

in the life of the fugitive, Onesimus. Values such as property rights, slave standards and customs, financial security, etc. are vital to human existence and to stir them or set them adrift will require all of the resources the soil can find. But the greater value is the goodness of God in Christ which lasts when all the rest turns bitter or fails.

The context of values is the real testing of every civilization and man. economic value is greater than human value, when security is greater than truth,

when ambition is more vital than love, then without notice the deadly cancer of moral cynicism and apathy have set in. But when a man or civilization has discovered that the reality of the good Christ is prior and the only absolutely essential,

- then there is at the core of that man or community the goodness that creates life, that nourishes, heals and survives when all of the other crutches of men and nations

are dust. The miracle at the River Kwai Prison Camp (Through the River of the Kwai, Ernest Gordon) occurred when the law of the jungle was no longer prior. The law of Love proved it had within it more guts and survival power than hate.

### CHAPTER III

#### "FREEDOM AND LOVE"

Verses 89/14

"I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required." In Paul's mind there is no question as to the immense weightiness of the interpersonal crises incited by this brief letter. He is sure that truth rests on the side of the request he shall propose, so much so that for a moment he ponders the possibility of commanding Philemon to obey truth's option in the Name of Christ. In some aspects a command from the distinguished apostle would prove an easier solution for Philemon. The agony of deciding the way to move would be simplified. He would have only to obey Paul's directive; also his relationship with other citizens in his city would be protected to a certain extent. But Philemon would be deprived

of his own struggle for truth; he would miss the chance of a century to participate in a genuinely revolutionary act; he would have evaded his own personal involvement in the life of Onesimus. Were Philemon simply to obey Paul's command history would know only two revolutionaries: Paul and Onesimus. Paul wisely chooses a way that is geometric in its influence and therefore he stops short of commanding the house of Philemon.

However, in expressing the possibility of a command Paul opens abruptly the whole issue of relationship and authority in the Christian community. The early church had an awareness of government and lines of authority. (11) Paul himself had journeyed to Jerusalem to receive the approval and the check and balance of the recognized apostolic leaders of the New Testament Church (Galatians 1:18-24). The origin of authority is founded carefully in this letter. The boldness is "in Christ" implying that it is the derivative authority of an under shepherd. The justification for commanding a brother is rooted in the issue of truth "to do what is required."

sense and awareness of truth before God then becomes the criteria rather than the superior status of one man above another. It is plainly true that at crucial moments the vision of some is clearer than others. In mountaineering if one climber recognizes a crevasse which another climber fails to see there is no hesitation to blurt out blunt orders to stop. And there are moral crises which need the immediate and abrupt "stop" command in order to save life or truth. Western jurisprudence has been founded upon the thesis that at critical junctions of human affairs the perspective and judgment of disinterested other men is a trustworthy route in finding justice. The right to command or exhort a brother is founded in the Gospel itself

the Gospel becomes its own check and balance upon arbitrary or perverse exhortations.(12)

"for love's sake, I, Paul, an ambassador and now a prisoner also for Christ with us. . I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will."

Because of love Paul chooses another way. The bland Greek term AGAPE which is so rarely used in classical Greek that it carries very little meaning apart from "goodwill" is taken universally by New Testament writers and transformed into the New Testament's most exciting word. The New Testament itself becomes the primary dictionary to define AGAPE. Here in Philemon AGAPE is portrayed in terms of its effect and affect upon men and events.

Love is the motivation. ("For love's sake.") Paul builds upon love trusting its intrinsic God granted strength to sustain and motivate. Because of love he is willing to risk everything most priceless into the hands of a fellowman. II Cor. 5:18 gives what is probably the most vivid insight into love as motivation. Paul in that book makes a defense of his sanity with the words: "The love of Christ controls us. The word "control" is the combination of two simple Greek words SUN (with, together) and EXW (hold). Literally this would be rendered "hold together." In Paul's experience Christ's love had literally held Paul together, had integrated the loose strands of his life and had given to this impossible individualist a new goal and way of life. Holy motivation by integrating the fragmented life; in the Corinthian passage Paul describes this integration as "reconciliation." There is no other source for motivation it can match what God has done for man and within man. The love of God makes peace within the human heart, that most primitive battlefield, and from that forgiveness at is motivated for individual acts at the edge where his life touches

Love is freedom. ("...that your goodness might be... of your own free will") The result of love is freedom "not the free will of man, but the will freed (John Calvin). Freedom is not man's naturally inclination or possession. Though he longs inwardly for it he must receive it from his creator. The freedom that for himself is deceptive because freedom like love cannot exist alone; they must be shared. Tyranny is able to force obedience and by deception can produce men of faith and hope but it can never produce love, and because love creates free will and anti-thetical to tyranny. Paul has elected the option of freedom because he understands and trusts in the love of God. He recognizes the atomic force within an act of love between men and therefore anything which deprives Philemon of the man to act is rejected. God is the giver of AGAPE and therefore man dares not con- love's freedom to move.

