



## A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

### The Apostle Paul Used a Credit Card<sup>1</sup>

#### Philemon 4-19

<sup>NIV</sup> **Philemon 1:4**...I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. <sup>6</sup> I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. <sup>7</sup> Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints. <sup>8</sup> Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, <sup>9</sup> yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul-- an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- <sup>10</sup> I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. <sup>11</sup> Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. <sup>12</sup> I am sending him-- who is my very heart-- back to you. <sup>13</sup> I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup> But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. <sup>15</sup> Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good-- <sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. <sup>17</sup> So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup> If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back-- not to mention that you owe me your very self.

A runaway slave, a slave owner out for justice and an old man in prison trying to smooth things over between the two...it hardly sounds like one of the books of the New Testament but it is. **Of course, it's not really a book in the traditional sense. Really, it's a letter, a very personal, very intimate, intensely private**

**letter, in which an old man chained and wasting away in prison pours out his heart on behalf of a rebellious, runaway slave.<sup>2</sup>**

Now I have to tell you, there are those who wish the letter to Philemon had not been included in the New Testament at all.<sup>3</sup> There are some things about the letter that upset their finer sensibilities. Some critics argue that Philemon ought not be included in the Bible because it's a private letter. That is, it's too personal. They argue that reading Philemon is a little like reading a person's diary or going through a bureau or dresser in their home and seeing their...their personal things. They argue that we ought not stare at what's there.

Of course, what they are really saying is that they are embarrassed and I for one don't really believe that such critics are the least bit embarrassed because the letter is personal; I think they are embarrassed because the old man who wrote the letter didn't blast slavery when he had the chance<sup>4</sup>. I think underneath their breath such critics are saying to themselves, **"If I had been in the old man's position, I would have blasted slavery in general and Philemon in particular<sup>5</sup>.**

**I would have laid to rest once and for all any question about how horrible a sin slavery was."**

Part of their embarrassment, I think, is related to the identity of the old man that wrote the letter. You see, the old man...the old man, who in their eyes, missed an extraordinary chance to forever set the biblical record regarding slavery straight...this doddering, sentimental old fool in chains, who chose not to

blast slavery but chose rather to pour out his heart in an effort to reconcile a runaway slave to his master, was none other than the incomparable, unimpeachable, Apostle to the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul, himself.<sup>6</sup>

Now, let me add quickly that those who are embarrassed here by the Apostle Paul's failure completely misunderstand his purpose in the letter. Paul could have spoken out against slavery but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul was concerned with an even more important question than that of slavery.

Now I want you to think about that for a minute. He turned down the opportunity to blast slavery because he wanted to address a question more important than the question of slavery. You see Paul wanted to answer this question instead, **“What should a Christian do with the hurt, anger and resentment that fills their heart when a another believer hurts them, slanders their good name, questions their motives, or purposely does them wrong?”**

Now, I hope you can see how that question is really more important, more universal, than even the question of slavery. Slavery has come and has mostly gone and while the awful vestiges of remaining racism and bitterness still linger they could be stamped out if we, as Christians, were to diligently apply the truth of God's word to our lives and to fulfill our role as salt and light in the world.

But. I think, even if we did that, this question of what we ought to do when we find it hard to forgive would still remain.

You see this question, this question of how to forgive, reared its ugly head even before there were any slaves and it will continue to exist as long as men and

women are selfish or self-centered, as long as children are born with rebellious hearts, as long as fathers deal roughly with their children, as long as men and women are unfaithful or unkind to each other, as long as pride rules in the hearts of men. You see this question will exist as long as sinful men and women, boys and girls live and breathe and have their being. So Paul, under the divine inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit decided to answer that question instead and just in case you missed the question Paul is actually addressing let me repeat it for you once more, **“What are we to do with the disappointment, hurt, anger and bitterness we feel when a fellow believer sins against us? What are we to do when forgiving is hard?”**

Now, having posed that question, let's ask God to render us His aid this morning, **“Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that your Spirit will come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts. Blessed Spirit we plead for you to come and take the written word and since you are it's true author and therefore its infallible teacher, we pray for you to come and instruct us in the truth of your Son. Give us this morning ears to hear and hearts pliable enough to receive the truth of how to deal with our own unforgiving hearts. Give us strength through the Holy Spirit, to the edification of our souls and to the glory of Christ we pray, Amen.”**

Now, we are looking this morning at Paul's little letter to Philemon and I have already made the point that what Paul does in this letter in address the issue of how we are to forgive others when forgiving is hard. Now what I want to do this morning is take a few minutes and show you how the Apostle Paul, this wonderful sentimental old fool in chains fashions his instruction toward

Philemon and provides his extraordinary answer to this most relevant and contemporary question.

