

The Pilgrim Way Commentary on
the Book of Philemon
A Reference Commentary



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Apology for This Work

25 verses, 430 words

This commentary on Philemon follows in a long line of other works by divines of the past as they have sought to study and expound this small, personal epistle.

This work grew out of over 25 years of both preaching through Philemon in three pastorates in Maryland, Delaware and North Carolina as well as teaching through the epistle as an instructor at Maryland Baptist Bible College in Elkton, Maryland. I needed my own notes and outlines as I taught and preached from Philemon, so this fuller commentary flows from those notes and outlines. Thus, the layout of this commentary is a practical one, written by a preacher to be preached from in the pulpit or to be taught in a Sunday School. It was not written from an isolated study of a theologian who had little contact with people or practical ministerial experience. There are many such commentaries on the market and they tend to be someone dull and not very practical in their application. It is written as something of a theological reference manual to me, filled with quotes and outlines from various books in my library. The layout and format are designed to help me in my preaching, teaching and personal study of this book. I figured there may be others out there who may benefit from this work which is why I make it available, but the work is basically laid out in a selfish manner, for my benefit and assistance. That is why I call this as “reference commentary”. You, as the reader, hopefully can find some profit in this!

This commentary cannot be easily classified into any single theological system. I believe that no single theological system is an accurate presentation of Scriptural truth in and of itself. When Charles Spurgeon once wrote “There is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else”, he displayed a most unfortunate theological hubris. Calvinism is a human, flawed, limited and uninspired theological system, as any other human theological system. There is some truth there, as there is in any theological system, but it ranks no better than other competing systems, such as Arminianism (which is nothing more than a modified version of Calvin’s teachings), dispensationalism, covenant theology, Lutheranism, Romanism, Orthodox theology, pre-wrath rapture, take your pick. All these systems are flawed as they are all the products of human attempts to understand and systematize Biblical presentations. They can all make contributions to our overall understandings of the truth but none may claim to be the only correct such presentation, at the expense of all others. Knowing the human impossibility for absolute neutrality and the human love for theological systems, I readily admit that I cannot be as dispassionate and uninfluenced by human teachings in these pages as I would like. No man can be. But I have made every attempt not to allow my own personal systems influence my understanding of what the clear teachings of Scripture is.

I have freely consulted a wide variety of commentaries and sermons for insights and other views of various texts that I might have missed. As the old preacher once remarked “I milked a lot of cows but I churned my own butter.” Direct quotes are attributed to their proper source to prevent that unpardonable sin of literary theft. But simply because I quoted a writer should not be viewed as an endorsement of all that he wrote or of his theological system. I selected the quote because I found it interesting and useful, not because I am in any degree of agreement regarding the rest of his teachings. In this sense, I have tried to follow the form of Charles Spurgeon’s *Treasury of David*, where he quoted a wide variety of other writers. I consider his commentary on the Psalms to be the greatest commentary ever in reference to its format.

This commentary is based on the text of our English Received Version, commonly referred to as the King James Version or the Authorized Version. I believe that this is the most preserved English translation available to us and that it is the superior translation in English. I can see no good reason to use or accept any of the modern versions, especially the current “flavor of the month” of the New Evangelicals and apostate fundamentalists, the corrupt and mis-named English Standard Version. When it comes to these modern, critical text versions, I reject them for a variety of reasons. One major reason is that they have not been proven on the field of battle. I have liver spots older than the English Standard Version, but I am expected to toss my English Received Text, over 400 years old, and take up this new translation, whose ink is still barely dry? How many battles has the ESV won? How many missionaries have done great exploits with an NIV? What revivals have been birth and nurtured with an NASB? We will stick with the translations and texts that our fathers have used and that God has blessed. We are also favorably inclined to the Geneva Bible, Tyndale Bible, Bishops Bible, and other “cousins” of our English text. The Greek text used is the underlying text of our English Received Text and its 1769 revision, which is the text most widely in use today by God’s remnant.

Each verse is commented upon, with the English text. The English grammatical notes are limited to the tenses of the corresponding Greek verbs, for I believe the study of the verb tenses is the most important element of the usage of the Greek text, even moreso than word studies. Not every Greek word is commented upon, only unusual or important ones. I am guilty of “picking and choosing” my word studies instead of presenting complete word studies for every word. That system would simply be too unwieldy for my purposes.

I have also decided to do some textual studies, mainly comparing the King James readings with the English Standard Version. I also refer to the readings in the English translations that preceded the King James Bible for sake of comparison and to examine how the English Received Text readings developed from the Tyndale Bible, through the Coverdale Bible, the Geneva Bible and the Bishops Bible.

The presupposition of this commentary is that what the Bible says is so and that we will not change the text to suit our theological fancy. It says what it says and that is what we

must accept, else we will be found unfaithful stewards of the Word of God, a judgment we fear. We will not amend our text but will take it as it is the best we can.

This commentary certainly is not perfect, nor is it the final presentation of my understanding and application of this book. A commentary over 25 years in the making can never truly said to be finished. As new insights are granted by the Holy Spirit and as my understanding of the epistle deepens, additional material will be added and sections will have to be re-written. One is never truly “finished” with any theological book. As one deepens and grows in his relation with the Lord, so does his theological understandings and that should be reflected in one’s writings.

This book was also written as a theological legacy to my four children. They will need to be mighty for God in their generation for their days will certainly be darker than the generation their father grew up in. This book is an expression not only of the heart of a preacher in the early 21st century but also of a Christian father for his children, so they may more fully understand what their father believed and preached during his ministry.

It is my sincere prayer that this unpretentious contribution to the body of Christian commentary literature will be a blessing to the remnant of God’s saints in the earth as we approach the coming of our Lord.

Introduction to Philemon

Authorship- The Apostle Paul. Origen cites the epistle as a Pauline letter addressed to Philemon concerning Onesimus. Tertullian refers to the brevity of this epistle as the "sole cause of its escaping the falsifying hands of Marcion" (*Against Marcion* 5.21). Eusebius refers to it as one of the "universally acknowledged Epistles of the canon" (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.25). Jerome and Ignatius also allude to it. It is quoted infrequently by the Fathers, evidently because of its brevity.

F. C. Baur was one of the few radical critics to deny Pauline authorship. He regarded it as a second-century document which was intended to show the church how to deal with slavery. Very few men would agree with this position.

Date of Writing- Probably the same time as the writing of the other prison epistles, around 62-64.

