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Greetings For the New Year

Dear friends of the Lord's family, we extend to you our hearty greetings and good wishes as we cross the threshold of another year. We trust that each of us can truthfully sing with the poet --

"All the way my Savior leads me,
What have I to ask beside?"

Remember that the great Watchman of spiritual Israel, the Lord, does not change. His promises are all yea and amen to those who obey him -- to all who by faith abide in him, trusting in the merit of his atonement -- who, possessing his spirit of love, are seeking to walk circumspectly in his footsteps. To all such -- if they continue in his ways -- we may be sure that 1988 will be a happy year.

But how many of those who know these things are disposed to fear, doubt, and disbelief thereby paving the way for their own troubles! It requires a long time and much thought in order *for some* of the pupils in the school of Christ to discover *why* they are in this school and under the discipline of our heavenly teacher!

Surely, the object of teaching should be to be taught. It is a privilege to be taught by him whom God has appointed to be the teacher of all his justified and consecrated sons, those adopted into his family. We do not come to *this* teacher to obtain an exemption, stating that we do not need his instruction. Rather, applying his Word to our experiences (his "providences" to all his pupils) we are enabled to grow in his likeness -- in grace and in knowledge.

At first, if we pupils get confused and mistake our own self-will for God's will, we are not to be surprised when our teacher points this out. Our failures should not make us rebellious and resentful of his lessons, nor should we become discouraged and lose heart. On the contrary, we are instructed to learn by every experience, seeking to practice the lessons that come during each day and using the ones we have already mastered on future days.

The most important lesson of the spiritual "school-term" is faith. The faith by which we first became the Lord's must now be encouraged to grow, and our faith can grow only by increasing our knowledge -- the knowledge of the Lord -- of his methods, his plan, his character. We must

study our teacher's words and conduct as well as studying the evidences of his overruling in our own lives and his instructions to us individually. His instruction in our lives must be interpreted in keeping with his recorded words to others. Much of what we first accepted by faith will gradually become knowledge. And knowledge will give us the basis for greater faith in, as well as a greater love for, our Redeemer.

There are, among the students of any school, various degrees of progress. Some students are in the primary stage of development. Others have progressed to intermediate stages. Some have reached the graduating class. The figurative graduating degree of discipleship in the school of Christ is the one for which we are all striving: the mindedness of Christ -- and this is best exemplified by our willing submission to whatever God may will for us. Without passing this final test we cannot finish our course with joy or hear the Master's well done, or receive the prize of our high calling.

Dear brethren, let us outline our course of "study" for 1988. Let us also encourage those who have not yet enrolled in the "school" of Christ to do so. As we progress in the lessons of Christ we cannot help but find that the peace of God which passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7) will rule our hearts. This peace can transform our trials of faith into blessings, the sorrows and disappointments of our earthly hopes into channels of God's grace, and our perplexities into full assurance of faith. We will graduate from this school if we learn this one lesson:

Full Submission to the Lord's Will

Are you saying in your heart, "That is what I have been wanting to learn ever since I consecrated myself to the Lord?" All of the truly devoted children of God have felt this same way, implicitly recognizing their inability to perform what they want to do. And many take a long time to learn that their mistake is in *wanting* to fully submit to God's will instead of *doing so*.

A good intention is an excellent thing. Good intentions are important. But if the wish does not lead to performance it is wasted! Some people never progress beyond wishing. They wish to rise at a certain hour of the morning or discharge certain obligations or offer some service to another or speak to some person -- but they never fulfill their wishes in deeds. Good wishes should be followed by a good and determined will. Now, without dropping a single good *wish*, let us immediately begin making this a successful year by throwing our entire strength into *doing*.

But take care! You are on treacherous ground: A strong will is as dangerous as it is valuable. If misdirected you have started a force (energy) which may lead you astray. Conscientious people are in special danger here: When they get hold of an idea which their consciences approve they may make as great a blunder as did Saul of Tarsus under very similar circumstances.

There is only one safe course. The preliminary courses in our figurative school of Christ are designed to teach one lesson. This final lesson is that the "will" which must be exercised in good deeds and good words is not to be our will. Oh no! We must learn to adopt God's will as our own. We became the Lord's pupils when we surrendered our own wills to him. Our first lessons in this spiritual school were in learning to keep our will dead. We can all reflect on some lessons that we may have learned in the past -- on some victories over self-will:

"Lord, at length thy love hath conquered,
None of self, and all of thee."

But after we have adopted the Lord's will and made it ours and after we have decided to *do* the Lord's will -- we are still in danger. Our next error could be an error in misunderstanding -- in taking the will of our fellow men, or the *will of* some church, as the will of God. We must remember that Satan also uses human agencies. God allows the Adversary to use deceit and misdirection to test us. This must always be remembered. We cannot allow ourselves, therefore, to despise human assistance or to forget that God has in times past used human agencies for the instruction of his people. We must learn, instead, to put our assurance in God and in his Word. These are our authorities and by them we learn to distinguish between the true Teacher and all false teachers. *"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"* (Isa. 8:20).

When we search the Scriptures for the will of God we find that the great *work* which God asks of us is not a work for others, but a work in ourselves: subduing, conquering, and ruling ourselves. *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification"* (1 Thess. 4:3, RSV). Everything else is subservient to this goal. Among the subservient goals are those which men often hold up to be primary: our service to our brethren in Christ, our efforts to alleviate the sufferings of our fellow men, assistance to foreign missions, etc.. The Apostle Paul clearly explains this point, saying that if we could preach eloquently to others or give our wealth to the poor or even suffer martyrdom for the truth's sake, if we did so without love we would be nothing in God's estimation (cf. 1 Cor. 13). The spirit of Christ and of the Father must grow in us as the ruling principle of our lives.

If the power of God's truth is gradually sanctifying us, then our wills will pass away and the Lord's will will possess us.

We can learn to accept his will as ours in thought, word, and action. If this happens, even if we were denied all outward means of service, we will have attained the mind of Christ. *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification."* Let nothing disguise this truth: neither other truths or errors. Let God's will dominate our lives and if we do so our pathway will be clearly marked.

Consider how often God when there has been a heart which longs to serve him has opened up the opportunities to serve divine truths to others. God commanded the light to shine (2 Cor. 4:6) and he gives no commands which cannot be obeyed. If you seek opportunities of service and there are none forthcoming, then something is wrong. You may have been seeking some *special* service of your own preference. Possibly our great Teacher sees that there is some pride remaining in your heart and that to grant your preference would be to crush you with your own desires. Possibly the great Teacher is telling you to do with your strength what already lies in your reach (Eccl. 9:10). Perhaps he sees that you must learn humility before you can serve others. Act quickly, therefore! The time is short! *"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God 'opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'"* (1 Pet. 5:6).

Take Trials in Stride

Have you ever suffered for righteousness' sake? Have you ever been a martyr to principle? Jesus stated that this would happen: *"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you..."* (Matthew 5:11, RSV). The Apostle makes the point more plainly, *"Indeed all who live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Tim. 3:12). Could Jesus and Paul have erred? Wishing to live a godly life is not enough. Resign yourself to *do* the Lord's will wherever you are able to find it and prove it in his Word -- using the best human help you can obtain in seeking and in proving. Soon the persecutions will come, and from the most unexpected quarters.

When persecutions do come, be prepared -- by God's word. There will be temptations to your flesh -- the adversary will attempt to embitter your heart and stir up in you the anger, malice, hatred, envy, and strife (the elements of the old nature) which you had previously considered dead. If this happens, then Satan will have had the victory. You will have been overcome by the temptation rather than having overcome it.

The mind which you counted dead will even use your best qualities to fight against persecution. Your old mind will call upon your sense of justice to come to its defense. Your own conscientiousness will be called to witness that the persecution is unjustified, your charity and spirituality, your love of family and friends, and of every good quality of your life -- all will be called forth in the name of "rightfully" fighting the persecution or in the cause of abandoning your pathway to godliness.

You will be in the midst of the battle. Unless you have been previously armed with the assorted pieces of armor found in the divine Word you are sure to lose faith, become terrified, and flee. And those *who* flee will be wounded and taken captive by the Adversary: for our armor is a front armor -- there is no protection for our backsides. The armor is invulnerable so long as we stand firm for the truth, the right, and do so in our great Captain's name and strength. But the armor is also a hindrance and a weakness to those who draw back from the fight and retreat.

But why should we be terrified? Or why should we flee? Is this not the *test* of our loyalty and devotion to our Lord and his Word for which all of our earlier experiences were training us? Is this not the test which the Lord declares to be indispensable to all who would be victorious in the fight of faith and made joint heirs in his kingdom? Are not these trials the very things for which we have prayed? Are not incidental persecutions just a part of that trying and testing which the Lord forewarned us would be a part of the cost of discipleship? And are these not the very persecutions the absence of which in our earlier Christian days made us wonder whether we were, in fact, acceptable sons of God (cf. Heb. 12:8)?

Our answers to these questions must be a resounding, "Yes! Lord," even though our human weaknesses keep these experiences from being pleasant and even though we often regard them through the veil of spontaneous tears. The Lord is pleased with such an answer from us. His promises are powerful and alive to those who freely confess him in this manner.

Love Your Enemies

When we can answer "yes" to these questions it is time to fight our Christian battle (1 Tim. 6:12). When we are able to accept God's strength we can triumph over self-will. Now is when we are most able to accept the buffeting, the slander, and the misrepresentations which come (sometimes) from good intentions. And we can overcome with good deeds, meekness, and patience. When we have been made submissive the Lord's spirit of love, dwelling richly in, us, will demonstrate itself in the control of our words, actions, and even our thoughts. Even the most minor of hard feelings must be overcome. The least bit of bitterness against our accusers must be fought. The Lord clearly sets before us the degree to which our victory must be gained:

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27,28, RSV). *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them"* (Romans 12:14).

The word "curse" in the preceding text carries with it, according to some scholars, the thought of "injuring." Here we are being warned not to "injure" our enemies. But early in a person's Christian

walk their definition of "not injuring" will most likely have been merely that of not killing, or wounding *one's* enemies, physically. In time, however, as we heed our Teacher's admonition to learn of him (Matt. 11:29), we note the more extensively applied principle. Note how the Apostle Peter treats this subject:

For to this *you* have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:21-23, RSV).

If you are a faithful pupil, it *will* not be long until you see that the perfect law of liberty, the law of Christ, is a discerner of the very thoughts and intents of the heart and that while you must hate all sin, you cannot hate any sinner and yet have the love of God perfected *in* your heart. You see that this means that you not only must not retaliate and revile your foes but must not even *wish* to do so. The evil which must be conquered and the selfish conditions which gave it birth must be utterly destroyed and replaced with love the spirit of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Cor. 6:10).

