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**COMMENTARY**

**COMMENTARY  
ON THE EPISTLE TO  
PHILEMON**

*by John Calvin*

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# COMMENTARIES ON THE

## EPISTLE TO

# PHILEMON

PHILEMON 1-7	
1. Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow-laborer,	1. Paulus vinctus Christi Iesu et Timotheus frater Philemoni amico et cooperario nostro,
2. And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in thy house:	2. Et Apphia dilectae, et Archippo commilitoni nostro, et Ecclesiae, quae domi tuae est.
3. Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.	3. Gratia vobis et pax a Deo Patre nostro et Domino Iesu Christo.
4. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,	4. Gratias ago Deo meo, semper memoriam tui faciens in precibus meis,
5. Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints;	5. Audiens tuam dilectionem et fidem, quam habes erga Dominum Iesum et erga omnes sanctos,
6. That the communication of thy faith may become effectual, by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.	6. Ut communicatio fidei tuae efficax sit cognitione omnis boni, quod in vobis est erga Christum Iesum.
7. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.	7. Gratiam enim habemus multam et consolationem super dilectione tua, quia viscera sanctorum per te refocillata sunt, frater.

THE singular loftiness of the mind of Paul, though it may be seen to greater advantage in his other writings which treat of weightier matters, is also

attested by this Epistle, in which, while he handles a subject otherwise low and mean, he rises to God with his wonted elevation. Sending back a runaway slave and thief, he supplicates pardon for him. But in pleading this cause, he discourses about Christian forbearance<sup>f1</sup> with such ability, that he appears to speak about the interests of the whole Church rather than the private affairs of a single individual. In behalf of a man of the lowest condition, he demeans himself so modestly and humbly, that nowhere else is the meekness of his temper painted in a more lively manner.

**1. *A prisoner of Jesus Christ.*** In the same sense in which he elsewhere calls himself an Apostle of Christ, or a minister of Christ, he now calls himself “a prisoner of Christ;” because the chains by which he was bound on account of the gospel, were the ornaments or badges of that embassy which he exercised for Christ. Accordingly, he mentions them for the sake of strengthening his authority; not that he was afraid of being despised, (for Philemon undoubtedly had so great reverence and esteem for him, that there was no need of assuming any title,) but because he was about to plead the cause of a runaway slave, the principal part of which was entreaty for forgiveness.

***To Philemon our friend and fellow-laborer.*** It is probable that this “Philemon” belonged to the order of pastors; for the title with which he adorns him, when he calls him *fellow-laborer*, is a title which he is not accustomed to bestow on a private individual.

**2. *And to Archippus our fellow-soldier.*** He next adds “Archippus,” who appears also to have been a minister of the Church; at least, if he be the same person who is mentioned towards the conclusion of the Epistle to the Colossians, (<<sup>510417</sup>>Colossians 4:17,) which is not at all improbable; for the designation — “fellow-soldier” — which he bestows on this latter individual, belongs peculiarly to ministers. Although the condition of a soldier belongs to all Christians universally, yet because teachers may be regarded as standardbearers in the warfare, they ought to be ready more than all others to fight, and Satan usually gives them greater annoyance. It is also possible, that Archippus attended and shared in some contests which Paul maintained; and, indeed, this is the very word that Paul makes use of, whenever he mentions persecutions.

*And to the Church which is in thy house.* By employing these terms, he bestows the highest praise on the family of Philemon. And certainly it is no small praise of a householder, that he regulates his family in such a manner as to be an image of the Church, and to discharge also the duty of a pastor within the walls of his dwelling. Nor must we forget to mention that this good man had a wife of the same character; for she, too, not without reason, is commended by Paul.

**4. *I give thanks to my God.*** It deserves attention, that he at the same time prays for that very thing for which he “gives thanks.” Even the most perfect, so long as they live in the world, never have so good ground for congratulation as not to need prayers, that God may grant to them, not only to persevere till the end, but likewise to make progress from day to day.

