.

Paul has put the ball entirely in Philemon's court by not keeping Onesimus,

Paul had to convince him to go back (of his own accord as there was no moral obligation to do so.)

By doing so Paul is putting the decision making power in Philemon's hands. Also in this way Philemon could have nothing against Paul.

That your good deed – the services that Onesimus was providing to Paul.

Might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary – giving Philemon the “chance” (though how could he in good conscience do otherwise after all that Paul has said) But Paul said in effect, “I’m leaving it up to you Philemon.”

This gives Philemon the opportunity to do what is right and build character and continue setting the good example that Paul commented on in :6.

Paul is trying to show Philemon a better way by his own example, the way that he is treating Philemon in this matter.

Matthew 20:

- 20** Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.
- 21** And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."
- 22** But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able."
- 23** So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father."
- 24** And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.
- 25** But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority (*katakurieuo*) over them.

Acts 19:

- 16** Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, **overpowered** (*katakurieuo*) them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Matthew 20:

- 26** Yet it shall **not be so among you**; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your **servant**.
- 27** And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—
- 28** just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

This is the better way that Paul is talking about. Peter echoes the same thing in:

1 Peter 5:

- 1** The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:
- 2** Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;
- 3** nor as being lords over (*katakurieuo*) those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

This is what Paul was doing in the letter to Philemon. Treating him like the brother that he refers to him as in :7, hoping that Philemon will then in return treat Onesimus, their brother in the same way.

Philemon 1:

15 For perhaps he departed [escaped and fled] for a while [a **short time**] for this purpose, that you might receive him **forever**,

Paul was saying that all this has eternal ramifications. For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, – Perhaps this was God inspired, a calling for Onesimus. This higher calling could then be of a greater service than Onesimus was in his former position as a slave for Philemon. [This is perhaps a better way for Philemon to look at what God was accomplishing.]

Notice how God works in this situation: It is not inconceivable then that God was using Onesimus and his calling to work out a greater good; [similar to Joseph being enslaved in Egypt.]

And now this is really being evidenced by the fact that we now have the book of Philemon.

Departed – a nice word for what Onesimus did.

For a while; for a season (KJV) – *hoṛa* literally an hour; what is this as contrasted to forever.

That you might receive him forever, – a relationship that would have eternal ramifications as they were now united in the be bonds of spiritual brotherhood.

Had he returned in his former status, how could Philemon trust him. But now it is an altogether different story and Philemon could “receive him”...not only that but “forever.”

Receive – Greek, “have him for yourself in full possession.”

This could be another play on words. This was the case before Onesimus left, but now it would be the case again only in a spiritual vein,

Philemon 1:

16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

No longer – an admission by Paul of a previous condition, but by the same token it is an acknowledgment of who and what Onesimus was in addition to this at that point.

Is Paul advocating revolution here? No.

Ephesians 6:

- 5** Bondservants [slaves], be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ;
- 6** not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,
- 7** with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,
- 8** knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a **slave** or **free**.

1 Corinthians 7:

- 20** Let each one **remain** in the same calling in which he was called.
- 21** Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it.
- 22** For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.
- 23** You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.
- 24** Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

I like the way Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary sums it up the issue of slavery: "Scripture does not sanction slavery, but at the same time does not begin a political crusade against it." We are not of the governments of this world, brethren. We do not try to change them.

What Philemon has to realize is that Onesimus now has an equal calling by God of his own.

A beloved brother especially to me – especially to Paul considering Onesimus conversion under Paul as well as his ministering to him.

But how much more to you – Onesimus comes back as a member of the "family", returning from the error of his ways; and likely never to do it again – these things should mean a lot to Philemon.

If we take out phrase delineated by the commas (especially to me but how much more to you) we see the point in this verse that Paul is making – that Onesimus is a beloved brother...both in the flesh and in the Lord so that he is now a member in the church and heavenly family.

Philemon 1:

- 17** If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.

Partner – translated elsewhere as companions, fellowship, partaker.

The idea in the word is that of having something in common and in this case it is the Gospel, Paul is putting the heavy on Philemon. If you I are of the same religion then:

Receive him as you would me – shows how highly he regarded Onesimus and demonstrates to Philemon, in reality, how he should as well. A reiteration of :12 I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, as a part of me or as you would receive me, receive him in the same way.

Philemon 1:

18 But **if** he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.

If – for some reason it appears here that Paul does not know what the debt may be. Or it could be that now that Philemon knows Gods hand in it, if he still feels that he has been wronged in light of it then put that on my account. At the end of the day it really is pure speculation since it is not clearly outlined anywhere. So I will just leave this aspect of the verse at that.

Account – only other place this word is found in Bible is Romans 5:13 (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Represent as being done, caused, or possessed by someone; attributed – as in: the crime is imputed to a specific person.

Impute is to assign (a value) to something by inference from the value of the products or processes to which it contributes. Strong's: attribute: - impute, put on account.

Paul is saying lay it to my charge or charge me; he was in effect being Christ like paying for something that he didn't do, and in effect he was asking Philemon to take the "wrong" on himself. That is a Godly principle.

But this was not necessary, let's quickly recount why:

- (1) Onesimus, not Paul, had done the wrong, Onesimus had though.
- (2) Paul was not guilty of it.
- (3) Paul assumed the debt to himself.
- (4) Philemon could have never charged it on him.

So what we have here then is Paul setting a Christ-like example. Paul was practicing what he preached.