Are you tempted, to complain, to feel disappointed at your situation in life, or your experiences as a believer? This is the time to remember that all such feelings are evidences of self-will. To have such feelings is to be reminded that your own will is not quite as dead as you might have believed. The person who has buried his will in God can hardly be disappointed at what God has permitted. No! In every experience they will search *by faith* to discover the way in which God has arranged or supervised that they should have arrived at just that point. "*We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose*" (Rom. 8:28, RSV). One evidence of our nearness to our spiritual "graduation" is whether we are able to accept the oppositions of the great Adversary, of the world, and of our own flesh *patiently*, without complaining. Our joyfulness is evidence of our disciplinary experience, which God metes out for *our* development.

This is what the good fight is all about. The first battle is the severest. With each victory the subsequent battles are easier. Victory strengthens our will (the Lord's will in us) *to* please him. Our hopes for what God will do also are strengthened as we see what he *has* done. Our perception grows keener. Faith's strength grows and our endurance is extended. With the very first victory there are accompanying blessings and to these are added more with each subsequent success: rest, peace, joy in the holy Spirit, full assurance of faith (Matt. 5:11).

This is the only standpoint from which it is possible to accept with determined resignation the tests of our patience, perseverance, faith, hope, and love for the Lord that he may allow to come upon us. And from this condition of acceptance blessings will result, even if the circumstances seem at the moment far from blessed. This is also the only standpoint from which we can fully receive God's blessings and promises. Only when *we* are victorious over self-will and when the sanctifying work in us is continuing by the power of God's truth in our lives can all things be said to be ours (Rom. 8:38), and only then does that promise apply both to things *present* and to things *future*. *This is* the point of graduation from the school of Christ, dearly beloved. And it *is* toward this goal that we would work (in the *spirit*) this year.. Let us join our hearts, our prayers, and our determination along with that of each of our brethren in Christ, yea, and with his as well, that we, may be completely sanctified and suitable for his use *to* the glory of God. "*Then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet*" (Rom. 16:20).

May our prayers ascend to God as in the words of the psalmist:

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of *my* heart be acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14, RSV).

Every evening let us review the day, judging our own hearts (wills) by the Lord's law of perfect love -- praying for his forgiveness of our shortcomings, and thanking our Lord for the strength and grace which brought its victories.

Come, let *us* anew our journey pursue,
Roll round with the year,
And never stand still till the Master appear,
His adorable *will* let us gladly fulfill,
And our talents improve,
By the patience of hope, and the labor of love.

Paul to Philemon, part 1

A Model Letter Examined

"Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved and fellow-worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in thy house: Grace to you and peace from God and the Lord Jesus Christ." - Philemon 1-3, ARV

Here, in the brief moment of a single epistle divided into only twenty-five short verses, two very lovable characters enter our Christian lives with their transforming fellowship. Portrayed by the vivid pen of the apostle Paul, 'a prisoner of Jesus Christ,' they illustrate valuable lessons in practical Christianity.

The writer appeals to the emotions of the reader in the very first phrase. In five previous letters Paul calls himself 'an apostle,' twice he writes without designation, and once he is 'a servant of Jesus Christ.' Here, in order to soften the heart of Philemon, his brother in Christ, Paul speaks of the liberty which he himself had relinquished so that the name of his beloved Master might be heralded farther afield.

Why has a letter which relates to an entirely private matter been placed in the archives of sacred Scripture? This epistle makes no contribution to creed or theological points. The letter has made great contributions however. In these verses the power of unselfish love is revealed (a thing unknown to most minds of that, and this, day). Paul's words unite two men: on the natural level they are at opposite poles of society; on the spiritual plane they are united. Genuine love is divine. All counterfeits are crude selfishness.

Are Christians Social Activists?

This letter illustrates in a practical way the true Christian attitude toward social problems. Largely ignoring the problems in which these two men found themselves the epistle corrects them only by example. The subject is slavery, and its treatment is a supreme example of refined courtesy, delicate subtleties, and tender consideration. The younger Pliny, a Roman letter writer of a generation later, has left us an example of how the world would deal with this matter. A comparison of the two letters may be beneficial and so we quote it as translated in the 'Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.'

Your freedman, who so greatly displeased you, as you told me, has come to me, fallen at my feet, and clung to them as if they were your own; he wept much, begged much, was much silent too, and in brief guaranteed to me his penitence. I think him really reformed, for he feels that he has sinned. You are angry, as I know; justly angry, as I also know; but clemency wins its highest praise when the reasons for anger are most just. You have loved the man, and I hope you will yet love him again; in the interval [interim] you are only asked to let yourself be brought to forgive. You will be quite free to be angry again if he deserves it; and this will have the more excuse if now you yield. Allow something for his youth, something for his tears, something for your own indulgence [of him]; do not put him to torture, or you may torture yourself too. For tortured you are when you, kindest of men, are angry. I fear I may seem rather to insist than entreat if I join my prayers to his. But I will join them, the more fully and without reserve as I chide him sharply and severely, adding a stern warning that I could never beg him off again. This for him for I had to frighten him; but I take another tone with you! Perhaps I shall entreat again, and win again; so the case is one in which I may properly entreat, and you may properly bestow. Farewell.

Pliny is far outdistanced by Paul. The apostle is spontaneously warm, gracefully ingenious, even playful, with a natural courtesy that rises above what is usually termed tact. One wonders at the talent that could on the same day write both the profound and far-reaching philosophy of the letter to the Colossian brethren and this model of simple grace, kindness, and exquisite tenderness. The perfection of this letter leaves one feeling not merely inspired, but that the guiding hand of the one who never errs may be discerned in every pen stroke.

The letter opens with greetings, closes with benedictions, and in between there are matters of personal interest and graceful complements to Philemon which propose to soften the heart of the reader to receive his suggestion. The central figures of the story are Philemon (an elder in the Colossian ecclesia and a slave-owner) and Onesimus (a run-away slave who is returning to his master in a new role).

Sanctified Reason

The intense hatred for Jewry by the Romans brought Paul before Caesar's power and into his imprisonment. In designating himself as a 'prisoner of Jesus Christ,' he ignores Caesar as a negligible second cause. Any manacles Paul wore were as if of gold, precious emblems of servitude to his heavenly bridegroom, ornaments placed on his wrists by his glorified Lord. What to others would have been a disgrace were to him a 'grace'.(Phil. 1:7) Like others of the apostles he rejoices that he is counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. (Acts 5:41)

To one who was sustained by the consciousness that no harm can be done to the ambassador of the King of kings, all of the Pharisees, the governors, stewards, and even Caesar himself were to Paul's faith-inspired vision the mere pawns on life's chess board; they were a part of the necessary equipment that all things may work together for good. With assurance he can say, 'none of these things move me',(Acts 20:24) for neither they nor anything else could separate him from Christ's love. (Rom. 8:35)

Commentators think that Philemon was a man of considerable wealth because of the salutation to the church in his house (Philemon 2). But they seem to forget that there is no evidence of any church edifice until near the end of the second century, and that where two or three would gather together in Jesus' name he promised to be present (Matthew 18:20; cf. Rom. 16:3,5 Col. 4:15). The fact that Philemon owned slaves would also not necessarily indicate much about his social standing. In that day slaves far out-numbered free men and they were found in most homes.

Commentators also use Philemon's ability to entertain traveling brethren as an indication of his wealth. This reasoning is faulty because the spirit of Christianity has long led to the dividing of a crust with one who is in need, and those who travel find their joy in the fellowship furnished in breaking bread -- regardless of the limitations of the household appointments or table provisions.

We are not told how long Onesimus had been absent from Philemon's house. If Philemon had received the truth into his heart and had begun to witness for his Master before Onesimus left, then it is interesting to note that the apostle commends him with the salutation 'our dear fellow-laborer,' instead of chiding him for not having converted Onesimus. Note that there is nothing of the spirit of distinction between laity and clergy which is found in later centuries from the pens of those who thought to sit as successors to Paul. Here, he forgets his special honors and places himself on Philemon's level, as another servant in the harvest field. And how well his words demonstrate that we are all brethren, all equally acceptable to the master of the harvest. From sowing to reaping there are a variety of jobs to be done. Each servant who serves faithfully until

the end of the harvest would hear that 'well done good servant' from his master. The individual who removed the first shovel-full of soil for the construction of the Cologne Cathedral performed a task as necessary for the completion of that work as the person who gave it the last finishing touch a thousand years later So also we may regard Philemon. He has his part in making the spiritual bride ready for her wedding day. He supplied somewhat just as Paul alluded that each true believer would when he wrote:

'From whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love.' - Ephesians 4:16

Yes, Philemon contributed the flicker of a single candle to the light of the glorious gospel of Christ. He added to the veritable beacon which Paul had kindled. But the difference between them lay in the circumference of the circles in which the two men had influence, not on the inherent value of their individual service. Paul had none of that vulgar tendency of thinking little of that modest service of obscure people. Nor did any brother receive a front seat from his hand because of his golden jewelry or appearance. It did not matter to Paul whether Philemon was wealthy (even if it has mattered to many commentators). He was not interested in the earthly treasures that had been laid aside; no, Paul was interested in whether Philemon would be faithful in laying up treasure where thieves could not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:19,20) Paul's letter is an encouragement to Philemon, to Onesimus, and to us to lay up treasures in heaven.

Who are Apphia and Archippus? They are generally regarded as the wife and son of Philemon. The latter is called a 'fellow-soldier,' but at the lips of such a battle-worn warrior as Paul the words may have as easily applied to a raw recruit. Note how Paul's Christian attitude contrasts to that of the world. First, he accepts the younger man as a fellow soldier. Next, he owns Apphia as his sister in Christ. The customs of those days had set a great gulf between various races, the sexes, and divergent planes of society. To Paul this gulf had been filled by the social upheaval which resulted from the death of Christ, and the literal earthquake of the crucifixion day was a mere precursor of the great figurative earthquake that shook the social conditions of the earth.

Paul does not suggest that the church at Colosse might not receive Onesimus. He introduces this returned slave to them as 'one of yourselves.' But in the centuries which have passed between his day and ours men still have not learned the lesson taught in the epistle to the Galatians:

'There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise.' - Galatians 3:28,29

The world has progressed further in modifying its views of this subject, more than one might expect; but, unfortunately, in some cases individual Christian homes have progressed less than one has a right to expect.

Model Greetings

Paul's customary greeting was 'grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' In writing to Philemon there was no need to alter his pattern. The same greeting was his due as a Christian brother. What could be added to these wonderful words? 'Grace' includes salvation from its initial to its final step. In his well-wishing, grace is accompanied by 'peace,' just as it must always be in every life where there is the grace of God, 'for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the holy spirit'.(Rom. 14:17, ASV)

Eternity can offer no more.

Grace is undeserved favor, unselfishly bestowed, no ulterior motive marring the process; and when God is the giver, it is unrequited, for who has anything to give in return? Should there have been some few Christians through the age who have done all that was commanded of them, (Matt. 28:20) even these would still have been unprofitable servants. (Luke 17:10)

There are interesting suggestions in the literal meanings of these two words. Grace means 'what causes leaping for joy.' Peace means 'what brings unto unity.' Unity cannot endure where peace does not reign in the individual hearts, and therefore, in the affairs of the congregation. But how easily unity and peace are made when the hearts of the individuals are set on receiving the full measure of the grace of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even the thought causes responsive hearts to leap with joy.