Place Written From- Rome, from prison.

Addressee- Philemon, a Christian who owned slaves, who was a personal friend of Paul.

Purpose of Writing- Onesimus, a slave belonging to Philemon, had fled to Rome, and he seems to have defrauded his master (1:18). At Rome he was converted under the ministry of Paul and was induced by him to return to his master. Paul writes to Philemon to ask him to receive Onesimus as a brother. Paul urges that the new convert be no longer considered a mere servant but also a brother in Christ. Paul also requests Philemon to prepare him a lodging, as he expects to visit Colossae shortly.

Style- This short epistle is a masterpiece of Christian tactfulness and politeness. It has been called "the polite epistle." Luther noted, the epistle exhibits "a right noble, lovely example of Christian love." Verses 17 and 18 of the epistle present a forceful illustration of imputation: "Accept him as you would me," that is, reckon to him my merit; "if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account," that is, reckon to me his demerit.

The Problem of Slavery- The question of slavery is often an emotional one but it must be admitted by all Bible believers that slavery, in some form, is a Biblical institution. Paul is writing to a Christian who owned slaves and at no time does Paul command Philemon to release his slaves nor does he rebuke Philemon for owning slaves. We would not defend colonial American or Southern-Confederate slavery before the Civil War for racial slavery, as practiced in all areas of America, was not Biblically based. Biblical slavery is more economically based, mainly for criminals who must make restitution for their crimes or for those who find themselves in the "poorhouse" and had to sell themselves into slavery due to bankruptcy.

The following verses deal with Biblical slavery:

1. Exodus 21:2-11

2. Exodus 21:20,21
3. Exodus 21:26,27
4. Exodus 22:3
5. Leviticus 19:20
6. Leviticus 22:11
7. Leviticus 25:39-55
8. Deuteronomy 15:12-18
9. Deuteronomy 23:15,16
10. Joshua 9:20-27
11. Nehemiah 5:5,8

We will proceed with the presupposition that there is a Biblical foundation for slavery. Slavery is not anti-Christian, despite what Unitarians, Liberals, Socialists, Civil Rights Do-Gooders and anti-Biblicians believe.

Names and Titles of Christ in Philemon

1. Lord Jesus Christ 3
2. Lord Jesus 5
3. Christ Jesus 6
4. Christ 8
5. Lord 20

Names and Titles of the Father in Philemon

1. Father 3

Outline of Philemon

1. Introduction and Greetings 1-3
2. Paul's Appreciation of Philemon 4-7
3. Paul Intercedes For Onesimus 8-21
4. Paul's Plan To Visit Philemon 22
5. Greetings And Close 23

Booklist on Philemon

In many booklists and bibliographies, as well as commentaries, Philemon is lumped in with Colossians. There is no good reason to tie Philemon in with Colossians, either in terms of a bibliography or commentary. Philemon deserves to stand alone in commenting.

The following reviews are taken from the following sources:

Biblical Viewpoint, Bob Jones University

\$ *Commenting and Commentaries*, by Charles Spurgeon

% *The Minister's Library*, by Cyril Barber

* *An Introduction to the New Testament*, by D. Edmond Hiebert

& *The Master's Journal*, The Master's Seminary

** Top 5 Commentaries on the Books of Colossians and Philemon, Keith Mathison, Ligonier Ministries <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/top-5-commentaries-on-the-books-of-colossians-and-philemon>

Listings with no notation are reviews by the author, Dr. John Cereghin

\$ Attersoll, William, *Commentary on Philemon*, 1633. A long comment on a short epistle. The pious author labors to keep to his text and succeeds in bringing out of it a mass of quaint practical teaching.

** Bruce, F.F., *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 1984. There are certain authors whose work serious students of Scripture should go out of their way to read. F.F. Bruce is one of those authors. Before his death, he wrote on an astounding variety of subjects, covering all aspects of biblical studies. Among these works were a number of commentaries on various books of the Bible. His commentary on Colossians and Philemon is a perfect example of his unique combination of scholarship and readability.

& Callahan, Allen Dwight. *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon*, 1998. 96 pages. It is refreshing to see Paul's small Epistle to Philemon dealt with in a stand-alone commentary, as too often this small book is relegated to a few pages of brief comments at the end of larger works. This commentary is part of "The New Testament in Context" series of NT commentaries. The author, an Assistant Professor of New Testament at Harvard Divinity School, presents six full pages of bibliography and promises a fresh interpretation as he "put[s] his exegetical hand to the plow" (xi). This work is built on two articles previously published in the *Harvard Theological Review* (*HTR* 86/4 [1993]:357-76, and 88/1 [1985]:149-56). In this work the author spends the introduction defending his thesis that the traditional interpretation (Onesimus as a runaway slave being returned to Philemon with a letter from Paul under whose ministry Onesimus has become a Christian) is false. The basis for this conclusion is, in brief, twofold: (1) nowhere in the text is this interpretative scheme presented clearly (5), and (2) the "fugitive slave hypothesis" is an invention of John Chrysostom, whom all others have simply followed without any critical thought (16). While the reevaluation of any

“traditional” understanding can be helpful, the author’s reasoning seems to be both subjective and incomplete. A few examples will illustrate. One of the arguments presented is that Philemon could not be a slave holder at all because “Philemon appears throughout the letter as a good and generous man” (5) and that Cruelty of a master towards his slave can never be ruled out in the Graeco-Roman world, where severity bordering on sadism was a common feature of the servile relationship. Mildness and forbearance in this respect would have made Philemon not only an exception but an oddity in his own world, so conditioned by violence against all purported inferiors (ibid). This reasoning is patently unsound. Should not the results of becoming a Christian and living according to the Spirit suffice to make one “an oddity in his own world” (cf. Gal 5:22-25). Additionally, although the author seems to wish that Paul was neither condoning nor regulating slavery (xiv, 3, 5), he fails to interact with passages such as Eph 6:5-9 and Col 3:22–4:1 (passages never referenced in the book). He seeks to support his view by stating that “the entire fugitive slave hypothesis was cogently challenged by John Knox” (6). However, he fails to mention that Knox did not question the hypothesis, only that Archippus, not Philemon was the slave-owner. He states that the traditional interpretation originated as the “imaginative and ingenious hypothesis of John Chrysostom” (16). However, his interaction with the sources and other writings which predate Chrysostom, are superficial at best. The actual commentary on the text is slanted, often forced, to coincide with the author’s predetermination. He agrees that Onesimus and Philemon are certainly estranged and Paul is working to reconcile them, but concludes that he is not trying to reconcile slave and master, but two brothers (ix, 51-54). Throughout the work the author equates the experiences and situation of NT-era slavery under the Roman system and the race-based slavery of 19th-century America. The results are an unsatisfactory commentary built upon a poorly devised theme for the book. This reviewer cannot recommend this work.