**First of all, Paul starts off his letter with a wonderful stroke of delicacy and tact praising Philemon for the way he has refreshed the hearts of believers in the past. Look, how he puts it in verses 4-7.**

<sup>NIV</sup> **Philemon 1:4...** I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. <sup>6</sup> I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. <sup>7</sup> Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

Now there is not much here that needs explanation. Paul starts off his letter and then he quickly turns to the reason that he is able to thank God for Philemon. He's says, **"Philemon, every time I pray I thank my God for you. I do that because you are so generous and kind and because you have blessed so many people<sup>7</sup>. So, I am praying that God will help you see more clearly everything you already possess in Christ. I am praying that because you have already given me great comfort and joy by the way you have so often refreshed the hearts of the saints."**

Now, I want you to remember that phrase, **"refreshed the hearts of the saints."** Beyond that, the only comment I want to add to that is that Paul uses a really unusual word here for **"heart"**. It is not the word normally used in New Testament for **"heart"**; that word is **"kardia"** and it is the word from which we get all kinds of English derivatives like **"cardiovascular"** and the like. That word means the **"muscle"** that pumps blood throughout our bodies. But the word Paul

chooses here is different. It is the word **“splanchna”** and it means something a little coarser, something like **“guts”**<sup>8</sup>. Of course, that seems crude to us today but to the ancients the word was perfectly acceptable and it was intensely descriptive. It described the place deep down in a person where all the emotions were housed.

If you have ever felt anything deeply, you know where that place is. I remember vividly when my dad died how it left a gigantic chasm, a black hole, in my soul. It was like someone had hollowed me out completely. I was empty on the inside and even though I was empty I ached, a long, slow, dull ache like someone had kicked me in the stomach. Now it is that spot, the spot where that kind of emotion comes from that Paul is referring to when he uses the word **“heart”**.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, it wasn't just a place of sadness. It was also the place from which joyful emotions sprang. It is the place that swells with pride when a father sees a precious daughter in her wedding dress or when a mother sees her beloved son holding his first child. You see Paul is thanking God for Philemon because Philemon knew exactly where that spot was in a person that was hurting and even where it was in a person that was joyful and he knew what to do to refresh that spot in both kinds of people.

You see, Paul was saying something like this, **“Philemon, you know what to do and you know when to do it. Whether it's a hot meal or a prayer of encouragement or even a well timed pat on the back you somehow know just what to do. When people are hollow on the inside you know how to fill them up. You are like a cool cup of water to a man dying of thirst. How could I not thank God for you?”**

Now, because Paul knows what kind of man Philemon is and what he has done in the past, he is going to ask him to do something extraordinary in the present. Paul's request is contained in verses 8-17.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Philemon 1:8**...Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, <sup>9</sup> yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul-- an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- <sup>10</sup> I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. <sup>11</sup> Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. <sup>12</sup> I am sending him-- who is my very heart—back to you. <sup>13</sup> I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup> But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. <sup>15</sup> Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good-- <sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. <sup>17</sup> So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

Now you don't need me to explain further what Paul is asking. He is asking Philemon to take back his runaway slave Onesimus. But look how humbly he asks him to do it. Instead of commanding him as an apostle he says, **"Look, I am appealing to you on the basis of love for my son not as an apostle but as an old man in chains; chains I received in my service to Christ."**

Now let me ask you, **"How could any believer with a heart deny whatever request was attached to a line like that?"**