**5. *Hearing of thy love and faith.*** This praise, which he bestows on Philemon, includes briefly the whole perfection of a Christian man. It consists of two parts, faith in Christ, and love towards our neighbors; for to these all the actions and all the duties of our life relate. Faith is said to be in Christ, because to him it especially looks; in like manner as in no other way than through him alone can God the Father be known, and in no other than in Him can we find any of the blessings which faith seeks.

*And towards all saints.* He does not thus limit this *love* to the *saints*, as if there ought to be none towards others; for, since the doctrine of “love” is, that “we should not despise our flesh, (Isaiah 53: 7) and that we should honor the image of God which is engraven on our nature, undoubtedly it includes all mankind. But since they that are of the household of faith are united with us by a closer bond of relationship, and since God peculiarly recommends them to us, for this reason they justly hold the highest rank.

The arrangement of the passage is somewhat confused; but there is no obscurity in the meaning, except that it is doubtful whether the adverb *always* (in the 4th verse) is connected with the first clause, “I give thanks always to my God,” or with the second clause, “making mention of thee always in my prayers.” The meaning may be brought out in this manner, that, whenever the Apostle offered prayer for Philemon, he interwove thanksgiving with it; that is, because Philemon’s piety afforded ground of rejoicing; for we often pray for those in whom nothing is to be found but what gives occasion for grief and tears. Yet the second mode of pointing is

generally preferred, that Paul “gives thanks for Philemon, and always makes mention of him in his prayers.” Let my readers be at full liberty to judge for themselves; but, for my own part, I think that the former meaning is more appropriate.

In the rest of the passage there is an inversion of the natural order; for, after having spoken of “love” and “faith,” he adds, “towards Christ and towards saints,” while, on the contrary, the contrast would demand that “Christ” should be put in the second part of the clause as the object to which our faith looks. <sup>F2</sup>

**6. *That the communication of thy faith may be effectual.*** This clause is somewhat obscure; but I shall endeavor to elucidate it in such a manner that my readers may somewhat understand Paul’s meaning. First, it ought to be known that the Apostle is not continuing to give the praise of Philemon, but that, on the contrary, he expresses those blessings for which he prays to God. These words are connected with what he had formerly said, that he “makes mention of him in his prayers.” (<570104> Philemon 1:4.) What blessing then did he ask for Philemon? That his faith, exercising itself by good works, might be proved to be true, and not unprofitable. He calls it “the communication of faith,” because it does not remain inactive and concealed within, but is manifested to men by actual effects. Although faith has a hidden residence in the heart, yet it communicates itself to men by good works. It is, therefore, as if he had said, “That thy faith, by communicating itself, may demonstrate its efficacy in every good thing.

*The knowledge of every good thing* denotes experience. He wishes that, by its effects, faith may be proved to be effectual. This takes place, when the men with whom we converse know our godly and holy life; and therefore, he says, *of every good thing which is in you*; for everything in us that is good makes known our faith.

***Towards Christ Jesus.*** The phrase εἰς Χριστόν may be explained to mean “through Christ.” But, for my own part, if I were at liberty, I would rather translate it as equivalent to ἐν Χριστῷ, “in Christ;” for the gifts of God dwell in us in such a manner, that nevertheless, we are partakers of them only so far as we are members of Christ. Yet because the words *in you* go before, I am afraid that the harshness of the expression would give offense. Accordingly, I have not ventured to make any alteration in the words, but

only wished to mention it to my readers, that, after full consideration, they may choose either of those meanings which they prefer.

*7. We have much grace and consolation.* Although this reading is found in the majority of Greek copies, yet I think that it ought to be translated *joy*; for, since there is little difference between *χάριν* and *χαράν*, it would be easy to mistake a single letter. Besides, Paul elsewhere employs the word *χάριν* to mean “joy;” at least, if we believe Chrysostom on this matter. What has “grace” to do with “consolation?”