The apostle, in his salutation, combines ideas from the cultures of both east and west. Grace is a salutation borrowed from the peoples of the West. Peace is the Eastern salutation which was often used by Jesus, and it is particularly appropriate to an area where the lanes of travel and commerce were often infested with bandits.

Grace is love in action toward those who are in some respect below the well-wisher. Wishing grace to another places one under the obligation of cooperating to secure grace. From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. (John 1:16) The evidence of our worthiness to receive this grace is shown by the faithfulness with which we both pray and act, so that the peace which others enjoy may never be disturbed, and rather, that their peace may be increased by our association. With divine forgiveness already granted, the grace of receiving supplies of sufficient strength for every time of need (Heb. 4:16) gives one the peace of God. What peace? The peace of knowing God's will and of resigning oneself to that will in joyful acquiescence. These two emotions can be fully appreciated only when the believer abides in his presence. (Psa. 16:7) We might be asked, however, do we know that we have genuinely been made to 'sit with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus'. (Eph. 2:6) Our only assurance of this reality can be in the quality of the peace which is manifested in and diffused by us.

What determines the nature of a person's peace? Is it the circumstances of the individual? No, it is in the casting of all of our burdens upon the Lord. If our burdens find full rest in him, we can experience the Sabbath rest that is the heritage of every true saint. People have diverse personalities. This notwithstanding, in our fellowship we can reach a perfect harmony by God's grace in spite of the natural discord which exists between us, just as the mountain stream and the pasture's ridge both find their end in an undisturbed pool in which is reflected the beauty of God's character as revealed in the works of his hands.

Peace, the Gift of God's Love

The child of God is privileged to carry grace and peace with him for the blessing of all with whom he comes in contact. If we find discord marring our associations, we do well to ask whether we have found it, or brought it. We should not be surprised, either, if we are unable to carry enough of the spirit of the Master to bring fullness of peace into every association of our life. But our presence should bring the presence of the Master and some measure of his spirit into every assembly.

Coastal storms occasionally stir up wreckage from the ocean bottom and spread it along the shore, sometimes endangering the health of local residents. But a quiet, peaceful sea would not

have disturbed these things: such is the influence of the believer in Christ, like oil upon troubled waters. We should look 'carefully lest there be any man that falleth short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled'. (Heb 12:15, ASV) 'Let the peace of God garrison your hearts'. (Col 3:15, author's translation) Discord is present in every human heart. This is due to evil tendencies and the performance of imperfect humanity. So, if our salutation of 'peace' is to be effective, there must be a guard set upon our life by the filling of our heart with the holy spirit: 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh'.(Matt. 12:34) If we fill our heart with the treasures of wisdom from above (one of the primary characteristics of which is peace), then we will be recognized as ambassadors of peace.

There are exceptions to this principle:

'If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men. Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God; for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord. But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.' - Romans 12:18-21, ASV

The least which we can do is to always make sure that our spirit is contrary to the spirit of the flesh, manifested in contention and strife. We must recognize that even these emotions are sometimes an evidence of over zealousness. There are points which are dear to all of us. And we all may be eager to bless others with our own knowledge. But going beyond making our thoughts available, forcing our views upon another to the disregard of their rights, is to make ourselves contentious. Our salutation of 'peace' might stir up our brother, but the example of peace might inspire him to stretch his every nerve in an effort to fill his heart with the spirit and peace of God. Such a demonstration of peace may convince him that there is more of the grace of God for him to secure; that is a lesson much more important than truth un-lived.

Peace, Fellowship's Guardian

Evidently, Colosse had problems. Greeks, Jews, barbarians, and Cythians were all having difficulty getting along peaceably. (Col 3:11) They were all there in the church by the calling of God, they were all 'holy and beloved' (Col. 3:12). What they needed was 'a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other... even as the Lord forgave' (Col. 3:12, 13, ASV) them Above all else they needed to put on love, the bond of maturity (Col. 3:14). But these things were not enough. It was necessary that they not stop, not be satisfied; they, and we all should 'let the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts, to the which also [we] were called in one body' (Col. 3:15).

Anxiety is a disease for which some cure must be found. There is danger not only of the situation spreading into every avenue of an individual's life, but also of its infecting others. Who would wish to condemn another to many hours of personal suffering, or even to the loss of those eternal joys promised them at the right hand of the majesty on high? (Rom. 8:34)

'In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.' - Philippians 4:6 (cf. Gal. 5:22 Rom. 14:17 Isa. 26:3 Psa. 119:165)

Like a river glorious *is* God's perfect peace,
Over all victorious in its glad increase.
Perfect; yet it floweth *fuller* every day;
Perfect; yet it groweth *deeper* all the way.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are truly blest,
Finding, as he promised, perfect peace and rest.
Hidden in the hollow of his blessed hand,
Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry toucheth spirit there.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are truly blest, '
Finding, as he promised, perfect peace and rest.
Every joy or trial cometh from above,
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of love.
We may trust him solely, all for us to do;
They who trust him wholly, find him wholly true.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are truly blest,
Finding, as he promised, perfect peace and rest.

- P.E. Thomson

A Model Letter Examined

Paul to Philemon, part 2

"I thank my God always, making mention of thee in my prayers, hearing of thy love, and of the faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; that the fellowship of thy faith may become effectual, in the knowledge of every good thing which is in you, unto Christ. For I had much joy and comfort in thy love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through thee, brother." - Philemon 4-7, ASV

The body of the letter begins with the first phrase given above and it is a sentiment found in most of Paul's epistles. In this epistle there is a specific reason for this expression, 'I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers' (Moffatt). By the end of the letter Paul will have asked a favor of Philemon and the only recompense to be had by Philemon would be through his God. The thing for which Paul is expressing thanks is the beauty of Philemon's character. He is saying that the same God who is working in himself is the one to whom all credit must be given for any beauty that Philemon possesses. In one phrase he has acknowledged his God, his duty and obligations to him, expressed his reverence for him, and reminded Philemon that we have no good in us except what has come from God.

The construction of the Greek text permits us to connect 'always' with the giving of thanks (as the Revised Version and others do), or as an indication of the frequency with which he made mention of Philemon in his prayers. Probably both are true. The graciousness in his own heart makes him recognize the same in Philemon. It would not be strange if every one of Paul's prayers would have remembered Philemon as one of the outstanding examples of God's grace. Some are inclined to devote their prayers to those who (in their estimation) are lacking in the divine requirements. This is not the apostle's practice. He knows from experience that the saints who are most faithful in their obligations and most appreciative of their privileges are the ones whom Satan is most eager to turn from the pathway of right.

Paul records no selfish prayer. He leaves us an example of thinking about others. The luscious fruitage of his life should inspire us to develop that self-forgetfulness in which we may love without seeking our own interests. (1 Cor. 13:5)

Paul says that he thanked God [the Greek indicates the idea 'continually'] because he heard of their love and faith extended toward the Lord and his saints. No one would accuse him of insincerity in such a prayer or a scribe his love of Philemon to weakness. A baser heart, however, might attribute the graceful complement which Paul here pays to mere diplomacy. Some Bible students, recognizing that Paul's phraseology actually describes Philemon's faith and love as for the Lord Jesus and unto his saints, for some reason have decided that the apostle did not express himself as well as they could have done and that what he meant to describe was faith in the Lord Jesus and love for the saints. Their difficulty lies in limiting a person's emotions to those which they themselves can feel. They seem to think that it is not possible to have both a love for a fellow saint and also a faith in that saint. And this is precisely the reason for Paul's letter: he hoped that Philemon was the sort of individual in whom he could have faith that his letter would bring results. If Philemon were not this kind of person, he would be inclined to think evil of other people rather than rejoicing in and magnifying their virtues. To express one's faith in another person does not mean that we expect them to perform everything perfectly (or even according to our expectations). This is merely a coincidence that God's grace will accomplish in them the same miracle which is being accomplished in all of the fully consecrated children of God. 'For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure'.(Phil. 2:13)

[Some commentators (see Ellicott's note, where the view is discussed and rejected) explain this as 'fidelity' (as probably Gal. 5:22 and certainly Titus 2:10). But that meaning is rare in St. Paul, and needs strong evidence for adoption in any given case. The ruling meaning, 'trust,' 'reliance,' is quite in place here.' - Cambridge Bible, page 169.]

The received text shows two prepositions indicating love and faith toward Christ and unto the saints. In the former:

'The idea is that of a movement of yearning after an un-attained good ... as of the soaring of an eagle to the sun, or the climbing [of] tendrils to the summit of the supporting stem. In Christ there is always something beyond.' - Expositor's Bible

But any Christian is capable of developing faith in and love for all fellow saints in proportion to their worthiness, therefore the force of the expression 'love and faith unto the saints.' Those who take Christ as their 'center' will draw circles of love and faith which are large enough to encompass their brethren, and the circles of their love will be large enough even to include their enemies. Paul is here asking Philemon to make sure that his circle is large enough for his present need - to include Onesimus. The graceful compliment which he pays is intended to assure this condition. If he had suspected Philemon of harboring pride, the compliment would not have been risked. A good heart is made better by sincere appreciation.

Purpose Finally Revealed

The apostle hints at his purpose in the sixth verse: 'That the communication [ASV: 'fellowship'] of thy faith may become effectual.' The word that is used here is also used elsewhere. It describes our fellowship with the Father and with the son as used by the beloved John. It denotes our partnership in the divine nature as used by Peter. Paul elsewhere uses it to describe our partnership in the bread and cup of the memorial supper. (cf. Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4, 2 Cor. 9:13;

Phil 1:5 Heb. 13:16) It is generally used with the idea of mutuality - benefaction - a sharing with another. That viewpoint appears to be too narrow in this context. Benjamin Wilson, in the translation given in his Diaglott, shows verse five as parenthetical. By this arrangement the apostle is saying that his prayers are to the effect that Philemon's fellowships, which are the outgrowth of his faith, may become active to the extent that others will take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus and learned of him. The prayer is not that they may learn something good about Philemon but that his conduct may be a revelation of 'every good thing which is in' him. Some manuscripts read 'every good thing that is in us,' a thought not out of harmony with the passage; but the reading 'in you' seems a much more likely one, as the apostle is preparing to suggest to Philemon a service to his Master which will be a revelation of a Christlike love far surpassing the world's variety, a greater demonstration than even most Christians ever have the privilege of making.