Paul's humility and tact are both highlighted even further in verses 13-16. There he says something to the this effect, **"Look I wanted to keep for myself to take care of the duties that you ought to have taken care of but I couldn't do that. So**

**I am sending him back to you and I want you to receive him just like you would me. We are still partners aren't we?"**

But the verse that really stands out to me is verse 12. You remember how in the first section Paul ended his praise for Philemon by saying, **"The hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother."**

Well in verse 12, Paul repeats that same word a second time and says, **"I have sent him back to you in person, that is, I am *sending* you my very heart."**<sup>10</sup>

It his way of saying, **"Listen to me Philemon, this boy Onesimus is my heart."**

Now we are not very used to verbalizing that kind of affection in Christ's church today. We are a bit too guarded, a bit too stuffy and perhaps a bit too apprehensive of how people might respond if we were to speak that way about each other. But Paul wasn't. He just laid it all out there in the open. When I think of the kind of affection, I cannot help but think of my grandfather and his best friend Bidy Nipp.

When I used to spend time at my grandfather's house in the summer, my grandfather and my cousin Buddy and I would almost invariably wind up at Bidy's house two or three times a week. My cousin and I used to dread going there. The frame of Bidy's house was made of tall Bois'Darc fenceposts. Tarpaper was stretched around the posts to form an outer wall for the house. The roof was made of galvanized tin. The floor was dirt. There was no electricity, no water, no plumbing. Now, my grandfather didn't have indoor plumbing either but at least he had electricity and he had actual floors. Inside Bidy's house there were lots of

kids and lots of old worn out stained mattresses strewn about on the dirt floor.

When we would visit, we would go inside and my grandfather who was pretty feeble would just plop right down on one of those mattresses like it was a fine leather sofa. There were no chairs. My cousin and I always stood keeping a careful lookout for ticks or scorpions or other nasty critters. We always spent our time trying to leave.

But my grandfather would act like he and Bidy were drinking Mint Juleps out on the veranda. We always dreaded him getting comfortable because if we lingered we knew that there was a chance that we might be asked to eat with Bidy and that was just about the worst thing we could imagine. You see at Bidy's everything was cooked outside on an open fire and there was absolutely no telling, from our point of view, what actually might wind up on the plate we were offered.

One of the last times I visited Bidy with my grandfather, the thing we dreaded most happened. Bidy invited us to eat. My cousin and I made excuses but my grandfather just dug in like he was eating at the Carlton Hotel in downtown Tyler. Later, when we left and were driving home my cousin and I asked my grandfather, **"Papa, how on earth could you eat with Bidy?"**

**"What do you mean?"** he asked.

**"I mean how could you eat with him? Didn't you see how dirty that place was? I mean there could have been anything in the world in that stuff?"**

My grandfather hesitated for a minute and then stopped the car and turned around in the seat and looked us both right in the eye and said with a very soft voice something...something I have never forgotten.

**“Boys, Bidy is my friend. He will always be my friend. I don’t care what he puts on the plate, and I would rather die than insult him and I won’t have you insulting him either. Boys, this may be hard to understand but I would eat whatever he fixed even if he spit in it.”**

Well, I can tell you it took me a long time to understand that kind of love and affection but clearly it is the same kind of love and affection we ought to feel for each other and it is exactly what Paul meant when he said to Philemon, **“You know this boy Onesimus, the boy you are so mad at, he is my heart.”**

Now, you remember that phrase from verse 8 where Paul said to Philemon, **“you have refreshed the hearts of the saints.”** I wanted you to remember it because Paul repeats that same word **“heart”** in verse 12 when he says to Philemon, **“Onesimus is...my heart.”** And he says that in such a way that you expect him to say...you want him to say... **“Brother, won’t you refresh my heart.”** And that is, in fact, what he does say down in verse 20.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Philemon 1:20**...I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

And, of course, what he means is something like this, **“Philemon, you have been there for so many of the saints and have refreshed their hearts countless times. This boy is...my heart. I love him like he was my own son. Won’t you refresh my heart and forgive him and take him back for my sake.”**

Now, I can't tell you how kind this request is. It was not uncommon for a slave owner to have a runaway slave flogged or to have him hamstrung or in repeated cases to even have him crucified. In studying for this message, I read about one Roman slaveholder who used to keep a giant fish tank of flesh eating eels in his home just so his slaves would know what would happen to them if they tried to run away. But Paul is saying to Philemon, **"Let's not have any talk of that sort of thing at all. Just take him back and take him back as if he were...me."** Now, if the letter stopped right there it would have been a wondrously noble letter. But it would have been like any number of letters written by compassionate men in antiquity on behalf of runaway slaves<sup>11</sup>.