* Drysdale, A.H., *The Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon*, 1870. Rich in devotional value, yet a work of scholarly exposition. Full, lucid and abounding in practical applications.

\$ Dyke, Daniel, *Philemon*, 1618. Dyke's remarks are memorably practical and full of common sense. He abounds in proverbs. The work is not very valuable as an exposition of the words but excels in making use of them.

* Ernst, Karl J., *The Art of Pastoral Counselling. A Study of the Epistle to Philemon*, 1941. Philemon viewed as a case in pastoral counseling. Interesting and stimulating.

% Gaebeleien, Frank, *Philemon: The Gospel of Emancipation*, 1939. A brief, sympathetic exposition.

** Garland, David E. *Colossians/Philemon*, NIV Application Commentary, 1998. The NIV Application Commentary series is a mixed bag. Some are better than others. David Garland’s commentary on Colossians and Philemon is one of the commentaries in this series that should not be passed by. Garland offers great insight into the text and its contemporary application. It should be of great help to busy pastors.

* Hiebert, D. Edmond, *Titus and Philemon*, 1957. An exegetical treatment of both epistles in the light of the original.

* Johnson, Philip C., *The Epistles to Titus and Philemon* in Shield Bible Study Series, 1966. A concise, well-outlined interpretation intended as a study guide.

\$ Jones, William, *Commentary on Philemon, Hebrews and 1 and 2 John*, 1636. Very lively, sprightly, colloquial lectures by a Suffolk divine, who thinks the Brownists and Dissenters were not persecuted. Despite his intolerance he says some uncommonly racy things.

* Kelly, William, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul to Titus and of that to Philemon, With Translation of an Amended Text*. A careful exposition by a voluminous Plymouth Brethren scholar of the 19th century.

* Knox, John and Buttrick, George, *The Epistle to Philemon* in The Interpreter's Bible, 1955. Introduction and exegesis by Knox, exposition by Buttrick. Knox propounds the novel view that the real owner of Onesimus was Archippus and that the purpose of the letter was to secure the return of Onesimus to Paul for his own service.

Lenski, Richard Charles Henry, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, Titus, and to Philemon*, 1966. An exhaustive Lutheran commentary. He defends Paul's authorship (473-484); corrects the KJV (501); discusses the Greek words for prayer (538); disagrees with Calvinists (802); defends the verbal inspiration of the Bible (851-59); argues for baptismal regeneration (946).

** Lucas, R.C., *The Message of Colossians and Philemon*, The Bible Speaks Today, 1984. Lucas's commentary on Colossians and Philemon is probably the best introductory level commentary on these two books. Like all of the commentaries in this series, it emphasizes the big picture and the overall flow of the text.

& MacArthur, John. *Colossians & Philemon*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1992. 249 pages. This lucid evangelical exposition with a brief section on introductory matters and a verse-by-verse commentary based on the NASB text has an appropriate title to fit each of its twenty chapters. The volume offers frequent help for teachers of Bible classes, pastors, students, and lay people as MacArthur answers most questions that readers may ask about the text. His fairly full, yet not tedious exposition has meaningful correlations with other Scriptures. On Philemon, a section discusses slavery in relation to Christianity. MacArthur also keynotes forgiveness, hence a threefold outline: spiritual character (vv. 4-7), action (vv. 8-18) and motivation (vv. 19-25). Forgiveness receives copious exposition (207-9), with ten statements that sum it up and a listing of its eight basic elements (218-20). An illustration of forgiveness at the end will be worth the price of the book for some. Mitsuo Fuchida, Japanese pilot in the attack on Pearl Harbor, later became a Christian. His conversion came after he received

profound impressions of Christianity such as Peggy Covell's sacrificial service that displayed to the Japanese people a love that forgives, though the Japanese had killed her beloved parents (232-35). A book may be a fine one, yet not satisfy all readers all the time. Overall, this work is very rewarding. It will prove useful in the frequent cases where it makes special contributions, and many will appreciate what they glean from it.

** Moo, Douglas J., *The Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 2008. The publication of any new commentary by Douglas Moo is an event. His commentary on Romans is a classic. His commentaries on other books are all outstanding. I was very excited, therefore, to see this new commentary on Colossians and Philemon. What I have read so far has been excellent. If anyone is going to give O'Brien a run for his money, it is Moo. Moo has the advantage of having written in the Pillar series — a much more reader-friendly series than the WBC. His commentary is also able to take into consideration studies published since 1987.

* Muller, Jac. J., *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 1955. A concise interpretation by a conservative South African professor. Seeks to maintain a balance between exact scholarship and the practical import of the letters. Technical matters are confined to the footnotes.

** O'Brien, Peter, *Colossians and Philemon* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, 1987. O'Brien has written the best all around commentaries on all of Paul's prison epistles. He is able to explain well both the details of the text as well as the big theological picture. He doesn't lose the forest for the trees. His commentary on Colossians and Philemon in the WBC series is less technical than his commentary on Philippians in the NIGTC series, but it is made unnecessarily difficult by the WBC format. In spite of the cumbersome format, all students of Colossians and Philemon should consult O'Brien on these two epistles.

Ruckman, Peter, *The Books of First and Second Thessalonians and Philemon*, 2005, 37 pages for Philemon. Based on the King James Version, dispensational comments and applicatios of a very practical manner.

% Scroggie, William Graham, *A Note to a Friend: Paul to Philemon*. A rewarding and in-depth study. One of the best ever produced on this epistle.

* Vincent, Marvin, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, 1897. Greek text. A scholarly, generally conservative interpretation with valuable introductions, word studies and exegetical comments.

Commentary on Philemon

1. Introduction and Greetings 1-3

1 Paul,^a a prisoner^b of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother,^c unto Philemon^d our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,

2 And to our beloved Apphia,^a and Archippus^b our fellowsoldier,^c and to the church in thy house:^d

1a Paul bases the authority of this letter on personal friendship, not apostolic authority. To refer to himself as an apostle wouldn't fit in with the tone of this letter since it was a personal letter.