Philemon has grown admirably in his likeness to Jesus. But the apostle Paul is insatiable in his desire to have Philemon 'filled with all the fullness of God.' He is, we infer, urging him not to be a rocking-chair Christian. Rather, the entire purpose of the Christian life is the exerting of every ounce of strength that is in his control toward attaining 'the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus'.(Phil. 3:14, emphasis added)

Living Faith: A Commendation

Paul must have been confident that Philemon would not be one of those who would prefer to be involved with great and marvelous works. Hence, he does not apologize for asking from him a devotion to the thing that counts most and will some day receive the Master's approval in the words, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant... enter thou into the joy of thy lord'.(Matt. 25:21) Only those who have attained the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13) will hear those words. These will have had their prayer fulfilled, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith. How strange that mere baubles can darken so great a light. How could a person ever think that there is the danger of a lessening of good works because one is devoting himself to learning more of his God. That point the apostle covers in his epistle to the Colossians (Col. 1:10). There is no other process by which to walk worthy of God. The ninth and tenth verses read as follows:

'[I] do not cease praying on your behalf, that you maybe filled, as to the exact knowledge of his will, withall spiritual wisdom and understanding; to walk worthily of the Lord, pleasing him in all things; bringing forth fruit by every good work, and increasing in the exact knowledge of God.' - Diaglott, emphasis added).

If one does not attempt to live up to his religion, it eventually shrinks to the level of his life. The apostle is asking our brother to live up to both his theories and the actual practices of the past; asking him not to have a mere theory but a practical religion; not a religion of works, but a religion in which the works are based on love and faith - an outgrowth of them.

Heaven is for Christians, not for theorists. A Christian is one who walks as his Master walked, who went about doing good and healing others. That Christian does not do things just to be seen by men. True Christians are content to lie low at the Master's feet so that others may see him who instructed us that in the giving of charity we ought not to let the right hand know what the left hand is doing. (Matt. 6:3) This we find is the basis upon which God shall reward us, and only by the grace of humility can we learn to keep the silence of our own mouths so that God may reward us in his due time. 'Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God'.(Phil. 1:11) Yes, the fruit of righteousness is by Jesus Christ and it is for the glory and praise of God. When we seek our own works, when we would have the

praise of men, then we disgrace him and ourselves. It is then that we risk having these words pronounced over our life's efforts: 'And I then will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity'.(Matt. 7:23)

At some time in the past Philemon had eternally dedicated himself to the doing of the will of God and to living to and for his glory. This step may have occurred at the instruction of Paul. He had been taught to acknowledge the one who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purity for himself a people of his own, who are zealous of good deeds. (cf. Titus 2:14) Elsewhere in the same letter we are instructed, 'And let our people also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful'.(Titus 3:14) The Revised Standard Version of this verse is clearer and perhaps more exact: 'Let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful.' Paul is carrying out the instructions to 'consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works'.(Heb. 10:24)

We have suggested that Paul is not asking something new of Philemon. The seventh verse tells him that in his prison cell in Rome he has been much comforted to know that Philemon has been faithfully living up to his privileges. It was probably quite a surprise to Philemon to learn that anything he had done could be a comfort to so distinguished a prisoner in Rome, many hundreds of miles away. Perhaps it will be still more of a surprise to him to learn that his faithfulness has been an inspiration to the saints who have lived during the nineteen hundred years since he completed his course. It would be well for each of us to remember that we can never know what effect the littlest word or the simplest act may have on others. It is, therefore, a great responsibility for us to conduct ourselves as is appropriate to the members of the body of Christ. Only if we are careful about our actions can we join Paul in saying,

'But thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savor of his knowledge in every place. For we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one a savor from death unto death; to the other a savor from life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?' - 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, ASV

We conclude by summarizing Paul's thoughts thus far: Philemon, you have had many wonderful opportunities of carrying out the Master's instruction to let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. In heaven's providence the privilege has now been granted you of a still larger demonstration of the power of divine love all excelling. Though I am physically absent from you, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice that you are building up a superstructure of love on the only dependable foundation. I rejoice, too, in the firmness of your faith in Christ and his body members. I have no doubt as to the outcome of this present trial upon your faith and love.

Can he have the same faith in us -- who live in the perilous times of the end of the quickly closing age?

"Help us to help each other Lord -- "
"Each other's burdens bear."
"Let each his friendly aid afford,"
"To sooth another's care."
"Blest be the tie that binds"
"Our hearts in Christian love;"
"The fellowship of kindred minds"
"Is like to that above."

A Model Letter Examined

Paul to Philemon, part 3

'Wherefore, though I have boldness in Christ to enjoin thee that which is befitting, yet for love's sake I rather beseech, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now a prisoner also of Christ Jesus: I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bounds, Onesimus, who was once unprofitable to thee, but now is profitable to thee and to me.' - **Verses 8 to 11** (American Standard Version)

We have seen that Martin Luther's recommendation of this lovely letter is not exaggerated. He wrote of it:

'This epistle showeth a right noble, lovely example of Christian love. Here we see how St. Paul layeth himself out for poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleadeth for his cause with his master; and so setteth himself as if he were Onesimus, and had himself done wrong to Philemon. Yet this he doth not with force nor constraint, as if he had full right. Nay he putteth himself out of his rights; whereby he constraineth Philemon (to perceive) that he also must strip himself of his rights. Even as Christ did for us with God... thus also doeth St. Paul for Onesimus with Philemon. For Christ also hath put himself out of his rights, and with love and humbleness hath prevailed with his father that he should lay aside wrath and his rights, and receive us to grace, for Christ's sake, who so earnestly intercedeth for us, and layeth himself out so tenderly for us. For we are all his Onesimi, if we will believe it.'

This passage is not to be taken as a statement of doubt on Luther's part as to the Father's love. 'It is his pictorial way of putting the work of atonement and intercession.'

Professor Franke Halle (18th Century) wrote: 'The Epistle of Philemon far surpasses all the wisdom of the world.' The better we understand history the more outstanding is Paul's wisdom in approaching this very delicate matter. Slaves were living tools in those days, a form of private property just as literally as machinery in a factory is today. Their only purpose - for most masters - was to provide a luxurious living for their master. They were not their own but were purchased, an idea which Paul applies spiritually to us and our relationship with Jesus. (1 Cor. 6:19) The extension was complete: the master thought; the slave acted.

It would be natural to think that this situation was apt to be very bad for the slaves and very good for the master. The fact was that all Christian slaves, as the apostles indicate, were by their very condition given wonderful opportunities of learning the submission necessary (absolutely necessary) to every one under the headship of our heavenly Master. The lesson is of such extreme importance that the apostle even advises slaves to remain in the condition in which the Lord found them upon becoming Christians - even slavery - unless definitely delivered by the Lord's hand. The apostles clearly made the point that as cruel as their earthly master may have been they were to accept him as though he had been placed over them by the Lord himself. (cf. 1 Cor. 7:21,22)

Slaves under Roman law had little protection from the cruelty of their master. Death - even death by crucifixion -- could be imposed upon a slave for the most trifling of offenses. During the reign of Augustus this lack of protection reached its extreme when it was declared that if a slave killed his master then not only the offending slave but also every fellow slave should be put to death. Vedlus Pollis, a friend of Emperor Augustus, chose to put his slaves to death by throwing them into a fish pond where they became the food for his huge electric eels. One day when he was entertaining the emperor, a cup-bearer broke a crystal goblet. Sentence was immediately passed

upon him. The poor fellow threw himself at the prince's feet, begging not for forgiveness, but that he might be killed by some more humane method. Augustus ordered the man's freedom.

Slaves: A Menace To Life

As part of the system of protection against slaves the government furnished *fugitivarii*, the truant officers of the day. It was their business to track down runaway slaves and return them - often to the death penalty. This severity was largely due to the popular fear that the slave population would revolt. In the year 300 B.C. there were 21,000 freedmen in Athens who lived in daily fear of their 400,000 slaves. Conditions were similar in Philemon's day.

When Onesimus bore this letter to Philemon, he had to take it upon faith that the master whom he had served had been developing a loving and merciful heart like that of Jesus who 'humbled himself... and took upon him the form of a servant'. (Phil. 2:8,7) Jesus ended his period of service by performing one of the most menial of services. He wrapped a towel around himself, kneeled at the feet of his own messengers, and washed from their feet the travel's stains.

Onesimus had to be strong in faith when he left the presence of Paul on his way home. He had to be confident in the transforming power of God's love and in Philemon's willingness to be transformed - being devoted to the Lord and his word. Even so, it is not surprising to note the delicate balance in which he weighs every word used to prepare Philemon's heart for the test which this great ordeal would put upon his Christianity. Paul was precipitating a test of Philemon's love and faith toward the Lord Jesus, and toward his saint -- in particular, toward Onesimus.

Paul's plea adds two sentimental touches. He asks for Philemon's sympathy toward himself as a prisoner 'of Jesus Christ.' Then, he extends his own request for sympathy to include his status as 'Paul, the aged.' We do not think that he referred to his natural age but probably that he had been aged before his time by the experiences of which he tells: 'In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.' - 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

'In Christ' one who had endured so much for him could be 'bold,' but aside from that relationship he had nothing he would think of using to place any obligation upon Philemon. Love is the only appropriate means of securing from a brother of Philemon's development 'that which is fitting' to a Christian.

There must have been a great bond of love between the two brothers, but it is not this personal love to which the apostle appeals. He begs 'for love's sake,' for the sake of the standard of Christian love, that its reputation may be maintained among the brethren and before the heathen and angels, remembering that we are a spectacle unto men and to angels. (1Co 4:9)

Paul could have said, 'I enjoin you to do what I am about to request because I am the apostle Paul,' or he could have said, 'You know that I have a better brain than the average and I therefore urge you to follow the advice I am about to give.' Philemon might, possibly, have accepted his

instructions on that basis, but we are glad for that brother's sake and for the sake of every one who has profited by this letter that the infinitely superior argument was used. Self-love says, There is no excuse for your not seeing it my way. Christian love says, I beseech you, therefore by the tender mercies of Jesus Christ, by the love he has implanted in the hearts of every true Christian. There must be outward authority at times, but love does not seek compliance, only a oneness in resignation to the will of God. The lightest wish of mutual love is stronger than the sternest word of authority. The light touch of a finger will start the rocking stones in motion, though howling tempests have failed to move them. The secret is in knowing where to touch.

Earthquakes and spirit trumpet-blasts left Israel disobedient. Even the perfect humanity of Jesus failed to bring reformation to that stiff-necked, hard-hearted generation. The Lord has planned something more effective than the sight of a perfect human body to bring them to their knees and teach them to 'confess with their tongues'.(Phil. 2:11) 'The goodness of God leadeth to repentance'.(Rom. 2:4) The gentleness of an entreating voice halted the threatenings and slaughter of the young zealot. Hear the tender, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?'.(Acts 9:4) Learn the lesson of love's power! Apparently Paul needed only that one lesson to convince him that love is more effective than authority. The latter, however, is still the usual method of the weak or the selfish man. A lazy teacher prefers temporary obedience to the permanency that love secures. It alone writes in indelible letters upon the tablets of the heart.

Wisdom Which Comes From Above

Many Christian precepts may be found in heathen religions; but in none of them is its motivating love to be discovered. Paul knows that it is a thing operative at all times in the faithful Christian and considers it appropriate that he should remind Philemon that an exercise of that love in doing the thing he is about to request will give relief to the aching bones of his aged, wearied body, acting as it were as a little silk to be put under the manacles that gall the flesh of the 'prisoner of Jesus Christ.'