*For thy love.* It is plain enough what he means, that he has great joy and consolation, because Philemon administered relief to the necessities of the godly. This was singular love, to feel so much joy on account of the benefit received by others. Besides, the Apostle does not only speak of his personal joy, but says that many rejoiced on account of the kindness and benevolence with which Philemon had aided religious men.

*Because the bowels of the saints have been refreshed by thee, brother.* “To refresh the bowels” is an expression used by Paul to mean, to give relief from distresses, or to aid the wretched in such a manner that, having their minds composed, and being free from all uneasiness and grief, they may find repose. “The bowels” mean the affections, and *ἀνάπαυσις* denotes tranquillity; and therefore they are greatly mistaken who torture this passage so as to make it refer to the belly and the nourishment of the body.

## PHILEMON 8-14

8. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,	8. Quapropter multam in Christo fiduciam habens imperandi tibi quod decet.
9. Yet, for love's sake, I rather beseech <i>thee</i> , being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.	9. Propter caritatem magis rogo, quum talis sim, nempe Paulus senex; nunc vero etiam vinctus Iesu Christi.
10. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:	10. Rogo autem to pro filio meo, quem genui in vinculis meis, Onesimo,
11. Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me	11. Qui aliquando tibi inutilis fuit, nunc autem et mihi et tibi utilis.
12. Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him that is mine own bowels;	12. Quem remisi; tu vero illum, hoc est, mea viscera, suscipe.
13. Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.	13. Quem ego volebam apud me ipsum retinere, ut pro to mihi ministraret in vinculis evangelii.
14. But without thy mind would I do nothing ; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.	14. Sed absque tua sententia nihil volui facere, ut non quasi secundum necessitatem esset bonum tuum, sed voluntarium.

8. *Wherefore, while I have great confidence in Christ to command thee.* That is, “though I have authority so that I might justly command thee, yet thy love makes me prefer to entreat thee.”

9. *Being such a one.* He claims the right to command on two grounds, that he is *an elder*, and that he is *a prisoner for Christ*. He says that, on account of Philemon's love, he chooses rather to entreat, because we interpose authority in commanding those things which we wish to extort by necessity even from the unwilling, but there is no need of commanding those who willingly obey. And because they who are ready of their own

accord to do their duty listen more willingly to a calm statement of what is necessary to be done than to the exercise of authority, with good reason does Paul, when he has to deal with an obedient man, use entreaty. By his example he shows that pastors should endeavor to draw disciples gently rather than to drag them by force; and indeed, when, by condescending to entreaty, he foregoes his right, this has far greater power to obtain his wish than if he issued a command. Besides, he claims nothing for himself, but in Christ, that is, on account of the office which he has received from him; for he does not mean that they whom Christ has appointed to be apostles are destitute of authority.

*What is proper.* By adding this, he means that teachers have not power to enact whatever they please, but that their authority is confined within these limits, that they must not command anything but “what is proper,” and, in other respects, consistent with every man’s duty. Hence (as I said a little before) pastors are reminded that the hearts of their people must be soothed with all possible gentleness, wherever this method is likely to be more advantageous, but yet so as to know that they who are treated so gently have nothing less exacted from them than what they ought to do.

The designation “elder,” here, denotes not age, but office. He calls himself an apostle for this reason, that the person with whom he has to deal, and with whom he talks familiarly, is a fellow-laborer in the ministry of the word.

**10. *I beseech thee for my son.*** Since less weight is commonly attached to those prayers which are not founded in some cause of just commendation, Paul shows that Onesimus is so closely related to him as to afford a good reason for supplicating in his behalf. Here it is of importance to consider how deep is his condescension, when he gives the name of “son” to a slave, and a runaway, and a thief.