Paul is writing from a dreary Roman dungeon but there is no word of complaint or self-pity from his pen. He is not about to let his current distress affect his correspondence and ministry to others.

Although Paul was under the jurisdiction of Rome and that insane nut Nero, Paul considered himself to be the prisoner of Jesus Christ, not of Rome or Nero. Paul was in that dungeon because it was part of the will of God for Paul to be there, so Paul was determined to serve Christ from that dungeon.

1b This is a prison epistle as clearly stated but it also qualifies as a pastoral epistle because it is sent to an individual and deals with a church problem in dealing with slaves in the church. It should be called a prison pastoral epistle and classified with the others.

1c Timothy is never called an apostle. Paul only used "brother" for a few men in his writings besides Timothy, including Quartus (Romans 16:23), Sosthenes (1 Corinthians 1:1) and Apollos (1 Corinthians 16:12).

1d A Phrygian name. Philemon may have been a resident of Colossae. His name, φιλημων, means "Affectionate or beloved", from φιλημα, a kiss.

2a Was she the wife of Philemon? The Geneva Bible and the ESV identify her as a "sister" while the King James and the other traditional translations do not.

2b Paul refers to him as "our fellowsoldier", showing that he was probably a preacher or evangelist. Philemon may have been a "Christian layman" while Archippus was in the ministry. He is also mentioned in Colossians 4:17. His name means "The ruler or master of the horse; from αρχων, a chief, and ιππος, a horse."

2c There is a trio of "fellows-" in Philemon:

1. Fellowsoldiers in verse 2. Archippas is mentioned in verse 2 with this title. Epaphroditus is also called a "fellowsoldier" in Philippians 2:25.

2. Fellowprisoners in verse 23. This is Epaphras.

3. Fellowlaborers in verse 1 and 24. Philemon is a "fellowlaborer" in verse 1. In verse 24, John Mark, Artistarchus, Demas and Luke are called "fellowlaborers", although Demas would soon fall away from that.

2d Churches met in houses in this age as dedicated church buildings were unknown until the enfranchisement of the Church by Constantine. This strikes in us a bit of romance in household religion (which every family must practice) and house churches in those areas where no good church is located. Such home churches and house ministries are to be encouraged. The New Testament pattern is then for churches meeting in homes. As soon as you start putting up dedicated church buildings, you are moving away from New Testament Christianity, for we see no such buildings in the New Testament!

The "church" in this context then is not a building. It never has been. A "church" is made up of a group of people who meet together for fellowship, worship and instruction in righteousness.

3^a Grace to you, and peace,^b from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Paul's Appreciation of Philemon 4-7

4 I thank^{present} my God,^a making^{present middle participle} mention^b of thee always in my prayers,^c

5 Hearing^{a-present active participle} of thy love and faith,^b which thou hast^{present active participle} toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;

6 That the communication^{2842-a} of thy faith may become^{aorist middle deponent subjective} effectual^{1756-b} by the acknowledging^{1922-c} of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.^d

3a This is the standard Pauline greeting.

3b Grace always before peace. No grace of God means no peace with God or peace of God.

4a As was a custom of Paul's.

4b Or "remembering you..."

4c Whenever Paul prayed, he always mentioned Philemon and his house-church.

5a The good testimonies that Paul was hearing of Philemon. The man had a good reputation among the brethren. Did Paul get this from Onesimus? Even though Onesimus wronged Philemon, his master may have had a strong enough testimony that even an unprofitable slave had to testify of it.

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

6a Strong's #2842 κοινωνία koinonia; fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse, the share which one has in anything, participation, fellowship, intimacy, the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship (in fulfilling the apostolic office), a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship. The other translations use "fellowship" and the ESV has "sharing".

6b Strong's #1756 ενεργης energês; from εν en (Strong's #1722) in, and εργον ergon (Strong's #2041) work; active

6c Strong's #1922 επιγνωσις epignôsis; precise and correct knowledge, used in the New Testament of the knowledge of things ethical and divine

6d The deity of Christ is emphasized in this title, as seen in "Christ" being mentioned first.

7 For we have^{present} great joy and consolation^{3874-a-b} in thy love, because the bowels^c of the saints are refreshed^{373-perfect passive} by thee, brother.^d

3. Paul Intercedes For Onesimus 8-21

8 Wherefore, though I might be^{present active participle} much bold^{3954-a} in Christ to enjoin^{2004-b-present infinitive} thee that which is convenient,^{433-c-present active participle}

9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech^{a-present} thee, being^{present participle} such an one as Paul the aged,^b and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.^c

7a Strong's #3874 παρακλησις paraklêsis; a calling near, summons, importation, supplication, entreaty, exhortation, admonition, encouragement, consolation, comfort, solace; that which affords comfort or refreshment

7b Two things Philemon's testimony imparted to the brethren:
1. Great joy
2. Consolation

7c We would say "hearts" today, as the Tyndale, Coverdale and ESV do. This is the seat of affections.

7d What a great testimony by Paul on behalf of this man!

8a Strong's #3954 παρρησια parrhêsia; from παρ pas (Strong's #3956) all, and ρεω rheô (Strong's #4483) speak; freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech, openly, frankly, without concealment, without ambiguity or circumlocution, without the use of figures and comparisons, free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance

Paul knew Philemon and his spiritual maturity well enough to know that he could speak frankly and candidly to him and that Philemon would react well. Paul still had some hesitation in making his upcoming request for Philemon, knowing that technically, he had no authority to meddle in Philemon's personal affairs relating to Onesimus.

8b Strong's #2004 επιτασσω epitassô; from επι epi (Strong's #1909) an intensifier, and τασσω tassô (Strong's #5021) appoint, ordain; to enjoin upon, order, command, charge

8c Or "suitable".

9a Paul is not going to order, command or throw any of his apostolic authority around to order Philemon to do what Paul wants him to in the matter with Onesimus. Paul is going to appeal to love for Philemon to receive Onesimus and to treat him as a brother.

9b Paul may have been in his mid-late 50s or maybe near 60 years old at the time of this writing.