But it doesn't stop there. You see, right here when you least expect it, Paul adds something that transforms his letter from reflecting the heart of a compassionate man to one reflecting the heart of a compassionate God<sup>12</sup>. And as he does that, he finally answers the question that I mentioned earlier. The question that asks, **"What are we to do with the disappointment, hurt, anger and bitterness we feel when a fellow believer sins against us?"** Look at his answer to that question in verse 18.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Philemon 1:18...** If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back-- not to mention that you owe me your very self.<sup>13</sup>

You see Paul is anticipating what Philemon might be feeling and as he does he tries to strengthen him by saying, **"Look Philemon, I know this may be hard for you to do. I know you have been hurt and that your pride has been roughed up a bit but here's what I want you to do. I want you to remember the affection you have for me. I want you to remember how I proclaimed the love of God to**

**you in the work of Christ. I want you remember how you would have given your life for me and I want you to deduct what Onesimus owes you from that and if there is not enough in my account to cover his debt, I will pay you even more when I see you. Consider this my personal note."**

Now, what Paul is doing is taking the language of the gospel and applying it to a personal relationship. You see he is thinking of Christ's great justifying work on our behalf and he wants Philemon to think of it too. He is thinking of the fact that Jesus bore our sins to turn aside the wrath of God. He is thinking of the fact that in His sacrificial work on the cross Jesus turned aside God's wrath when we were unprofitable servants and paid the penalty of our sin Himself. He is thinking of the fact that Christ's righteousness has been put on our account and because of that God no longer sees us as slaves, but as something more than slaves<sup>14</sup>. He sees as His own dear children and the beloved brothers of Christ our Lord.

You see Paul cannot get the gospel out of his mind and because of that he winds up applying it to something as commonplace as a broken relationship between a slave and his master. So in the end, Paul answers the question, **"What are we to do with the gut-wrenching pain, hurt and anger and bitterness we feel when a fellow believer does us wrong?"** And his answer goes something like this. We are to charge it to what we owe Christ and then we are to let it go. That means we are to stack up the eternal weight of all we owe Christ and then we are to deduct the insignificant wrongs our brothers or sisters do to us from that great treasure. Brothers and sisters, the great mercy we have been shown demands that we show some mercy ourselves and when we feel shortchanged in our acts of mercy we are to trust Christ to make it right.

Now common sense tells us that Philemon granted Paul's request and took Onesimus back. It is hard to imagine that this book would have ever made into the canon of Scripture if he had not. Tradition even tells us that Onesimus went on to become the great Bishop of the church at Ephesus but that is absolutely irrelevant to what Christ is calling us to do this morning. He does not want us to forgive the brother that has offended us because of what they might become or in order that they might recognize their potential. Rather He wants us to forgive them because of what they are, His own dear child.

Jesus Himself is leaning over the portals of heaven and saying to each of us, **"You know that person you can no longer endure, that person whose voice irritates you, whose very presence grates on your nerves like fingernails on a chalkboard. Well, I feel differently about them than you do. I paid for their sins because I loved them. In fact, they are...they are my very heart. Won't you refresh my heart? And if you think they owe you even more, charge that to me."**

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> With apologies to Dr. J. Vernon McGee who used this exact title in a sermon on the same book at Town North Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. I had the privilege to hear him in person and though I do not recall his outline or any of the details of his sermon beyond the title, I do remember the title and how he turned the subject matter from a runaway slave to the doctrine of justification.