Beginning with verse ten Paul has sufficiently prepared the ground so that he can now plainly tell Philemon what has been trembling on his lips all this time: 'I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bounds, Onesimus.' There is a touch of tenderness here in the Greek that our English does not show, a touch used elsewhere by the apostle. It is accomplished by reserving the name until the very close of his petition. This he follows in verse eleven with a little play on words (Onesimus meaning 'profitable'), to add the softening influence of humor to the situation. (For a few other instances of Paul's tenderness notice his discourse at Miletus to the Ephesian elders, his speech before Agrippa, Acts 22:2-29; all of Rome Gal. 4:11-20; Phil. 1:29-2:2; 2 Cor. 6:1-13)

Formerly a slave, a thief, Onesimus is now, 'my son Onesimus.' Some lesser lights might be accused of 'darkening counsel' by speaking of him as his son, but this is a favorite figure of the apostle. (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15 Gal. 3:25,26; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2, 3 Tim. 2:1; Titus 1:4) It was his way of showing his love and trust in a brother.

We are told that the name Philemon comes from a word meaning 'friendly,' and that it has the idea of 'one who is loving or kindly.' The fact that our brother bore this name does not mean that this was necessarily his disposition before Christianity brought its influence upon him. It merely indicates that this is what his parents may have desired of him. With such ambitions for their son we can imagine that in all probability he was above average, a real gentleman.

Classical literature brands slaves as generally 'liars, thieves, idle, treacherous, master-haters, ever

watchful for opportunities of retribution.' The name Onesimus, however, was frequently borne by slaves. Its meaning 'is helpful, profitable.' Such descriptive words were often used as slave names. Verse eleven indicates that Onesimus had not lived up to his name, but Paul who had 'begotten' him in his bonds does not doubt that he will now be as 'profitable' to Philemon as he had proved to be to himself, serving the apostle faithfully in his imprisonment. Paul's faith was not in Philemon or Onesimus personally but in the grace of God working in their hearts, and he was confident it would keep them faithful even in a trial such as this would be for both. Evidently both of them had indicated steadfastness, not spasmodically but continually applying for 'grace sufficient.'

This writer once had the experience of riding twenty-five miles on an electric trolley at a time of year when the power lines were covered with ice. Only after the comparatively warm trolley wheel had been on the wire long enough to melt the ice could any electrical contact be made. A flash would result, sending the car a few feet ahead and lighting up the countryside and producing a fairy-land of sparkling ice - but it did not get the passengers very far on the way to their destination. There are Christians who are like that illustration. Their interest, apparently, is not in the sanctifying power of truth - that steady, daily, striving for more of his likeness. Their enthusiasm is often super-abundant and their zeal is frequently deflected to speculative interpretation and the nourishment of the natural desires. Writing about such believers A. McClaren says: 'If a Christian does not show that his religion is changing him into the fair likeness of his Master, and fitting him for all relations of life, the reason is simply that he has so little of it, and that little so mechanical and tepid.'

The order of the apostle's next expression is important: 'profitable to thee and to me.' While the words sound correct to us, they are not according to the Greek usage. Their customary order was, 'to me and to thee.' Paul by his reversal places an emphasis on the pronouns: 'You yourself will find him helpful even as I myself have done.'

By the failure of Onesimus we are reminded that we too are unprofitable servants. There is less a different hope for us than that which existed for Onesimus. Even if we do all that we are commanded (and who does?) we can still be no more than unprofitable servants. The price that was paid to induct us into our heavenly Father's service is too great a one to make possible our returning anything that could be called profit. However, when we have reached our heavenly home, things will be as different for us as they were for Onesimus on reaching Colosse. As runaway vagabonds, those who have robbed our Master of that which was his due, we come pleading admittance, confidently expecting acceptance as those 'now profitable.' Our Father has the love that suffers long and is kind, (1 Cor. 13:4) the love that hopes for all things (verse 7). His eldest son has the love that can say, 'If he hath wronged thee at all, or oweth thee aught, put that to mine account.'

A Model Letter Examined

Paul to Philemon, part 4

'I have sent [Onesimus] back to thee in his own person, that is, my very heart: whom I would fain have kept with me, that in thy behalf he might minister unto me in the bonds of the gospel: but without thy mind I would do nothing; that thy goodness should not be as of necessity, but of free will. For perhaps he was therefore parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest have him for ever; no longer as a servant, but more than a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much rather to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then thou countest me a partner; receive him as myself. But if he hath wronged thee at all, or oweth thee aught, put that to mine account; I Paul write it with mine own hand, I will repay it: that I say not unto thee that thou owest to me even thine own self besides.' - **Verses 12 to 19** (American Standard Version)

Fugitive slaves who sought refuge on the decks of English men-of-war soon discovered that the government sided with their owners, instructing that every one be returned to his master. Paul, similarly, sided with the slave owner. Onesimus, however, does not return as one who must be dragged from the horns of the altar. (1 Kings 2:28) Instead, he gladly returned to his servitude as a bond-slave of Jesus Christ.

We know not the intimate details of his thoughts as he carried Paul's letter to his master, Philemon. Perhaps he was fearful and tempted to turn back to the freedom which he had so briefly enjoyed. But that course offered no lasting freedom: if he were to be caught by the law he would be dragged back to his master; he would probably die, as well as all those others who had been his companions in slavery. An ordinary slave in an ordinary household could not help but be plagued by such thoughts. But Onesimus' nine-hundred-mile journey was not only taking him back to an earthly master but also to a fellow servant of Jesus Christ.

What is the strangest of all Christian experiences? Is it not, perhaps, the desire to be released from the bondage to Christ and his principles? The discrete answer to one's own heart's longing is, 'To whom shall we go?' (John 6:68) If we yield to our desire, we would only return to the bondage of corruption, (Rom. 8:21) the cords of sin, (Prov. 5:22) and would be departing from the service of Christ and entering the service of Satan. (cf. John 8:34; Rom. 6:16; 2 Pet. 2:10,20) There is a sad ending in store for those who do draw back. The last verse cited indicates that the 'latter end' of these is worse than their first condition. They were born in sin and shaped by iniquity, (Psa. 51:5) and it is a blessing for such that their lives will simply be ended - final destruction (Phil. 3:19) , nothingness. It is inconceivable that a loving God would continue their lives eternally, into ever increasing depths of depravity. No, the lives of these will end in final and complete destruction. (Heb. 6:6) That will be the only way to assure a cleansed universe for the habitation of God's obedient creatures.

Men instinctively realize their imperfection, excusing themselves for their failures. Some recognize that the cause of their failures lies in sin. It may be that this inherent recognition of sin is the reason that human organizations can so easily control and rule men. Christians are particularly aware of their need for direction, supervision, and correction. They joyfully accept the bonds of their one Master: he who can teach them to sever their connections with all previous bondages; he who can protect the servant from the degrading influences of sin and everything that would lower the standard of Christ-like living.

When the master is the mental superior of the servant, then servitude can be a blessing. That such is the case when any one enters the service of our Lord Jesus is manifest. He is wisdom personified. His character and compassion are perfect. His service is joy! Men avoid absolute

bondage even when they have never known complete freedom. Because of this aversion, man must be brought into subjection to the will of Christ.

What is the most important element of our freedom? Interestingly, Paul points out that it is not our bodily freedom from other humans:

'Wast thou called being a bondservant? care not for it: nay, even if thou canst become free, use it rather. For he that was called in the Lord being a bondservant, is the Lord's freedman: likewise he that was called being free, is Christ's bondservant... Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God.' - 1 Corinthians 7:21,22,24, ASV Paul, therefore, is sending Onesimus back to Philemon not as the servant of a human master but as the Lord's servant. Justice compelled Paul to send Onesimus back but love forced him to write this lovely letter. Onesimus' sanctified conscience and his consecrated desire for God's glory forced him to return.

Seemingly More Feeble

Paul and this slave had become intimate friends. Notice the figurative expression in the twelfth verse. He speaks of Onesimus as though he were part of his own body - as essential to him as his own heart and lungs. The symbolism here is not excessive. No saint can count himself spiritually healthy if he is not benefiting from the other members of the body whom the Lord has provided for his assistance. We will suffer spiritually if we do not take that which every member supplies (Eph. 4:16) and apply it to our lives. The King James translation uses the archaic word 'bowels' here; in our current vocabulary the word 'heart' more clearly conveys the idea which Paul expressed in the Greek of his day. The word he used is only applied to the 'higher organs' (those of thought, emotion, etc.) and as such it expresses a greater importance in the relationship than the Authorized reading suggests.

These preceding thoughts were Paul's seventh argument in Onesimus' favor. We move now to the eighth. Paul would have enjoyed keeping Onesimus there with him. He indicates that he had considered it -- and stifled the thought at its inception. He writes, saying that he was 'wishing,' but that he would do nothing without the consent of Philemon. 'The language is exact; there is a universe between [wishing and willing]' (Expositor's Bible). Justly, Paul could not have accepted the service of Onesimus without Philemon's consent and Paul does not even suggest the possibility of Onesimus being returned by Philemon to him. Paul imitates the heavenly Master by accepting his free-will service.

The church's present mission is preparatory to a larger mission than even those reforms which are so needed in this world! God's purposes will have to be accomplished before men will realize just how far short they have fallen (in even their best attempts to free each other from sin and selfishness). Men have emancipated many of their fellows - history tells the story plainly and with valor. But this freedom has been incomplete and the removal of one shackle has resulted in their more severe chafing under the other forms of bondage in which all men remain. The true church knows a different freedom, however. Whomever Christ makes free is free indeed. (Joh 8:36) Only a comparative few have taken advantage of this freedom, but Isaiah speaks of the extended emancipation which is yet to come:

'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach the good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.' - Isaiah 61:1

There will be only one exception to this liberty: all will have to submit to the Mediator of the

New Covenant. This Mediator is defined as our Lord Jesus Christ. (cf. Luke 2:32; 4:18) There is a similar mission pointed out for the followers of Jesus in the future. (cf. Isa. 42:6,7; Acts 13:47 Rom. 8:21) Yes, this is their work too! The spirit speaks of this as though it were something which the entire world awaits - even though they do not exactly understand what they are waiting for. When the sons of God are manifested, the world will know the blessings which God has planned for them. (Rom. 8:22)

Freed For Service

Soldiers of the cross are never drafted. Their only compulsion comes from the power of love. We understand that there will be a rigid rule in the Millennial kingdom of Jesus, but our understanding is broadened when we think of this as in the expression 'shepherding them with a rod of iron.' Appropriately, those who will assist Jesus in bringing liberty to Satan's captives are those who themselves appreciate that blessing. The Scriptures indicate that this will always be true of those because 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty'.(2 Cor. 3:17)

This liberty could easily be abused, becoming a stumbling block to brethren who are weaker in the faith: (1 Cor. 8:9)

'For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self.' - Gal. 5:13,14

Contrasting Illustrations

In Paul's next argument we find him beginning with a word which is very difficult for men to accept: 'perhaps.' But is it not better to begin with a 'perhaps' and change it in time (as we mature) to a 'truly' than to begin with a 'verily' and end by having to apologize and say 'I was wrong'? We can all learn by this careful use of words. However careful we may be in wording our statements, we can still be gracious and humble - just as our Master and as the apostle Paul give us example. It is doubtful that anyone has ever spoken only the certified words of the holy spirit without the interjection of their own personal opinions. And haven't we all found that at times our most completely thought-out ideas have been contradicted by the truth: disclaiming our thoughts?