"Paul the aged - If we allow St. Paul to have been about 25 years of age at the utmost, in the year 31, when he was assisting at the martyrdom of Stephen, (Acts 7:58) as this epistle was written about A.D. 62, he could not have been at this time more than about 56 years old. This could not constitute him an aged man in our sense of the term; yet, when the whole length of his life is taken in, being martyred about four years after this, he may not improperly be considered an aged or elderly man, though it is generally allowed that his martyrdom took place in the 66th year of our Lord. But the word πρεσβυς signifies, not only an old man, but also an ambassador; because old or elderly men were chosen to fulfill such an office, because of their experience and solidity; and πρεσβυτης, for πρεσβευτης, is used in the same sense and for the same reason by the Septuagint; hence some have thought that we should translate here, Paul the ambassador. This would agree very well with the scope and even the design of the place (Adam Clarke)."

10 I beseech^{present} thee for my son Onesimus,^a whom I have begotten^{aorist} in my bonds:^b

11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable,^{890-a} but now profitable^{2173-b} to thee and to me:^{c-d}

The ESV reduces “Paul The Aged” to “Paul, an old man”. This robs Paul of the dignity of his age and makes him to be just another old man.

9c Paul is using every ace that he has up his sleeve. Would you turn down the request of an old man? Would you turn down a request from a man who is suffering for the cause of Christ?

Paul refers to himself under two titles as the basis for this appeal:

1. Paul the Aged
2. Paul the Prisoner

10a His name means “Useful or profitable.”

“The word means *helpful*, and it was a common name for slaves. The same idea was expressed by other names, as *Chresimus*, *Chrestus* (*useful*); *Onesiphorus* (*profit-bringer*, (2 Timothy 1:16); *Symphorus* (*suitable*). Onesimus was a runaway Phrygian slave, who had committed some crime and therefore had fled from his master and hidden himself in Rome. Under Roman law the slave was a chattel. Varro classified slaves among *implements*, which he classifies as *vocalia*, *articulate speaking implements*, as *slaves*; *semivocalia*, *having a voice but not articulating*, as *oxen*; *muta*, *dumb*, as *wagons*. The attitude of the law toward the slave was expressed in the formula *servile caput nullum jus habet*; *the slave has no right*. The master's power was unlimited. He might mutilate, torture, or kill the slave at his pleasure. Pollio, in the time of Augustus, ordered a slave to be thrown into a pond of voracious lampreys. Augustus interfered, but afterward ordered a slave of his own to be crucified on the mast of a ship for eating a favorite quail. Juvenal describes a profligate woman ordering a slave to be crucified. Some one remonstrates. She replies: “So then a slave is a man, is he! 'He has done nothing,' you say. Granted. I command it. Let my pleasure stand for a reason” (vi., 219). Martial records an instance of a master cutting out a slave's tongue. The old Roman legislation imposed death for killing a plough-ox; but the murderer of a slave was not called to account. Tracking fugitive slaves was a trade. Recovered slaves were branded on the forehead, condemned to double labor, and sometimes thrown to the beasts in the amphitheater. The slave population was enormous. Some proprietors had as many as twenty thousand (M.R. Vincent).”

10b Onesimus had been converted under Paul's ministry while Onesimus was at Rome, thus he was Paul's son in the faith. Somehow these two crossed paths and Paul was able to lead him to faith in Christ.

11a Strong's #890 ἀχρηστος *achrēstos*; from α a (Strong's #1), a negative particle, and χρηστος *chrēstos* (Strong's #5543) fit, useful; useless, unprofitable. Used only here.

“Onesimus represented the least respectable type of the least respectable class in the social scale. He was regarded by philosophers as a 'live chattel,' a 'live implement'; and he had taken philosophy at her word. He had done what a chattel or and implement might be expected to do, if endued with life and intelligence. He was treated by the law as having no rights; and he had carried the principles of the law to their logical consequences. He had declined to entertain any responsibilities...There was absolutely nothing to recommend him. He was a slave, and what was worse, a Phrygian slave; and he had confirmed the popular estimate of his class and nation his own conduct. He was a thief and a runaway. His offence did not differ in any way, so far as we know, from the vulgar type of slavish offences. He seems to have done just what the representative slave in the Roman comedy threatens to do when he gets into trouble. He had 'packed up some goods and taken to his heels.' Rome was the natural cesspool for these offscourings of humanity. In the thronging crowds of the metropolis was his best hope of secrecy. In the dregs of the city rabble he would find the society of congenial spirits. (J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon*).” For such a man as this to turn from being “unprofitable” to “profitable” is a wonderful example of the transforming power of the grace of God in the life. God specializes in such cases as these.

12 Whom I have sent again:^{a-aorist} thou therefore receive^{aorist middle imperative} him,^b
that is,^{present} mine own bowels:^c

Being unprofitable is our natural spiritual state before God, as Paul says in Romans 3:12. It is salvation that makes us spiritually profitable unto God.

11b Strong's #2173 ευχρηστος euchrêstos; from ευ eu (Strong's #2095) well, good, and χρηστος chrêstos (Strong's #5543) fit, useful; easy to make use of, useful.

11c The gospel can take the most worthless of men and make them useful and profitable for the kingdom. Onesimus was a different man now that he had been saved! He was no longer the runaway slave/thief who was unprofitable, but now he was very profitable. Paul knew this from firsthand experience since Onesimus had ministered to Paul in Rome after his conversion.

It would seem that Philemon had sent Onesimus on some errand of business and Onesimus had been unfaithful, maybe even running off with a sum of money that his master had entrusted him with. Or it could be that Onesimus ran away from Philemon, maybe with some of Philemon's money or goods, and had gone to Rome to try to lose himself in the crowd of the city. Whatever, he had run away and robbed Philemon. In this sense, he was most unprofitable. He served with eye-service. He loitered away his time and set a bad example to the other servants. Every unsaved man is equally unprofitable in his service to his Master, God. We would wonder just how profitable he might be to his current Master, Satan? Can a man be a profitable servant of a Master he hates and who hates him back?

So how do you go from “unprofitable” to “profitable”? The first step is salvation. No unsaved man can be profitable in the sight of God. Once saved, you start obeying whatever commands the Lord may give you and you seek to walk in His statutes and commandments. These lead to a life of spiritual profitability. Before, Onesimus was unprofitable. But now, the man Paul was sending back to Philemon was a different man, as Paul was sending back a Christian slave, who would now be profitable.

11d “Onesimus” means “profitable”. Before he was saved, he was anything but. But now, he was living up to his name. This is what the Gospel does- takes a worthless life and gives it purpose and value. There are no hopeless cases in this context or men beyond the reach of the grace of God.