<sup>2</sup> F.F. Bruce, "The Epistle to Philemon" in *Paul: An Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 396-397. Bruce does a great job outlining the conflict over the place of origin by detailing the conflict between G.S. Duncan and C.H. Dodd. Duncan held that a slave, not having much money, would have fled to the nearest large city and hid in the mass of people that were there. He thus believes the point of origin was Ephesus and that the letter was written when Paul was in captivity there. Dodd held that Onesimus would have fled as far as possible,

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thus to Rome. Obviously, he held that the letter was written when Paul was in prison in Rome. Ephesus was 100 miles away; Rome was 1,000 miles away. It's a toss up.

I should add that there are those who believe that Onesimus fled to Caesarea and that that was the point of origin. They do so principally on the basis that they know Paul was imprisoned there for a while. One commentator asked the question (I don't remember who), "Why would anyone flee there?"

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 395. F.C. Baur is perhaps the most notable critic who did not believe that the letter belonged in the canon. On the other hand Chrysostom argued for its inclusion wishing, in fact, that the church possessed even more of this kind of material. Cf. Chrysostom, "Homilies on Philemon" (Sage CD Rom), 1129. He writes: "But because some say, that it was superfluous that this Epistle should be annexed, since he is making a request about a small matter in behalf of one man, let them learn who make these objections, that they are themselves deserving of very many censures. For it was not only proper that these small Epistles, in behalf of things so necessary, should have been inscribed, but I wish that it were possible to meet with one who could deliver to us the history of the Apostles, not only all they wrote and spoke of, but of the rest of their conversation, even what they ate, and when they ate, when they walked, and where they sat, what they did every day, in what parts they were, into what house they entered, and where they lodged — to relate everything with minute exactness, so replete with advantage is all that was done by them. But the greater part, not knowing the benefit that would result thence, proceed to censure it."

<sup>4</sup> This is especially true since the Old Testament forbade the returning of runaway slaves. Cf. John M.G. Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership", *New Testament Studies*, 37, 1991, 165. Barclay notes that returning an escaped slave to his master was the expressly forbidden in the Mosaic Law. He refers to: NAS Deuteronomy 23:15...."You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. 16 "He shall live with you in your midst, in the place which he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat him.

<sup>5</sup> There is no small debate as to whether Onesimus the runaway slave belonged to Philemon or to Archippus. The text seems to me to point to Philemon but one commentator John Knox, no not "the" John Knox, wrote extensively on the fact that Onesimus actually belonged to Archippus rather than Philemon. Cf. John Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul: A New View of Its Place and Importance Rvd.* (New York: Abingdom, 1959), 58ff. He writes: "A study of Paul's usage will show that no word would have served so admirably to designate the obligation under which he was placing Onesimus' master. He even uses the verb diakonew in describing the service which Onesimus is to render *in his master's place* ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῆ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. But this clearly points to Archippus' being the owner of the slave, whereas that person was Philemon. But was he? Although it is not a matter upon which I am inclined to insist, I suggest that all of the difficulties in the complex Philemon-Colossians relationship can best be met by the assumption that Archippus was the owner. That this assumption is by no means impossible I believe the examination of the first paragraph of the letter will show." This argument has been resuscitated by S.C. Winter, 'Paul's Letter to Philemon', *NTS* 33, 1987, 1-15. It is discussed adequately by J. Duncan M. Derrett, 'The Function of the Epistle to Philemon', *Zeitschrift Für Die*

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Neutestamentliche Wiesenschaft, November 1988, 64. Cf. William L. Westermann, *The Slave System of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1955) and M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Viking Press, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1970), 640. "This Epistle brings into vivid focus the whole problem of slavery in the Christian Church. There is no thought of denunciation even in principle. The apostle deals with the situation, as it then exists. He takes it for granted that Philemon has a claim of ownership on Onesimus and leaves the position unchallenged. Yet in one significant phrase Paul transforms the character of the master-slave relationship. Onesimus is returning no longer as a slave but as a brother beloved (verse 16). It is clearly incongruous for a Christian master to 'own' a brother in Christ in the contemporary sense of the word, and although the existing order of society could not be immediately changed by Christianity without a political revolution (which was contrary to Christian principles), the Christian master-slave relationship was so transformed from within that it was bound to lead ultimately to the abolition of the system."