When he says that Onesimus has been *begotten by him* this must be understood to mean, that it was done by his ministry, and not by his power. To renew a soul of man and form it anew to the image of God — is not a human work, and it is of this spiritual regeneration that he now speaks. Yet because the soul is regenerated by faith, and “faith is by hearing,” (<sup><451017></sup> Romans 10:17,) on that, account he who administers the doctrine holds the place of a parent. Moreover, because the word of God preached by man is the seed of eternal life, we need not wonder that he



from whose mouth we receive that seed is called a father. Yet, at the same time, we must believe that, while the ministry of a man is efficacious in regenerating the soul, yet, strictly speaking, God himself regenerates by the power of his Spirit. These modes of expression, therefore, do not imply any opposition between God and man, but only show what God does by means of men. When he says that he had *begotten him in his bonds*, this circumstance adds weight to the commendation.

**12. *Receive him, that is, my bowels.*** Nothing could have been more powerful for assuaging the wrath of Philemon; for if he had refused to forgive his slave, he would thus have used cruelty against “the bowels” of Paul. This is remarkable kindness displayed by Paul, that he did not hesitate to receive, as it were into his bowels, a contemptible slave, and thief, and runaway, so as to defend him from the indignation of his master. And, indeed, if the conversion of a man to God were estimated by us, at its proper value, we too would embrace, in the same manner, those who should give evidence that they had truly and sincerely repented.

**13. *Whom I was desirous to keep beside me.*** This is another argument for the purpose of appeasing Philemon, that Paul sends him back a slave, of whose services, in other respects, he stood greatly in need. It would have been extreme cruelty, to disdain so strong affection manifested by Paul. He likewise states indirectly, that it will be a gratification to himself to have Onesimus sent back to him rather than that he should be harshly treated at home.

*That he might minister to me instead of thee in the bonds of the gospel.* He now mentions other circumstances: first, Onesimus will supply the place of his master, by performing this service; secondly, Paul himself, through modesty, was unwilling to deprive Philemon of his right; and, thirdly, Philemon will receive more applause, if, after having had his slave restored to him, he shall willingly and generously send him back. From this last consideration we infer, that we ought to aid the martyrs of Christ by every kind office in our power, while they are laboring for the testimony of the gospel; for if exile, imprisonment stripes, blows, and violent seizing of our property, are believed by us to belong to the gospel, as Paul here calls them, whoever refuses to share and partake of them separates himself even from Christ. Undoubtedly the defense of the gospel belongs alike to all. Accordingly, he who endures persecution, for the sake of the gospel, ought

not to be regarded as a private individual, but as one who publicly represents the whole Church. Hence it follows, that all believers ought to be united in taking care of it, so that they may not, as is frequently done, leave the gospel to be defended in the person of one man.

**14. *That thy benefit might not be by constraint.*** This is drawn from the general rule, that no sacrifices are acceptable to God but those which are freely offered. Paul speaks of almsgiving in the same manner. (<470907>2 Corinthians 9:7.) **Τό ἀγαθόν** is here put for “acts of kindness,” and willingness is contrasted with constraint, when there is no other opportunity of putting to the test a generous and cheerful act of the will; for that duty which is generously performed, and not through influence exercised by others, is alone entitled to full praise. It is also worthy of observation, that Paul, while he acknowledges that Onesimus was to blame in past time, affirms that he is changed; and lest Philemon should have any doubt that his slave returns to him with a new disposition and different conduct, Paul says that he has made full trial of his repentance by personal knowledge.

PHILEMON 15-19	
15. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;	15. Forte' enim ideo separatus fuit ad tempus, ut perpetuo eum retineres;
16. Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord?	16. Non jam ut servum, sed super servum fratrem dilectum maxime mihi, quanto magis tibi et in carne et in Domino?
17. If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.	17. Si igitur me habes consortem, suscipe eum tanquam me.
18. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on mine account;	18. Si vero qua in re to laesit, vel aliquid debet, id mihi imputa
19. I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.	19. Ego Paulus scripsi mea manu, ego solvam, ut ne dicam tibi, quod et to ipsum mihi debes.