When the Lord goes through all the trouble of saving us, shifting us from “unprofitable” to “profitable”, He expects some return on His investment. The parable of the talents demonstrates that (Matthew 25:15-30, look at Luke 19:12-26 as well). We are to “work out our own salvation” (Philippians 2:12) and “occupy until He comes” (Luke 19:13) for that end. We are to do things as Christian to profit and benefit our Lord. It may not be much, for not everyone can pastor a mega-church like Spurgeon or win millions to Christ like Moody, but everyone can, and ought to do something for the Lord with the spiritual gifts and abilities the Holy Spirit gave you.

But you must do more than what is simply expected of you, or what was your “duty”. If that is all you do, then you are an unprofitable servant (Luke 17:10). You have to go beyond what is expected of you spiritually. Stretch yourself. Inconvenience yourself. Go “out on God”. Don't just do those things that you are supposed to do. Do some things that are not required of you. That's good advice that can be applied to both the workplace and the church-house. Going to church, tithing, praying, reading your Bible are things that you ought to do and that you are expected to do. When is the last time you did something “above and beyond” the call of duty for the Lord?

12a What runaway slave would willingly and voluntarily return to a master whom he had wronged and stolen from, knowing that his master could have him put to death? Although Onesimus was returning to a Christian master, he still had no real way to know how Philemon would react, despite all the assurances that Paul no doubt gave him. But see the power of the gospel yet again, to compel a runaway slave to forsake any hope he had to be a freeman (even if he was also a fugitive) to return to a life of bondage. No doubt Onesimus would have loved to stay with Paul, his spiritual father, and help him in his ministry, but he had other obligations that he must fulfill first.

12b The ESV omits the request of Paul to Philemon to receive Onesimus.

13 Whom I^a would^{imperfect middle/passive} have retained^{present infinitive} with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered^{b-present subjunctive} unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

14 But without thy mind^a would^{aoorist} I do^{aoorist infinitive} nothing; that thy benefit should not be^{present subjunctive} as it were of necessity, but willingly.

15 For perhaps he therefore departed^{aoorist passive} for a season,^a that thou shouldst receive^{present subjunctive} him for ever;^b

12c When Paul returned Onesimus to Philemon, he urged Philemon to receive the slave as "mine own bowels". Paul is asking Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul if Paul were coming unto him. After all, Onesimus was now a co-laborer with Paul who had ministered to Paul and had been sent back by Paul. Onesimus was now closely associated with the apostle.

One thing the gospel does in a man is to make want to "make right" the sins he committed while he was yet a sinner. Yes, he is a new creature and old things pass away and all things become new, but there is still the honorable desire to make things right and to try to undo some of the damage that might have been done in the days of the flesh. It spoke something of Onesimus' character and to his new heart that he was willing to go back and face his master, in the face of how he wronged Philemon. Only the gospel would compel a man to do that in the face of whatever punishment Philemon would be legally allowed to inflict. Yet Onesimus would not be able to sleep well at night until he had confronted his sin and the man whom he had wronged.

By returning to the man he had wronged, Onesimus placed himself entirely at the mercy of Philemon. Roman law, which was much crueler than the Athenian Law with respect to slaves, imposed no limits to the power of the master over his slave. The power of life or death rested solely with Philemon, legally (if not spiritually), and slaves were constantly crucified for far lighter offences than his. A thief and a runaway, he had no claim to forgiveness.

13a Emphatic.

13b Onesimus was doing the work of a deacon in his ministry toward Paul. Deacons serve and minister, they do not rule. They have no leadership authority. That is reserved for the pastor and elders. What a blessing to find a man who is content with a ministry of just being helpful! And a young Christian, like Onesimus, at that! Many older Christians never learned how to be a blessing. Everyone can and ought to minister as a deacon, regardless of whether they are ever ordained to the office. And since Philemon himself could not be there to assist Paul, Paul hopes that Philemon will allow Onesimus to be his replacement. And there must have been something in this man that appealed to Paul for Paul to want to keep Onesimus around.

Since Philemon could not be there to minister to Paul, although Philemon might have wanted to if he could, Paul was hoping that he would allow Onesimus to fulfill that ministry in his stead.

14a "Without your permission..." Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him in order that he might minister to Paul. Onesimus must really have been very useful (profitable) unto Paul. But Paul realized that Onesimus belonged to Philemon and he had no legal or moral right to keep Onesimus. Paul thus returns him, reluctantly and with regret, but it is the right thing to do. Notice what we said, Paul recognized the fact that Onesimus belonged to Philemon! Paul recognized the validity of this slave-master relationship and abided by it. Paul thus recognized the validity of slavery, even among Christians and even within the church.

15a Paul does not deny the crimes that Onesimus had done, nor does he try to defend him in those sins. Paul is very careful in his wording. It's not "he took your checkbook and ran off". Paul is more diplomatic in his wording as to not stir up any bad memories or emotions in Philemon as he makes his appeal.

16 Not now as a servant,^a but above a servant,^{a-b} a brother beloved,^c specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?^d

17 If thou count^{present} me^a therefore a partner,^b receive^{aorist middle imperative} him as myself.^{c-d}

18 If he hath wronged^{91-a--aorist} thee, or oweth^{present} thee ought, put that on^{present imperative} mine account;^b

15b Obviously, not through eternity, for you don't get to take your slaves with you to heaven! It means "for the rest of your life." Philemon and Onesimus would be brothers forever but the slave-master relationship ends at death.

16a The ESV uses "slave". All of the other translations use "servant" which is much better here. Onesimus was going back as a saved man. A Christian "slave" of a Christian man is no longer really a "slave" but is now a brother and a servant.

16b Paul asks for Philemon to receive Onesimus "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord." Paul asks Philemon not to punish Onesimus for his sins and crime against him, but rather to forgive and to receive him as the brother that Onesimus was. Why didn't Paul command this? Because he had no authority to. Philemon had every right (before God) to treat his slave as he pleased. Paul was the outsider in this situation. It would be similar to him trying to tell a husband how to treat his wife or a father his son. Paul could not make a command in a personal relationship like this, so he rather beseeches.

16c Paul's words in Galatians 3:28 ring true here, as there is no "bond or free" in Christ. In the eyes of Christ, the despised slave and the exalted master were one, and equals.

16d If Paul felt this way about Onesimus, then Philemon should as well.