<sup>7</sup> C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 54. πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν ἤρεε ἰσ χλοσε το πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ

<sup>8</sup> Helmut Köster, "σπλάγχνον" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. .7* (ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Freidrich translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 555. "Only the noun is found in Paul. As compared with the usage of *Test. XII* ( 551, 16ff.) there is a distinctive but typically Pauline change, σπλάγχνα has not only lost completely the sense of creaturely or natural emotion it also shows no traces here of the later Jewish sense of "mercy"

551, 25 ff. Like other anthropological terms, e.g., καρδια νους the word is used in Paul for the whole man, and this especially in so far as he is able as a Christian to give and to experience personal liking and love between man and man, An essential part of the original meaning has been retained to the degree that splagcna concerns and expresses the total personality at the deepest level. It thus remains a very strong and forceful term, which occurs only when Paul is speaking directly and personally, as in 2 Cor. or Philemon, or in a transferred sense in Philippians. In 2 C. 6:12 σπλάγχνα is parallel to καρδια" στενοχωρείσθε δὲ ἐν τοῖς σπλάγχνοις ὑμῶν "but you are deeply closed in your capacity to love me, while my heart is wide open to you" (v. 11). 2 C. 7:15 says positively of Titus τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ περισσotέρως εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐστίν "he has a deep love for you," the word being parallel here to pneuma the "human spirit," v. 13. Twice in Philemon there is reference to the σπλάγχνα of the τῶν ἀγίων v.7; μου 20). The word is again used for the whole person which in the depths of its emotional life has experienced refreshment through consolation and love. The very difficult v. Phlm 12 is to be taken along the same lines ,Ονήσιμον...ὄν ἀνέπεμψά σοι, αὐτόν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα It is as if Paul, in the runaway slave, came to Philemon in person with his claim to experience love. The frequent use of the word in this short letter shows how personally Paul was involved in the matter."

<sup>9</sup> Henry George Liddell, and Robert. Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon Revd. By Sir Henry Stuart Jones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 1628. splagcnon, to;:-mostly in pl. splagcna, *the inward parts*, esp. the *viscera thoracis*, i.e. heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, which in sacrifices were reserved to be eaten by the sacrificers, Hom., etc.::-hence *the sacrificial feast*, Lat. visceratio, Ar.::-also as used in divination, Aesch., etc. . *any part of the inwards, the womb*, Pind., Soph.: so in sing., Aesch. II. metaph., like our *heart, the seat of the feelings and affections*, Id., Eur., etc.::-so in sing.,

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Soph., Eur.; avndro.j spla,gcnon evkmaqei/n to learn a man's *inward nature*, Eur. (Deriv. uncertain.)

<sup>10</sup> Most commentators hold that Onesimus was a runaway slave, who had not only run from Philemon but who also, in all probability, stolen from him in order to it. In addition, they contend that the letter to Philemon was written to encourage Philemon to take Onesimus back. Knox held the unique view that Paul was really asking to be given Onesimus as his servant. Such a view, in my humble opinion, really minimizes Paul's heart. Cf. Knox, 28-29. He writes: "Paul asks that his protégé be admitted to the same partnership of which he feels himself to be a member. As a transfer of ownership would normally have required, he underwrites any debt of the slave to his owner, although he reminds the latter that he really owes Paul himself as well as his slave. He acknowledges that he is trying to "make something" (ὀναίμην) out of his reader, and there is after all no genuine play upon the word unless what he hopes to "make" is Onesimus. He appeals to his reader to "relieve his heart," and could his use here of the strong word *σπλάγχνα* fail to recall the earlier sentence in which he had written that in sending Onesimus he was sent his heart *σπλάγχνα*? He closes his letter by expressing his assurance that he can rely upon his reader's obedience to do more than he has said. It is clear that this is no merely generous appeal on behalf of a slave boy in whom Paul had come to feel an interest. Paul's own affections and purposes are in the balance; he wants Onesimus to returned to him."