**15. *For perhaps he was separated.*** If we are angry on account of offenses committed by men, our minds ought to be soothed, when we perceive that those things which were done through malice have been turned to a different end by the purpose of God. A joyful result may be regarded as a remedy for evils, which is held out to us by the hand of God for blotting out offenses. Thus Joseph — when he takes into consideration, that the wonderful providence of God brought it about, that, though he was sold as a slave, yet he was elevated to that high rank, from which he could provide food for his brethren and his father — forgets the treachery and cruelty of his brethren, and says, that he was sent before on their account.

(<sup><014505></sup>Genesis 45:5.)

Paul therefore reminds Philemon that he ought not to be so greatly offended at the flight of his slave, for it was the cause of a benefit not to be regretted. So long as Onesimus was at heart a runaway, Philemon, though he had him in his house, did not actually enjoy him as his property; for he was wicked and unfaithful, and could not be of real advantage. He says, therefore, that he was a wanderer for a little time, that, by changing his place, he might be converted and become a new man. And he prudently softens everything, by calling the flight a departure, and adding, that it was only *for a time*.

***That thou mightest receive him for ever.*** Lastly, he contrasts the perpetuity of the advantage with the short duration of the loss.

***But above a servant, a beloved brother.*** He next brings forward another advantage of the flight, that Onesimus has not only been corrected by means of it, so as to become a useful slave, but that he has become the “brother” of his master.

***Especially to me.*** Lest the heart of Onesimus, wounded by the offense which was still fresh, should be reluctant to admit the brotherly appellation, Paul claims Onesimus first of all, as his own “brother.” Hence he infers that Philemon is much more closely related to him, because both of them had the same relationship in the Lord according to the Spirit, but, according to the flesh, Onesimus is a member of his family. Here we behold the uncommon modesty of Paul, who bestows on a worthless slave the title of a brother, and even calls him a dearly beloved brother to himself. And, indeed, it would be excessive pride, if we should be ashamed of acknowledging as our brother those whom God accounts to be his sons.

*How much more to thee.* By these words he does not mean that Philemon is higher in rank according to the Spirit; but the meaning is, “Seeing that he is especially a brother to me, he must be much more so to thee; for there is a twofold relationship between you.”

We must hold it to be an undoubted truth, that Paul does not rashly or lightly (as many people do) answer for a man of whom he knows little, or extol his faith before he has ascertained it by strong proofs, and therefore in the person of Onesimus there is exhibited a memorable example of repentance. We know how wicked the dispositions of slaves were, so that scarcely one in a hundred ever came to be of real use. As to Onesimus, we may conjecture from his flight, that he had been hardened in depravity by long habit and practice. It is therefore uncommon and wonderful virtue to lay aside the vices by which his nature was polluted, so that the Apostle can truly declare that he has now become another man.

From the same source proceeds a profitable doctrine, that the elect of God are sometimes brought to salvation by a method that could not have been believed, contrary to general expectation, by circuitous windings, and even by labyrinths. Onesimus lived in a religious and holy family, and, being banished from it by his own evil actions, he deliberately, as it were, withdraws far from God and from eternal life. Yet God, by hidden providence, wonderfully directs his pernicious flight, so that he meets with Paul.

**17. *If, therefore, thou holdest me to be thy associate.*** Here he lowers himself still further, by giving up his right and his honor to a runaway, and putting him in his own room, as he will shortly afterwards offer himself to be his cautioner. He reckoned it to be of vast importance that Onesimus should have a mild and gentle master, that immoderate severity might not drive him to despair. That is the object which Paul toils so earnestly to accomplish. And his example warns us how affectionately we ought to aid a sinner who has given us proof of his repentance. And if it is our duty to intercede for others, in order to obtain forgiveness for those who repent, much more should we ourselves treat them with kindness and gentleness.