17a Emphatic.

17b The pre-King James translations use either "fellow" or "companion". The Geneva's reading is not a good one with "count our things common".

17c Do you count me as a partner and a fellow-laborer in the gospel? Then receive Onesimus as you would receive me. Consider him to be there in my stead and treat him as you would me.

17d Onesimus would go back to Philemon and would be expected to serve as a Christian slave to a Christian master under the command of 1 Timothy 6:2.

18a The aorist gives the idea of "if he has wronged you at any time..." not just in this situation or context.

Strong's #91 ἀδικεῖν adikeō; to act unjustly or wickedly, to sin, to be a criminal, to have violated the laws in some way

18b Paul signs a promissory note. Paul is also willing to repay Philemon for damages incurred by Onesimus. If Philemon was worried about the money, Paul promises to cover it. Paul here is putting himself up for usury for a runaway slave! That ought to have made a strong impression upon Philemon, that Paul was willing to do to bat for him like this.

What a beautiful type and a shadow for the doctrine of imputation here. We were all like Onesimus was at one point- worthless thieves who wronged God. But Christ was willing to pay back to the Father any damages that we incurred (and that we could not repay) so that the Father would be willing to restore us again to a position of usefulness. And you find this truth put on display in one of the shortest books of the Bible!

19 I^a Paul have written^{ao} it with mine own hand,^b I^a will repay^{fu} it: albeit I do not say^{ps} to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.^{c-p}

20 Yea, brother, let me have joy^{ao middle optative} of thee in the Lord: refresh^{ao} my bowels^a in the Lord.
imperative

21 Having confidence^{a-perfect active participle} in thy obedience I wrote^{ao} unto thee, knowing^{perfect active participle} that thou wilt also do^{fu} more than I say.^{b-c-p}

4. Paul's Plan To Visit Philemon 22

22 But withal prepare^{present imperative} me also a lodging:^{a-b} for I trust^{present} that through your prayers I shall be given^{future passive} unto you.

19a Emphatic.

19b This plea, and letter, came directly from Paul and no secretary was used. This underscores the direct appeal Paul was making to Philemon, "man to man".

19c Paul reminds Philemon how much Philemon owes Paul. Maybe not so much in a monetary sense was this debt but spiritual. Paul probably led him to Christ and had functioned as something of his spiritual father. Philemon owed much to Paul. Paul now calls his marker due.

20a Or "affections". The Coverdale and ESV use "heart".

21a The perfect tense shows Paul's absolute confidence in Philemon that he will do as he asks.

21b Yes Philemon had been wronged. He had every reason to be upset with Onesimus. Onesimus had fled and stolen money. But Paul is urging forgiveness. After all, how much has God forgiven us? How much have we sinned against Him? And how much as He forgiven us? Forgive Onesimus as God has forgiven you!

Might this "more than I say" be a round-about way of Paul hinting that Philemon release Onesimus? Paul would not be so bold as to come right out and suggest it but he might want to hint at it and place that thought in Philemon's head.

22a Paul intended on visiting Philemon after he got out of jail, so spruce up the guest room! Travelers, especially the itinerant preachers (the evangelists) were often so lodged by God's people, since there were no hotel chains and the Christian would not have wanted to lodge with heathen in their inns and lodges.

22b Strong's #3578 xenia xenia; hospitality, hospitable reception, a lodging place, lodgings. Old word from *xenos*, stranger, only here and in Acts 28:23.

5. Greetings And Close 23-25

23 There salute^{present middle-passive} thee Epaphras,^a my fellowprisoner^b in Christ Jesus;

24 Marcus,^a Aristarchus,^b Demas,^c Lucas,^d my fellowlabourers.

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

23a Is this a shortened form of the name Epaphroditus?

23b Paul refers to Epaphras as "my fellowprisoner", even a "prisoner of war", who was also serving Christ in jail along with Paul. Epaphras also appears in Colossians 1:7 (where he is a **fellowservant**) and in Philippians 2:25 (where he is a **fellowsoldier**).

24a This is John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas and author of the second gospel. We see Mark mentioned in 2 Timothy 4, just before Paul died. He is also mentioned here in a favorable sense, showing that Paul had reconciled himself to Mark by this time, long before 2 Timothy. Paul was upset when Mark left the first missionary tour in Acts 13 and refused to take him on the second. But Paul had gotten over that now as Mark had proven himself to be a profitable servant of Christ.

You have to love the example of Mark. Here is a young man who failed in the ministry. It was his first missionary trip (or first pastorate or whatever) and he failed. But Christ reclaimed him. Mark did not waste that second chance. He served faithfully along with his uncle Barnabas and distinguished himself so much that Paul wanted to see him again before he died (2 Timothy 4:11). He was "profitable" (see verse 11) to Paul now. He even went on to write the second gospel.

How is that for "reclamation?"

Which preacher hasn't failed somewhere? Noah got drunk. Abraham "shacked up" with Hagar. Jacob was a cheat. Moses was a murderer as was David. Solomon apostatized. Peter denied the Lord and swore and cursed as only a commercial fisherman can do. Jeremiah wanted to quit. Paul disobeyed the Lord in going to Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit told him not to go. And on and on we could go. I know I have failed the Lord so many times that I wonder that He still keeps me on His bread-wagon. If you will be honest with yourself, you'll say "Amen, and I'm even worse!"

24b A Thessalonian, alluded to in Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2, a companion of Paul, at least for part of the way, on his trip to Rome. He is also mentioned as a "fellowprisoner" in Colossians 4:10. He was also with Paul up to the end (2 Timothy 4:11).

24c Demas had yet to fall away and return to the world, as he would do later. (2 Timothy 4:10). Demas is the anti-John Mark. He also "fell away: and failed in the ministry. We do know why Mark quit in Acts 13 but we know what Demas' problem was- he fell back in love with a world system that he was supposed to have abandoned as a Christian. Demas left and never came back. If he was saved, he became a totally worldly and carnal believer, totally worthless to Paul and the kind of ministry he was involved in. Demas became unprofitable and remained that way.

24d The Beloved Physician and author of Acts and the third gospel.

25a This is the typical Pauline ending. The ESV omits the "amen".

Addendum: Thoughts About Slavery

We must notice several things regarding slavery and the Christian response to it in this letter. Slavery in the days of the early church was a fact of life. Many Christians in this day owned slaves. This did not seem to affect their spirituality for Paul paints Philemon as a very godly man. Many Christians were slaves. Paul recognized the validity of the institution and says nothing against it in this epistle.