<sup>11</sup> Philo, *The Works of Philo Judaeus* (translated by Charles Duke Yonge Chapter 33, "Every Good Man is Free") This chapter from Philo is extraordinary both for its parallels to the New Testament and for its relevance to Philemon. Two quotes will suffice. "Slavery, then, is of two kinds; slavery of the soul and slavery of the body. Now, of our bodies, men are masters; but over our souls, wickedness and the passions have the dominion." "For, in real truth, that man alone is free who has God for his leader; indeed, in my opinion, that man is even the ruler of all others, and has all the affairs of the earth committed to him, being, as it were, the viceroy of a great king, the mortal lieutenant of an immortal sovereign."

<sup>12</sup> Chris Frilingos, "For My Child Onesimus: Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon", JBL 119/1, 2000, 91. I really appreciated his quote a letter of Pliny's concerning a runaway slave. He writes: "I know you are angry with him, and I know, too, it is not without reason; but clemency can never exert itself more laudably than when there is more cause for resentment. You once had an affection for this man, and, I hope, will have again...do not make himself uneasy any longer, and I will add too, do not make yourself so; for a man of your benevolence of heart cannot be angry without feeling great uneasiness. (Ep. 9.21)"

Also noted by Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: First Period: The Church Under the Apostles from the Birth of Christ to the Death of St. John, AD 1-100*, Chapter 12, The New Testament §98. He writes: "Grotius and other commentators quote the famous letter of Pliny the Consul to his friend Sabinianus in behalf of a runaway slave. It is very creditable to Pliny, who was born in the year when Paul arrived as a prisoner in Rome, and shows that the natural feelings of kindness and generosity could not be extinguished even by that inhuman institution. Pliny was a Roman gentleman of high culture and noble instincts, although he ignorantly despised Christianity and persecuted its innocent professors while Proconsul in Asia. The letters present striking points of resemblance: in both, a fugitive slave, guilty, but reformed, and desirous to return to duty; in

both, a polite, delicate, and earnest plea for pardon and restoration, dictated by sentiments of disinterested kindness. But they differ as Christian charity differs from natural philanthropy, as a Christian gentleman differs from a heathen gentleman. The one could appeal only to the amiable temper and pride of his friend, the other to the love of Christ and the sense of duty and gratitude; the one was concerned for the temporal comfort of his client, the other even more for his eternal welfare; the one could at best remand him to his former condition as a slave, the other raised him to the high dignity of a Christian brother, sitting with his master at the same communion table of a common Lord and Savior. "For polished speech the Roman may bear the palm, but for nobleness of tone and warmth of heart he falls far short of the imprisoned apostle."

<sup>13</sup> This is an example of the rhetorical device "**praeteritio**". Essentially, it is bringing up an event or issue while pretending not to mention it in order to take advantage of the event or issue without seeming to allude to it. For example, "Let us make no judgment on the events of Chappaquiddick, since the facts are not yet all in." (Spoken by a political opponent of Senator Edward Kennedy) See the University of Kentucky Online Glossary of Rhetorical Terms. <http://www.uky.edu/ArtsSciences/Classics/rhetoric.html> Also called "**apophasis**": (also called praeteritio or occupatio) asserts or emphasizes something by pointedly seeming to pass over, ignore, or deny it. This device has both legitimate and illegitimate uses. Legitimately, a writer uses it to call attention to sensitive or inflammatory facts or statements while he remains apparently detached from them:" <http://www.virtualsalt.com/rhetoric.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, "The Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon" in *The Works of Martin Luther with Introductions and Notes Vol. 6* (Philadelphia Edition...Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 473. "This Epistle gives us a masterly and tender illustration of Christian love; for here we see how St. Paul takes the part of poor Onesimus and advocates his cause with his master all that he can, and acts no differently than if he were himself Onesimus, who has done wrong. And yet he does this, not with force or compulsion, as was his right, but he lays aside his rights and thus compels Philemon, also, to waive his rights. What Christ has done for us with God the Father that St. Paul does for Onesimus with Philemon. For Christ laid aside His rights and overcame His Father with love and humility, so that He had to put away His wrath and His rights and receive us into favor, for Christ's sake, who so earnestly advocates our cause and takes our part so tenderly. **For we are all his Onesimi, if we believe.**"