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' - Isaiah 55:8,9

The apostle confirms this, saying that we are not 'sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God'.(2 Cor. 3:5, RSV)

Human errors can be made profitable to our spiritual progress if we know how to take them. We need to humbly confess our mistakes and when the next situation arises, to wait on the Lord (Psa. 123:2) for those things which the Lord will reveal to us. (Deut. 29:29) When we recognize that God's ways are higher than ours, we cannot help reflect that our carefully reasoned arguments must appear immature and infantile to the all-wise God. It should be apparent from the volume of Scriptural testimony that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3) have been hidden in Christ. No human system of discovery or speculation will detect even the greatest of these 'hidden' truths. These things are within his control; they await his time for their revealing. And in support of this fact we point to the many times that God denounced the prophets for speaking without his authorization. (cf. Jer. 14:14; Jer. 23:14-16, 25-32, etc.)

When Paul used the word 'perhaps' in the fifteenth verse, he was not speculating. He was not unclear about God's benevolence, but he was unclear about whether Philemon would demonstrate himself a mature Christian. Note how easy and attractive Paul presents the situation to Philemon. The King James translation uses the rather harsh word 'departed.' Paul's word in the original text is much softer. He says that Onesimus was 'parted from you for awhile.' It was clear to Paul that his God arranged all things after the counsel of his own will. (Eph. 1:11) Paul did not doubt the wisdom which timed and directed the feet of Onesimus to the city where God's messenger waited with an abundance of time to preach to every listening ear. Paul's imprisonment gave him a special insight. The holy spirit was preparing them for the 'furtherance of the Gospel' (Phil. 1:12). And so, it was not a runaway slave whom Paul 'received.' Onesimus had been temporarily parted by divine providence so that Philemon might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother (verses 15 and 16).

A simple principle lies behind this situation. However, when we try to apply this concept to our lives, it becomes rather more difficult. He who lives such a life does not merely believe. Nor does he merely hope. To live that kind of life one must know. (Heb. 10:3) Faith surpasses any mechanical radar in assisting the consecrated mind to see beyond the difficulties of life to the inspiration which is to be found in the ocean of God's love. Those who are unaided by faith view the world only through the fog of human speculation.

Let us illustrate this point. Flax is a plant used to make the great hawsers which tow giant ships into a harbor. The plant also produces lovely blue flower bells. But these flowers are not spared when the entire plant is plunged into a chemical vat to rot (a process necessary to soften the tough flax fibers so that they may later be turned into heavy cable). Sown in weakness, raised in power is the life story of a Christian. Men see only the pain and suffering when they try to judge the Almighty. Faith, however, sees a kingdom filling the entire earth with righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy spirit. There is an old Moravian translation of the Scriptures which says, 'to his kingdom and peace there shall be no boundary.'

Hopeful Love

Philemon 16 reminds us of Paul's attachment for the slave. He has become 'beloved... in the Lord.' Paul expected that he would become even more precious to Philemon: 'beloved, specially to me, but how much rather to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord.' But Philemon would first have to accept Onesimus in his new capacity as a brother and the first few days of their reunion would be the most difficult. Paul pleads, therefore, 'If then thou countest me a partner, receive him as myself.' This is not the demand of a superior but the plea of a peer: two men standing on equal footing. Paul asks the heartiest of welcomes for his protege, 'more than a servant, a brother beloved.' There are many men who are willing to be partners on Sunday with those whom they despise during the rest of the week - if only they will remember their places from Monday to Saturday. But the only satisfactory arrangement for the apostle was an unrestricted seven-day partnership. Anything less than this would be living after the flesh. (cf. Gal. 2:20 Rom. 8:8,9) Almost any human mind would be intrigued at the prospect of a 'partnership' with the Father and the son. Our beloved John assures us that if we live according to the understanding which such a partnership will bring to our lives, then we will also have partnership with one another. (1 John 1:3) He adds a startling provision to this idea, saying that 'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin' (1 John 1:7). The implication here is that if one were to reject the partnership of the humblest brother, he would risk rejection of the blood of our Savior himself.

This is an extreme warning! Nevertheless, consider the variety of fences which have been made

by human interests so as to exclude others from this partnership at various times during the Gospel age. If we fully believed this text, we would tend to accept as brethren all who name the name of Christ regardless of the fact that human reason may doubt the person's sincerity. The ancient writer Horace records one of the common fears of the slave owner: the 'anxious master fears lest his slaves shall pillage him and fly.' Note how Paul avoids antagonizing Philemon when he refers to this crime in reference to Onesimus. He does not tell Philemon, 'Onesimus has robbed you, he told me so himself.' Instead he says, 'but if he has wronged you.' Love is kind (1 Cor. 13:4) and Paul exercises love in selecting these gentle words to address the subject.

'Charge that to my account,' is the lawyer-like phraseology he used, and we sense in the words a half-playful attitude on the part of Paul. But, nevertheless, he completes the legality of his offer saying, 'I Paul write it with mine own hand.' At least this much of the letter was written by Paul, assuring Philemon that this was a debt which could be collected. The Greek here is an infrequent use by Paul of a rare word in description of an even more rarely found Christ-like act. Paul took upon himself the chastisement of Onesimus' peace. (Isa. 53:5)

It is not necessary to fully understand the circumstances which made possible Paul's fourteenth argument: 'I do not say that you owe me your own life.' Whether the allusion is physical or spiritual does not matter. But it points to another basis upon which Paul could have commanded Philemon. But Paul had learned the lesson of the far greater power of love. 'True love never presses its claims, nor recounts its services' (Alexander MacLaren). The truth of these words brands many of the acts which parade themselves as 'acts of love' as being of their true master, the Devil. Paul is not boasting. His gesture of love hopes to obtain for both of these brothers the favor of the Lord. Love delights to give, asking no return. Selfishness has its eye on reward, the praise of men, the comfort of a satisfied conscience, and the warmth of self-commendation. We, too, have a debt. We owe our lives to Christ. If there is gratitude, there is response, an eagerness to give what we can -- all that we have. (cf. Gal. 4:15; 1 Thess. 2:8)

A Model Letter Examined **Paul to Philemon, part 5**

'Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my heart in Christ. Having confidence in thine obedience I write unto thee, knowing that thou wilt do even beyond what I say. But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I hope that through your prayers I shall be granted unto you. Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, saluteth thee; and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen' - Verses 20 to 25 (American Standard Version)

The apostle Paul's final argument to Philemon is to ask of him a favor. He already knows of Philemon's faithfulness. Now he asks the additional comfort of Philemon's cooperation. 'Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my heart in Christ.' The word 'yea,' here, is an adverbial form of pleading for which no one seems to have found an adequate English substitute when it is used as in this passage. Similarly, the original word for the English 'joy' is impossible to put into graceful English. The form of speech which the apostle here employs is that of a play on words, the most difficult of the translator's problems.

A literal translation of this text (though an awkward one) would be: 'Oh, brother, let me be *onesimied* ('have joy') by you.' In effect Paul is saying, I am sending you Onesimus, the helpful, and thus you have the opportunity to be helpful to me, comforting my spirit by letting me hear that you have extended your helpfulness to this new brother in Christ -- one with whom you might be tempted to be overly severe (in view of his past unhelpfulness, yes even unfaithfulness).

I hope you will remember the need of an aged prisoner for all the consolation he can have and add my need to your reasons for accepting this former slave, now a new fellow-bond-servant of Christ, accepting him just as you would accept myself. I am not asking that you give me merely human pleasure; it is my 'heart in Christ Jesus' to which you will be giving rest, repose.

The word 'heart' (cf. Philemon 7 and Philemon 12) is the English nearest approach to a correct translation of the Greek. The word indicates the 'higher organs' of the heart and lungs and reminds us of Paul's plea: 'Let this mind be in you which is in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5) . Four words are required to translate into English the thought of one Greek word. This verb implies much more than the translation suggests. It is based on the noun which is the name of the diaphragm (or 'midriff') - the most powerful muscle in the human body. This muscle separates the higher and lower organs. All of the organs (on both sides of the diaphragm) were used by the ancients to represent the mind, and fittingly they represent the two prevailing types. What is Paul thus exhorting? 'Let this separation be in you which was in Christ Jesus who never lived for a moment for the gratification of the lower desires, but always lived for the things of eternity.'

He is instructing us to diligently (2 Pet. 1:5) set our affections or 'heart' (Col. 3:2) on heavenly things. So doing, we can be filled with the spirit of God (Acts 9:17) and breathe that heavenly atmosphere with him.

The under-priests can only be prepared to share the office of the glorious high priest by their being conformed to his teachings and character. All else must be made secondary to their development of characters like his. Paul uses a symbol to express this idea: 'Jesus Christ himself, being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit'.(Eph 2:20-22, ASV) Those for whom old things have passed away and all things have become new, receive as in the Lord (Rom. 16:2) those whom he has chosen in himself (Rom. 16:13); marry in the Lord; (1 Cor. 7:39) labor in the Lord (1 Cor. 16:12); do their glorying in the Lord; (1 Cor. 1:31) recognize all faithfulness in themselves and in others as traceable to their relationship in the Lord. He is in fact their 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28; cf. 1 Cor. 4:17).

The intimate interrelationship between Christians is illustrated by a picture of the Lord's 'body.' He is the head and does all the thinking. We are the organs through which he accomplishes his will. We are connected to the head by a mysterious spiritual nervous system and thus we are also connected with every other member for our mutual benefit. When one member suffers, all of the body suffers. (1 Cor. 12:25,26) Only a diseased member of the body would fail to respond to pain in other members of the body -- or to a threat to it. Only when we are in Christ Jesus can we conquer all harshness and judgmental thinking, those disheartening manifestations of selfishness - traces of which must persist in us until the day when we are filled with all of the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19) and when all the ugliness of the old self has been crowded out. It is that day when the faithful bride of Christ shall be ushered into the Father's presence. What a commendable ambition it is to seek to please other men in righteousness! But Christians should always recognize the higher motive that Paul suggests to Philemon. We all have opportunities to please other members in the Lord. We can all please others because of our relationship in that mystical body, and can therefore also please our head. Christians' words and actions should not be aimed at pleasing men but toward pleasing God (1 Thess. 2:4) .

No one would be surprised if Philemon's first thought had been, 'What will my neighbors think?' Whose neighbors cannot be counted on to criticize? Any leniency on his part would be viewed by his unbelieving neighbors as encouragements to revolt on the part of the thousands of slaves in their community. But Philemon could serve only one master! In order to please God it was

necessary that he not 'walk in the counsel of the ungodly'.(Psa. 1:1)

Paul's confidence in the success of his letter is seen in the twenty-first verse. Doubtless, some credit is due to his letter but most of the credit must go to the quality of Philemon's character. In review we note the reasons for Paul's confidence.