**18. *If in any thing he hath done thee injury.*** Hence we may infer that Onesimus had likewise stolen something from his master, as was customary with fugitives; and yet he softens the criminality of the act, by adding, or *if he oweth thee anything*. Not only was there a bond between

them recognised by civil law, but the slave had become indebted to his master by the wrong which he had inflicted on him. So much the greater, therefore, was the kindness of Paul, who was even ready to give satisfaction for a crime.

**19. *Not to tell thee that thou owest to me thyself.*** By this expression he intended to describe how confidently he believes that he will obtain it; as if he had said, “There is nothing that thou couldest refuse to give me, even though I should demand thyself.” To the same purpose is what follows about lodging and other matters, as we shall immediately see.

There remains one question. How does Paul—who, if he had not been aided by the churches, had not the means of living sparingly and frugally — promise to pay money? Amidst such poverty and want this does certainly appear to be a ridiculous promise; but it is easy to see that, by this form of expression, Paul beseeches Philemon not to ask anything back from his slave. Though he does not speak ironically, yet, by an indirect figure, he requests him to blot out and cancel this account. The meaning, therefore, is — “I wish that thou shouldest not contend with thy slave, unless thou choosest to have me for thy debtor in his stead.” For he immediately adds that Philemon is altogether his own; and he who claims the whole man as his property, need not give himself uneasiness about paying money.

## PHILEMON 20-25

<b>20.</b> Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.	<b>20.</b> Certe frater, ego te fruar in Domino: refocilla mea viscera in Domino.
<b>21.</b> Having confidence in thy obedience, I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.	<b>21.</b> Persuassus de tua obedientia scripsi tibi, sciens etiam, quod supra id, quod scribo, factururus sis.
<b>22.</b> But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.	<b>22.</b> Simul vero praepara mihi hospitium; spero enim quod etiam per vestras preces donabor vobis.
<b>23.</b> There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus;	<b>23.</b> Salutant te Epaphras concaptivus meus in Christo Iesu:
<b>24.</b> Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-laborers.	<b>24.</b> Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, cooperarii mei.
<b>25.</b> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.	<b>25.</b> Gratia Domini nostri Iesu Christi cum spiritu vestro. Amen.
Written from Rome to Philemon by Onesimus a servant.	Ad Philemonem missa fuit e Roma per Onesimum servum.

**20. *Yea, brother.*** This affirmation is used in order to increase the ardor of the exhortation; as if he had said — “Now shall it be clearly proved that there hath been no variance between thee and me, but that, on the contrary, thou art sincerely attached to me, and that all that thou hadst is at my disposal, if thou pardon offenses and receive into favor him who is so closely related to me.”

***Refresh my bowels in the Lord.*** He again repeats the same form of expressions which he had previously employed. Hence we infer that the faith of the gospel does not overturn civil government, or set aside the power and authority which masters have over slaves. For Philemon was not a man of the ordinary rank, but a fellow-laborer of Paul in cultivating Christ’s vineyard; and yet that power over a slave which was permitted by the law is not taken away, but he is only commanded to receive him kindly by granting forgiveness, and is even humbly besought by Paul to restore him to his former condition.

When Paul pleads so humbly in behalf of another, we are reminded how far distant they are from true repentance who obstinately excuse their vices, or who, without shame and without tokens of humility, acknowledge indeed that they have sinned, but in such a manner as if they had never sinned. When Onesimus saw so distinguished an apostle of Christ plead so eagerly in his behalf, he, must undoubtedly have been much more humbled, that he might bend the heart of his master to be merciful to him. To the same purpose is the excuse which he offers (Philemon 1:21) for writing so boldly, because he knew that Philemon would do more than he had been requested.