2 Corinthians 5:

19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Paul was saying something similar in verses :17-18 of Philemon.

Do not impute his trespass to Onesimus, but to me, Paul, I will take on his debt caused by sin. Receive him as you would me, since you have nothing against me, and put anything that he may owe on my account. A very noble gesture.

Philemon 1:

19 I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.

I, Paul, am writing with my own hand – this was not always the case as evidenced elsewhere in his writings – Salutations and greetings were from him, the rest may have been taken by dictation. Paul had failing sight and was incarcerated at times.

But this was a **personal** letter as we mentioned before and may have been why he wrote it himself. [‘The epistle to Philemon’ was not written to any of the Churches.] Philemon knowing this also, meant this letter would carry more weight – and probably did. But this would have underscored his commitment and sincerity to follow through on what Paul was saying.

I will repay— this emulates a legal form of security or guarantee or promissory note. The Bible cautions strongly against doing this, Paul knowing this felt it necessary in this situation to do it, but I would imagine Paul did not expect that it would be redeemed as we see in the rest of the sentence.

Not to mention – this wording cracks me up, because he **does mention** the following just “oh by the way.” To you that you owe me even your own self besides. – seems questionable that he would be referring to a monetary sum but his conversion, that being attributable to Paul. So he sets up a juxtaposition of debts and obviously by comparison what Philemon owes Paul is considerably greater than what Onesimus owes Philemon.

Possibly an Allusion to Christ’s words of “debt” in: Matthew 18:23-35.

Philemon 1:

20 Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

Let me have **joy** from you in the Lord – seems to be saying that this would be the **right thing to do** based on the teachings of God as you know them.

I wanted to compare other usage of this word “**joy**” throughout the Bible, but this is the only place that this word is used. It is interesting how a couple of other translations have it:

Darby Bible Translation

Yea, brother, I would have **profit** of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in Christ.

Young's Literal Translation

Yes, brother, may I have **profit** of thee in the Lord; refresh my bowels in the Lord;

It appears to be another **play on words** in conjunction with name Onesimus like verse 11 who once was unprofitable to you, but now is **profitable** to you and to me. Joy here is *'oninēmi'* on-in'-ay-mee.

Onesimus *Onēsimos* on-ay'-sim-os Strong's has it as derived from this word for joy.

It really appears to me in conjunction with verses 13 and 14 that Paul is asking for Onesimus **back** for all the help that Onesimus can provide, but he wants it to be Philemon's decision.

When you read it this way: Yes, brother, let me have Onesimus from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. [it makes sense and Paul would also have joy.]

Refresh my heart in the Lord – uses the word for bowels again.

So the meaning here then is that Paul has earnest desire that this be done for BOTH of them; it would satisfy Paul's ardent request on behalf of Onesimus as well as benefit Philemon by him doing the right thing.

On top of that Paul is only asking him to continue to do what you have been doing, keep acting the same way :7 because the **hearts** of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. [It is the same word bowel there too.]

Philemon 1:

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

Paul knew what kind of man Philemon was and had the utmost trust in his Christianity and knew that he would do what was right in the eyes of God as well as Paul. Of course Paul said [1 Corinthians 11:1] Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. And as we have seen Paul was not asking out of line but rather setting a good example all the way through the letter.

[Paul could have been putting subtle pressure on Philemon to free Onesimus. As we think through the repercussions of Paul commanding this, we realize that it could have been tantamount to starting a revolution. What would all the other slave owners and slaves within the Church think if this is what Paul demanded of Philemon? What would the Roman government have done if they knew Paul was advocating this?]

Now Paul has finished addressing the issue at hand closes the letter in the last 4 verses.

Philemon 1:

22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

Prepare a guest room for me – Paul may have been accustomed to Philemon's hospitality; also it may even show an intent to settle up his debt if necessary.

I trust – Hopeful of a release.

Through your prayers I shall be granted to you. – Expectation of reciprocal intercessory prayers that he had been doing on their behalf.

Philemon 1:

23 Epaphras my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

This could be figurative in the same way that Archippus was a fellow soldier, obviously he was not involved in the military. But it is not outside the realm of possibilities that he got caught up in everything along with Paul. This could be a distinct possibility considering he is referred to separately from those in verse 24.

Philemon 1:

24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my **fellow laborers**.

...fellow laborers – Paul uses the term again.

These are the same people that Paul mentions at the end of Colossians, which can be used to put the dates of these 2 epistle fairly close together.

Philemon 1:

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

Conclusion

Paul also was setting an example in the way he acted toward Philemon showing him a better way that he could act towards Onesimus. What we have seen is masterfully written and well thought out letter and if Philemon was to read it carefully he would have seen the how Paul was encouraging him to act towards Onesimus by continuing to do what is right and act the way you have been acting towards everyone else, but now he was to include Onesimus.

In this Christian Principle letter to Philemon we see that it is about much more than **slave and free** but a timely and important message for all the saints. It is not only about repentance – but allowing room for others to repent and change and go another direction. We are to forgive others past trespasses and allow them to move on and we must move on as well. We have to realize that people can change – and **do change** through the power of God.

What we have seen is that “Philemon” is a masterfully written and well thought out letter – and if Philemon were to read it carefully he would have to see how Paul was encouraging him to act toward Onesimus. Philemon would see how he was to treat **all** the saints (this is where he was remiss), of which Onesimus was one of them.

How to treat **all** the saints is a timely and important message for all the churches down through the ages.

End: Philemon