Philemon had a history of faithfulness. Since the request had been made as from a body member to a body member in Christ Jesus for the preservation of the principle which bound them together, love, Philemon could be expected to assent to Paul's request. Further, it was an opportunity to give comfort to an aged prisoner of Christ Jesus while risking nothing since Paul would pay any debt left by Onesimus. Additionally, Onesimus was a changed man and would not disappoint him, but would be found by Philemon to be profitable, as a brother, as a son, and as a fellow-bond-servant of Jesus Christ. Philemon was assured that the apostle loved Onesimus enough so that he wished he might keep him with him; but best of all because if he were there, Philemon had reason to believe that it was God who sent him away so that he might return as an added blessing to him and all the congregation in his house. In this state he would be more beloved to him than even to Paul, Philemon's own partner, and one to whom he owed his very life.

'But the liberal deviseth liberal things and in liberal things shall be established'.(Isa. 32:8, author's translation) One who has been liberal in giving himself (his all to the Lord) finds it easy to be liberal with others, generous in deeds, in giving and in judgment. Although Philemon knows these things, Paul makes his practice of them easier by expressing his confidence in him. Poor teachers often assure the disobedience of their students by treating them in such a way as to imply that they expect the student's disobedience. 'A will which mere authority could not bend, like iron when cold, may be made flexible when warmed by this gentle heat' of love in the heart and in the tone, is the testimony of Alexander MacLaren. Agreeing with this principle, the apostle writes: 'Having confidence in your obedience I write unto you, knowing that you will do even beyond what I say.' Love does not plan to do the least it can, but the most.

Lightfoot comments that 'the word emancipation seems to be trembling on the apostle's lips, and yet he does not once utter it.' No such suggestion was necessary for, as Wordsworth observes: 'By Christianizing the master, the Gospel enfranchised the slave. It did not legislate about mere names and forms, but it went to the root of the evil - it spoke to the heart of man. When the heart of the master was filled with divine grace and was warmed with the love of Christ, the rest would soon follow. The lips would speak kind words: the hands would do liberal things. Every Onesimus would be treated by every Philemon as a beloved brother in Christ.'

According to a person's disposition one could take Paul's added request for a place of lodging for himself either as a sly way of urging Philemon to prompt obedience or as a reward for the generosity toward Onesimus which he has already said he knows will be exercised.

Paul ardently wanted to visit Colosse. He asks for the prayers of his brother that he may have that privilege. 'I know you will act like a Christian toward brother Onesimus; but I hope my own eyes can have the joy of seeing you together as brothers.' We are not told if Paul did have that privilege but we do know that his prayers were answered. He did not say, 'Send Paul to Colosse because I wish it,' but 'Send Paul to Colosse if it is your will.' The first is the prayer of faith in self. The second is the prayer of faith in God and in his superior wisdom. Such a prayer can never be denied. However, the expression 'prayer of faith' is often misapplied to prayers of selfishness by those who are determined to have their own will done. True faith fears to have its own will considered, knowing that God's will is always as much higher than his as the heavens are higher than the earth. Many of the saints were praying for Stephen but he was stoned nevertheless. What

a blessing he has been to us in his martyr's death. Jesus prayed for Peter, but he denied the Lord anyway. He thus showed us the lengths to which God's mercy will reach.

The mutual love between Paul and Philemon must have inspired them to pray in earnest to know whether it was God's will that Paul 'come quickly.' Paul did not want to visit to check up on Philemon, driving him to obedience, but rather for the larger privilege and joy of service to the Lord's people. Joyful service freely given is the kind that yields the richest fruitage. It is said the finest wines are made from grapes which are so ripe that little pressure is required to extract their juice.

The pleadings of Paul and Jesus bear remarkable similarities. Both accept deeds done to their loved ones as if done to themselves. Both joy in the imperfect acts of those who respond because they are moved by love. Both expect that degree of love which will perform more than is requested. Both long for a day of reunion and use that mutual longing to inspire greater faithfulness. Paul, like Jesus Christ his master, prefers the tone of love to that of authority. He binds himself to pay all our indebtedness, reminds us that we owe him our lives - a debt that eternity cannot cancel - and asks us to prepare a place for him in our hearts where he can abide. Paul joins us in our prayer for assistance toward that end:

'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man.' - Eph 3:14-16

This letter closes with greetings from Epaphras and Aristarchus. The former is called his fellow prisoner and the latter his fellow worker. Interestingly, these designations are reversed in the Colossian letter (Col. 4:10, 12). Since the designations fit both men, we suggest the explanation of Meyer: "These attendants of Paul voluntarily took turns in ministering to him in his place of confinement; hence one at a time, and another at another time, would be Paul's 'fellow prisoner.'"

At this point in the letter Philemon would have had but the few words of final greeting to read before turning to Onesimus to pronounce sentence upon him. This inspired 'short story' leaves it to the reader to supply the story's conclusion. Onesimus had fled as an ignorant heathen, a slinking thief, with rebellion and mutiny in his heart, and with stolen property on his person. Though he feared for his life, nevertheless, he had returned to his master. His life was now hidden in Christ. (Col. 3:3) He was a trusted representative of a well respected Christian, he longed for the perfection of holiness, of knowledge, and of the love of God. He hoped for a kingly crown and the privilege of reigning with Christ at his appearing. He joyed at the service opened to him in the meantime, ready to do good to all men as he had opportunity, (Gal. 6:10) and doing all things as unto the Lord. (Col. 3:23)

The little letter in his hand, by implication, tells Philemon all these things. Need we question what his answer will be? Need we doubt the joy that will flood Paul's prison-dwelling, no, that did fill his cell in the writing of this letter? He knew that Philemon would do even more than he asked! Each of the apostle's letters are a precious self-portrait of the author. But none so faithfully depict the tender heart which penned these words. There is no part of the letter so Pauline or more telling of his character than the benediction which closes it. Who cannot visualize in the mind's eye the two brothers clenched in a typically oriental embrace when Philemon has read these final words? And in the lower corner of the letter we find the final identification that corresponds with the name at the letter's heading: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.'

The Apostle Paul and "His" Gospel

"He is a chosen vessel unto me." Acts 9:15

What word might best describe the contribution of St. Paul to the present-day Christian? The word might well be "progress" and we would not be wrong if we described him as the "Apostle of Progress." Jesus himself indicated this at the time of Paul's selection to the apostolic office saying, "...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel."

Several jobs were entrusted to Paul. He freed the church of Christ from the wrappings of Judaism which had served as its cradle. He extended the message to the furthest parts of the earth. Those who heard his message not only turned from Moses to Christ, they also turned from paganism to the worship of the one true God. We quote a well-known-author, speaking of Paul:

He was the traveled ambassador of Christ who snatched Christianity from the hands of a local faction and turned it into a universal faith, whose powerful word shook all the gods from Cyprus to Gibraltar, who turned the tide of history and thought.

In order to get to know Paul we turn to his epistles. We learn a variety of things about him *from* other sources, such as The Acts of the Apostles. There, we learn about his life and his sufferings. But, without his epistles we would have very little idea of who he was. In his letters Paul is present with us. In them he lays bare his inner life -- lived over again for us and brought before our mind's eye in word pictures. Paul not only provides us instruction on how to live the Christlike life; we have still more valuable tools from Paul -- a cross-section of the Christlike life as he lived it.

Powerful Intellect And Heart

In what light have Christians regarded Paul? We know that the other eleven Apostles lived and walked with Jesus. Because of their affection for him they went forth to tell the world the simple story of his life and death. Paul was different. He was possessed of a powerful and carefully trained intellect. Many suppose that this made him cold, aloof. Such read into his words the nature of a hard, intellectual system of belief. They suggest that he drew the Gospel away from the person of Jesus.

This impression does a great injustice to the Apostle to the Gentiles. None of the Apostles, not even John, was more filled with the glow of personal attachment to Christ. Being an intellectual type, Paul could not help carrying his thoughts through to their logical conclusions, to the doctrine that Christ taught. But we find more, we find that Christ entered into every thought he had about them. Paul's intellectual superiority is universally acknowledged when it comes to the exposition of our Lord's teaching. But the student of Paul's life and character knows that as great as he was in intellect he was equally great in heart.

"His" Gospel

Paul tells us that he was a servant of Jesus Christ who had been divinely appointed and separated unto the Gospel. There was nothing more important to him than the preaching of the Gospel. Nor were there other loves in his life which shared a place in his heart with the Gospel. The Gospel was the business of his life to which all else was incidental and to which all else was held

subservient. Paul's strength *lay* in this complete, wholehearted abandonment to the call which he had received from our Lord at his conversion.

The Epistle to the Romans contains the most complete and detailed exposition of "his" gospel. To understand the message of Christ, as Paul told it, one must not only read that epistle but study it. In these few words we cannot accomplish that end. We will merely observe the twofold work of Christ which Paul elevates to our view: Christ's work for us, the ground of our justification; Christ's work in us, our sanctification by his spirit.

Christ's Work For Us

The entire Gospel according to Paul is concerned with a person. Let no man deceive you. The substance of his message is Jesus. The one purpose of his preaching, never lost sight of even in the most intricate doctrinal discussions, is to put the individual hearer and believer of his message into personal touch with his own risen and living Lord.

How could he do this effectively? His own experience told him. He had spent years prior to his own conversion in the pursuit of his own righteousness. He knew that the first essential to salvation is righteousness. From his own experience he had found that he, or any man, could never merit such righteousness. This being accepted, he focused upon that righteousness which is obtainable as a *gift*. No wonder he is not ashamed of the Gospel! For therein was revealed a righteousness which all may have as a gift, a righteousness which may be obtained *by* faith, and a righteousness which has its origin with God and is therefore acceptable to him.

Anyone who is seeking after righteousness could not help but be interested in this gospel. This offer of righteousness was available as a free gift to all who will accept the redemptive work of Christ. It is a small wonder, then, that elsewhere he says, "*For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures*" (1 Cor. 15:3).

Christ's Work In Us

Jesus performed a work for us by dying on Calvary's cross. His death is the basis of our righteousness (or "justification"). But he is today (in his risen and glorified condition) carrying on a work in us by his spirit. This is no less an important work than the first which is already accomplished. "*For it, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life* [his resurrection life, of course]" (Rom. 5:10).

Peace with God is both a blessing and it is life. The peace which we *have* comes from being justified by God by virtue of our faith in the precious blood of Christ. So we ask, could a seeker of righteousness ever be satisfied with such a reckoned (or "considered") righteousness? The true seeker after righteousness seeks not only to be removed from the guilt and punishment of sin but also from its power -- the power of sin continuing to work in their life. The psalmist states the thought accurately: "*As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness*" (Ps. 17:15). And he will not be satisfied until then.

Righteousness is imputed (or "counted") to us by our faith in Christ's work for us. When his spirit begins to dwell in our hearts, praise be to God, righteousness begins to be imparted to us. Therefore, Christ in us is indeed, as Paul says, the hope of *glory* (Col 1:27). And what do we mean by "Christ in us"? The Christlike life, the Christlike mind, a life completely in tune with the will of God and submissive to it.