**21.** *But at the same time prepare for me a lodging.* This confidence must have powerfully excited and moved Philemon; and next, he holds out to him the hope of being gratified by his own arrival. Although we do not know whether or not Paul was afterwards released from prison, yet there is no absurdity in this statement, even though he was disappointed of the hope which he cherished about God's temporal kindness. He had no confident hope of his release, further than if it pleased God. Accordingly, he always kept his mind in suspense, till the will of God was made known by the result.

*That through your prayers I shall be given to you.* Here it deserves notice, that he says that everything that believers obtain "through their prayers," is "given" to them; for hence we infer that our prayers, though they are not unsuccessful, yet have no power through their own merit; for what is yielded to them is of free grace.

**24.** *Demas.* This is the same person who afterwards forsook him, as he complains in the Second Epistle to Timothy (<570410> 2 Timothy 4:10.) And if one of Paul's assistants, having become weary and discouraged, was afterwards drawn aside by the vanity of the world, let no man reckon too confidently on the zeal of a single year; but, considering how large a portion of the journey still remains to be accomplished, let him pray to God for steadfastness.

**END OF THE COMMENTARIES ON THE EPISTLE  
TO PHILEMON.**

# A TRANSLATION OF CALVIN'S VERSION

## OF THE

# EPISTLE OF PAUL TO PHILEMON

- 1 PAUL, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy a brother,
- 2 To Philemon our friend and fellow-laborer, and to Apphia the beloved, and to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church which is in thy house.
- 3 Grace (be) to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 4 I give thanks to my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,
- 5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast towards the Lord Jesus and towards all saints,
- 6 That the communication of thy faith may be effectual, by the knowledge of every good thing which is in thee towards Christ Jesus.
- 7 For we have much grace (*or, joy*) and consolation on account of thy love, because the bowels of the saints have been refreshed by thee, brother.
- 8 Wherefore, while I have great confidence in Christ to command thee what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather entreat thee;
- 9 Being such a one as Paul the aged (*or, elder,*) and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.
- 10 I beseech thee for my son, whom I have begotten in my bonds,



- 11** Onesimus, who formerly was unprofitable to thee, but now is profitable both to thee and to me;
- 12** Whom I have sent back; receive him therefore, that is, my bowels;
- 13** Whom I was desirous to keep beside me, that he might minister to me instead of thee in the bonds of the gospel.
- 14** But without thy opinion I would do nothing, that thy benefit might not be by constraint, but of free choice.
- 15** For perhaps for this reason he was separated for a time, that thou mightest receive him for ever;
- 16** Not now as a slave, but above a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, how much more to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord?
- 17** If therefore thou holdest me to be thy associate, receive him as myself.
- 18** And if in anything he hath done thee injury, or oweth thee anything, place it to my account.
- 19** I Paul have written it with my own hand, I will pay it; not to tell thee that thou owest me even thyself.
- 20** Yea, brother, let me enjoy thee<sup>fla</sup> in the Lord; refresh my bowels in the Lord.
- 21** Being convinced of thy obedience, I have written to thee, knowing that thou wilt do beyond what I write.
- 22** But at the same time prepare for me a lodging; for I hope that through your prayers I shall be given to you.
- 23** Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus,
- 24** Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers, salute thee.
- 25** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (be) with your spirit. Amen.

*It was sent from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a slave.*

# FOOTNOTES

<sup>ft1a</sup> “Ou, recoive ce plaisir de toy.” “Or, receive this pleasure from thee.”

<sup>ft1</sup> “De la douceur, moderation, et humanite.” “Of gentleness, moderation, and kindness.”

<sup>ft2</sup> It has sometimes occurred to me, that the intricacy of this passage might be removed, first, by the transposition suggested by CALVIN, and, next, by transposing the 5th verse so as to place it before the 4th. “Hearing of thy love towards all saints, and of thy faith which thou hast towards Lord Jesus, I give thanks unto my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, That the communication of thy faith may be effectual, through the knowledge of every good thing which is in thee towards Christ Jesus.” - *Ed.*