This was not the racial slavery of the American South prior to 1865 or what existed in colonial America. This was a class slavery and an economic slavery. Many slaves were also prisoners of war. American chattel slavery was unbiblical, despite attempts of some Southern theologians to defend it. But we also recognize that Northern Abolitionist attempts were equally unbiblical. They were led by Quakers and Unitarians and were statist, humanist and messianic in character. Abolitionism was nothing more than an attempt by Unitarians and humanists to transform America into their own frightening image. The slavery of the Africans was simply an excuse for them. Abraham Lincoln was a racist who proposed shipping all blacks back to Africa (establishing the colony of Liberia for them). Many Northerners were also racist. Although Northern Blacks were technically free, they were severely discriminated against. Their plight was better in the Confederacy than in the Union. This is why many blacks actually fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, and wept when they were forcibly freed by Union troops.

Paul, at no time, ever condemned Philemon for having slaves and he never ordered Philemon to release his slaves. Conversely, Paul, at no time, ever encouraged Onesimus to continue to be a fugitive from Philemon. Paul was not running an "underground railroad."

Paul tells Christian slaves and servants to serve their masters as unto the Lord (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-25). The fact that a slave may be saved does not change his status. He is not to be released simply on the basis of his conversion. Paul also tells Christian masters to treat their slaves and servants well, as unto the Lord (Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1).

When Hagar ran away from Sarah, God told her to return to Sarah and to submit herself to her (Genesis 16:8,9). God did not encourage a "runaway slave" to keep "heading north" and to freedom in that case.

Biblical slavery is still valid for today. It has never been done away. If a criminal cannot make economic restitution to his victims (not the State!) for his crimes, then he is to be sold into slavery until he can pay back his victims. If a man defaults on a debt, he can be sold by the holder of that debt in order to get his money back. If we only renewed this practice today, how it would cut down on thefts!

Men may voluntarily sell themselves into slavery or indentured servitude in order to raise money. Do you realize how many millions of Americans have voluntarily placed themselves under a form of economic slavery, called debt? If you have a mortgage, car loan or credit card debt, you voluntarily sold yourself into slavery for the life of that loan.

The only permanent form of Biblical slavery was the enslavement of heathens. See the enslavements of the Gibeonites in Joshua 9:23,27.

There are three basic forms of slavery:

1. Physical servitude, either voluntary or involuntary. The Bible does not condemn this but instead heavily regulates it.
2. State ownership. This is what we have today in the United States, especially among former Negro slaves. They exchanged one form of slavery for another upon emancipation. They sold themselves into the slavery of Statism, when they demanded the State provide all their needs and protect them. They do not want to be free but they want a master to care for them. That master today is Big Government. How many other Americans have sold themselves into state slavery in looking to the Government or the Welfare State to feed them, give them jobs, regulate their pay, educate them and take care of them when they are old?
3. Spiritual slavery, slavery to sin and Satan.

“Slaves In The Early Christian Church labored under several disabilities as regarded to their Church relations and privileges. This did not arise from any hostility or desire to oppress on the part of the Church, but rather from the necessity of respecting the legal rights of the master.

1. They were debarred from the privilege of ordination, for the reason that; being originally tied by birth or purchase to their patron’s or master’s service, they could not be legally ordained; the service of the Church being incompatible with their other duties, and no man was to be defrauded of his right under pretence of ordination. If, however, a slave was found worthy, and his master gave consent, then he might be ordained.
 2. If the master of a slave was a Christian, his testimony concerning the life and conversation of the slave was required before the latter could be admitted to the privilege of baptism. The design of this course was to enlist the interest of the master, and prevent the over-hasty admission of unfit persons.
 3. The slave could not marry without his master’s consent. Being looked upon in this respect as a child; nor could he enter a monastery without this permission, because this would deprive his master of his legal right of service.
 4. The privilege of sanctuary was also denied them if it would excuse them from the proper duties of their station. If they fled to a church, they might be reclaimed and brought out immediately. Other facts relating to slaves may not be uninteresting: e.g. exception was made in their favor so that the judge might on Sunday go through the civil process of law necessary for their emancipation. It was thought a highly proper and commendatory act to celebrate Easter by granting freedom to slaves. Further, if the slave of an apostate or a heretic fled from his master and took sanctuary in the church, he was not only to be protected, but to have his manumission or freedom granted him likewise.
- Roman Slavery.* Roman slavery was perpetual and hereditary, the slave had no protection whatever against the avarice, rage, or lust of his master. The bondman was viewed less as a human being, subject to arbitrary dominion, than as an inferior animal, dependent wholly on the will of his owner. The master possessed the uncontrolled power of life and death over his slave — a power which continued, at least, to the time of the emperor Hadrian. He might, and frequently

did, kill, mutilate, and torture his slaves, for any or for no offense, so that slaves were sometimes crucified from mere caprice. He might force them to become prostitutes or gladiators; and, instead of the perpetual obligation of the marriage tie, their temporary unions (*contubernia*) were formed and dissolved at his command, families and friends were separated, and no obligation existed to provide for their wants in sickness or in health. But, notwithstanding all the barbarous cruelties of Roman slavery, it had one decided advantage over that which was introduced in modern times into European colonies — both law and custom being decidedly favorable to the freedom of the slave.

Although the condition of the Roman slaves was no doubt improved under the emperors, the early effects of Christian principles were manifest in mitigating the horrors, and bringing about the gradual abolition, of slavery. Onesimus, according to the concurrent testimony of antiquity, was liberated by Philemon (ver. 21)...The servile condition formed no obstacle to attaining the highest dignities of the Christian priesthood. (McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*.)”

The best treatment on the Biblical theology of slavery is in *Tools of Dominion* by Gary North, pages 111-206. He identifies 5 forms of servitude that existed in ancient Israel (page 125):

1. Debt bondservice for up to almost seven years. The purpose of this was to train irresponsible men to become productive covenant members (page 127). Men who could not govern themselves must be educated and trained into doing so by working for another man as a bondservant.
2. Becoming a permanent hired laborer for up to 49 years
3. Up to 49 years as a bondservant in a resident alien's household
4. Restitution bondservice for convicted criminals
5. Voluntary lifetime servitude in a Hebrew's household (Exodus 21:5,6).