If this attitude prevails, it will not matter to us if our human body perish as long as our mind is determined to do what God would have us do; as long as the inward man is renewed. We are asked, when does this renewing take place? Daily, says the Apostle. "Give us day by day, we pray, not our temporal bread only, but the living bread from heaven." Jesus said that if a man would be his disciple he should deny himself and follow after the Master, daily bearing his own cross (Mark 8:34).- Paul echoes Jesus' words saying, *..but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day*" (2 Cor. 4:16). Under the influence of the spirit of God, just as our Master had promised to those who would follow him, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds rather than being conformed to the customs of this world (Rom. 12:2). Being renewed, day by day, we are able to prove what is *"...that good and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."*

While he was hanging from the cross our Lord said *"it is finished* (John 19:30). By this he referred to the all sufficient ground for our acceptance with God: the *work* of Christ for us. And of Christ's work *in* us the Apostle writes: *"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Phil. 1:6).

A Faithful Minister

Briefly told, this is the gospel of Paul. What of the lessons that Paul's life may have to teach? We *will* mention *only two* of many.

First -- his faithfulness. Paul learned one lesson *well* before he taught it to others: *"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful"* (1 Cor. 4:2). Of all the areas *in* his life, Paul's practice certainly kept pace with his profession in this. He *was* entrusted with the *Gospel* by our Lord and *by* God. He guarded that Gospel from friend and foe alike for you and for me. He kept a watch over it as a sacred treasure, as the *keeper* of a holy fire which must never be stamped out.

We see his faithfulness in the face of Jewish foes, before Festus and Agrippa, and before numerous' others. ' But his faithfulness *is* more keenly apparent in the dispute between Peter and himself at Antioch when he withstood him to the face (Gal. 2:11). And lest the glorious light of the Gospel which had been committed to his trust should be jeopardized he separated himself *from* Barnabas, proven a friend as he had been. Our Lord had told Paul that he would reveal what great things it would be necessary *for Paul* to suffer for Christ's name's sake," and of them all none could have cost him more. To defend the': truth against enemies would be expected. But oh, what agony must have, filled his heart when he was called upon to defend the truth against his friends not friends in word only, but those with 'whom he had labored in the Gospel, and suffered with, and cried with.

A Beloved Brother

Paul was also a beloved brother, not just a faithful minister. Such a combination of qualities is rare. *How* many realize how difficult it is to attain this development of character. It is easy to be loved to be lovable, easy-going, gentle, agreeable, at the expense of faithfulness. On the other hand, to be faithful is little more than an attainment of the flesh when faithfulness to' the truth is maintained in a rough, uncouth, unloving, contentious spirit of !, strife. A faithful minister may pick out our faults to a "T," but we would hardly call him a beloved brother, would we? But if the Apostle John was one who taught us to love in the truth, it is just as certain that it was Paul who taught us to speak the truth in love.

In conclusion we find no more apt way of ending than by referring to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. You will remember that early in his journey to the Celestial City, Christian was taken into the Interpreter's house and there was shown the picture of a man; "And this," says Bunyan, "was the fashion of it. It had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books was in its hand, the *law* of truth was written upon its lips; the world was behind its back; it stood as if it pleaded with men; and a crown of *gold* did hang over its head."

"Then said Christian: What meaneth this? The Interpreter replied: The man whose picture this is, is one of a thousand. He can say in the words of the Apostle: 'Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel.'"

The Main Use of the Christian Armor

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." - Ephesians 6:13

What a strange conclusion to so martial a war cry! The soldier is generally told to put on his armor for the sake of the battle. Here it is worn for the sake of the camp. It is commonly thought that the most difficult time in the Christian's life is the hour of conflict; but Paul suggests that it is the hour after the conflict. If you or I had written these words we might have put it like this: "Take to yourself the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand while awaiting your enemy and that you might withstand his onslaught."

Paul, however, reverses this process. To him the withstanding is the less difficult of the two. The greatest of the dangers which he sees is just at the point where the Christian soldier has "done all." Is Paul right in his evaluation? When a man feels that he is surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses it is comparatively easy to lay aside the hindrances to future accomplishment. But when there is no battle evident, no visible foe, no crown -- awaiting the victor, when the field of battle is his own heart and the enemy is his own desire and the spectator is his own conscience, when there is no human *voice* to shout out "well done" and no public opinion to proclaim that he has fought a good fight -- that is the time when the Christian most needs his armor.

Lord, arm me for the silence! Often in my hour of trial I am brave when duty has to be done and weak when it is over. In the first fire of my bereavement I have to rise up from before my dead. There are letters to be written; there are sad duties to be performed; there are friends to be invited to the funeral. And I go through them calmly; I feel as if something supported me; men say "how bravely he bears it!" But when the letters are finished and the funeral over, and the

friends gone, then comes the misery and the despair. Save me, O Lord! Save me from my own companionship! Protect me from the solitude of my own heart. Arm me against myself! I have been strong in the hour of outward battle because I hear the voices of human sympathy. Let me hear the voice of a greater sympathy for the watch of the night! I *was* able to withstand in the day because there was work to be done; help me in the shadows when no man can work! Teach me that the heart has a duty greater than the hand! Teach me that the courage which can endure is nobler than the courage which can strike! Teach me the heroism of Gethsemane ..! You have girded me with the sword for the battle, clothe me now with the breastplate for the silence! My armor shall only be complete when I have done all and still shall stand.

- George Matheson

An Invitation

"Come and follow me..." Matthew 19:21

Jesus said to Philip, Follow me (John 1:43).

Jesus said to' Levi, Follow me (Mark 2:14).

He said to Simon and Andrew, Follow me and I will make you fishers of men (Matt. 4:19).

Jesus said unto the disciples, if any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23).

He called the multitude and his disciples unto him and said, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Mark 8:34).

A great multitude followed him and he turned to them saying, Whosoever does not bear his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27).

Jesus loved him and said, Sell what you own and come and follow me (Mark 10:12).

He said to another, Follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead (Matt. 8:22; Luke 9:57-62).

If any man would serve me, let him follow me ... if any man serve me, him will my Father honor (John 12:26).

- Selected

The Bridegroom's Dove

Song of Solomon 2:14

"My Dove!" The bridegroom speaks to whom?
,Whom thinkest thou, meaneth he?
Say, O my soul! canst thou presume
He thus addresseth thee?
Yes, 'tis the bridegroom's voice of love
Calling thee, O my soul! His dove!

The dove is gentle, mild and meek:
Deserve I, then, the name?
I look within in vain to seek
Aught which can give a claim:
Yet made so by redeeming love,
My soul, thou art the bridegroom's dove!

Methinks, my soul, that thou mayest see,
In this endearing word,
Reasons why Jesus likens thee
To this defenseless bird;
Reasons which show the bridegroom's love
To his poor, helpless, timid dove!

The dove hath neither claw nor sting,
Nor weapon for the fight;
She owes her safety to her wing,
Her victory to flight.
A shelter hath the bridegroom's love
Provided for his helpless dove!

As the poor dove, before the hawk,
Quick to her refuge flies,
So need I, in my daily walk,
The wings which faith supplies
To bear me where the bridegroom's love
Places beyond all harm his dove!

My soul, of native power bereft,
To Calvary repairs:
Immanuel is the rocky cleft,
The secret of the stairs!
Since placed *there* by the bridegroom's love,
What evil can befall his dove?

My soul, now hid within a rock
(The "Rock of Ages" called),
Amid the universal shock
Is fearless, unappalled,
A cleft therein, prepared by love,
In safety hides the Bridegroom's dove!

O happy dove! thus weak, thus safe;
Do I resemble her?
Then to my soul, O Lord! vouchsafe
A dove-like character.
Pure, harmless, gentle, full of love,
Make me in spirit, Lord, a Dove!

His Word is Sure

Mathematicians have worked out a formula for proving the accuracy of any prediction. They call it the law of Compound Probabilities. It runs something like this:

One prediction has one chance in two of fulfillment.

An added detail weakens the chance to one in four.

Two added details weakens the chance to one in eight.

Three added details weaken the chances to one in thirty-two.

Ten added details increases the hazard to one in 1024.

Twenty-five added details makes the fulfillment practically impossible, for the hazard is increased to one chance in 33,554,432.

The Old Testament Scriptures predicted that Jesus Christ would visit this world in the form of human flesh and from the first to the last they added 109 details to this prediction. Twenty-five of these details were connected with the betrayal, trial, death, and burial of our Lord. Such predictions seemed absurd, unbelievable, and were made by the prophets over a period of 500 years -- centuries before the event occurred.

On turning to the four Gospel records we find that every one of these predictions was literally fulfilled in the space of twenty-four hours.

Should any one be interested to apply this test further, taking the time to calculate the chances of making 109 predictions covering the advent of Christ, he would have a line of figures many yards long. And yet -- the records show -- that every predictions was accurately fulfilled during a period of thirty-three years.

- Prophecy Monthly

The Old Year and the New

Into the silent places
The old year goes tonight,
Bearing old pain, old sadness,
Old care, and old delight;
Mistakes and fears and failures,
The things that could not last --
But naught that e'er was truly ours
Goes with him to the past.

Out of the silent places
The young year comes tonight,
Bringing new pain, new sadness,
New care and new delight; --
Go forth to meet him bravely,
The new year all untried;
The things the old year left with us --

Ambassadors

The responsibility of service is truly a power to the individual. So long as the Christian's ideal is merely to live in peace and charity with his neighbor without a realization of his responsibility towards others, it is more than likely that he will make little progress in the way of holiness and will moreover be ignorant of his own state before God. His spiritual bankruptcy hardly becomes apparent. As soon as he, however, begins to understand that the humblest Christian, as in the early Church, is responsible for bringing others to Christ, he stirs himself to seek and to find, and so becomes fitted for the performance of duty

Have we ever wished we might render some real service for Christ? There is only one way by which this can be accomplished. Of ourselves we can do nothing. The holy Spirit can do great things through us. The secret; of acceptable service, then, is to surrender ourselves to him; to let him guide us in all things; to be willing to do anything that he may reveal to us as the will of God. When we have reached this plane of spiritual existence, then he will be able to use our talents, our energies, our love, our consecration to nobler achievements than we have ever dreamed. It is the touch of the spirit that gives true power to one's life.

- A. P, Wilkes

The Memorial Supper

"For as often as ye eat this Bread and drink this Cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

According to our usual method of reckoning, the Memorial celebration this year should be held after sundown, Thursday, March 31, 1988.

This, according to the Jewish calendar, is the 14th of Nisan, and the appropriate time for the brethren to meet "in remembrance" of the Lamb who was slain.

"This do in remembrance of Me."

Entered into Rest

Matt E. Czajkowski, WI
Margaret DeYoung, PA
Laura Hallberg, MN
Jack Kuenzi, WI
Mary Kukowski, WI
Emma Soderlin, MN