This is what is basically wrong with lust. Lust is a perverse kind of "love" which attempts to disarm love of its mystery and freedom in interpersonal relationship. Lust whether sexual or materialistic defines another individual in the specialized category for which they are to be used. A woman then becomes a body too related to only in one carefully ordered way. This is tyranny of the most corrosive kind which will not admit to the mystery of man's nature, which will not tolerate love to have its way and show its miracle, which previously decides the worth of another human being and then fixes that individual into a role from which there is little chance of escape. Sexual lust is frustrated and cruel in that the sign of love (sexual union) is inacted between individuals with love's meaning and power evaded. The result is always disappointing because the insatiable appetite for freedom and love are never fulfilled by what is fraudulent.

Because of love Philemon is free and in the breast of freedom is responsibility. The gospel enables a man to love his brother, and to care about the feelings and welfare of his brother.(13) He is free from fear, from sin, and from death.(14) He is free from every bondage of the soul, save the bondage of love itself.

Philemon will have a split second in which to decide.

## CHAPTER IV

### ONESIMUS

Verses 10-13

"I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment." Onesimus escaped from Colosae and probably went quickly to Rome this great city of western culture would be relatively safe for a fugitive. It was rest, heterogenous and busy.(15) A hunted man could preserve his anonymity in Rome when hardly possible anywhere else. It is a curious fact that totalitarian regimes have always been most vulnerable at their heart. The capital city is the safest place for the "enemy within" and the place where the most damaging inroads are made against tyranny.

This anonymous young man has come to Rome and now wanders from street to street trying hard to look a part of the unfriendly giant, to fit in with every idiosyncrasy and cynical habit of its people. He may have drifted with the crowds into Nero's monolithic Colosseum with its ingenious arches and the famous forum stretching before it. Onesimus hated slavery and in escape he has pressed hard his hatred for its terrors and injustice. But ironically the freedom he presently experiences is haunted with wistful longing for the ones he loves, who he shall never see again, and the question that faces each day, if this might be the terrible day of Roman justice for him. Onesimus is Raskolnikov\*, haunted by every glance and desperately in search for himself. Everything identifiable is stripped away; he hardly remembers his own name.

Paul is a fugitive, too: shipwrecked, left for dead, beaten short of death, imprisoned. Onesimus meets Paul, this fugitive who had not lost his identity. Paul had a thousand causes for despair and yet he was alive with enough love and faith to share it with Onesimus. He was defiant of the curse of Rome to which other men bowed; he was vigorous and strong yet without the bitterness that is the mark of most defiant men. This rugged man of God introduced Onesimus to Jesus Christ.

Onesimus the economic factor, the slave, the runaway, for the first time in his existence became a son, and stepped out of the darkness of fear into the brilliance of self hood, freedom and responsibility.

Christianity has always made the deepest sense to men and women at the moment of crises. The same moment when some men are quitting the way of discipleship for fear of reprisal, others are seizing hold of its life. Crisis reveals the slowness and bankruptcy of previous foundations. The New Testament gospel has thrived upon crises, because of the truthfulness of such an hour in a man's life and he appeal at such moments of basic, rock bottom reality. History justifies the worth of Onesimus decision at the moment of crisis by the effects that result of his character. The discipleship that Onesimus found in Christ was not escape non-reality nor was it angry rejection of his past reality. The way of discipleship for Onesimus was to lead him into the relationships of his past as a new time of punishment, Dostevoski

man with new perspectives and new goals. It is the mark of an authentic discovery what a man is able to encounter his previous existence and experiences without the bitterness they appear to deserve. This establishes that he is not dominated by the pest. The gospel resolves and unites a man so that he becomes his true self. For Onesimus this means the risk of his life, to return to the people and places of his youth. In his hand is a scrap of paper which we some 1900 years later are reading. Philemon and his neighbors read it, too.

"Formerly he was useless to you..." Paul interprets the relationship between Philemon and his slave by a play upon Onesimus' name which literally means "useful" — Greek. In what sense was Onesimus useless? As a runaway he obviously was useless however, Paul is subtle and probes more deeply, further back to discover the real selflessness that existed even prior to the young man's daring escape. What Paul means is that as a slave he was useless, even were he a model slave he was useless. Roman utilitarianism like any morality that is founded upon economic criteria for evaluation valued men in terms of productivity. Paul strategically takes their language to make his point. A man is useless as a slave; he is miscast, misused, so that the pressure he possesses is unused. As a slave Onesimus was fixed into an impersonal economic category; he who like other men owned within his breast the wind of life is miscast as a factor on gross national product charts. Not only this but to enslave and cage man is to disregard the valuation God Himself has rendered. The Book of Philemon in a few words probes deeply the biblical doctrine of man. Paul has rejected the platonic assumption which classifies men into inflexible strata. (16) This as lies at the bottom of the institution of slavery. Tacitus, who is the most thoughtful of the Roman period historians never calls into question this grim institution

Slaves were not valued as persons; their feelings and anxieties were not issues to be grappled with. The New Testament understanding of man is all the more remarkable men judged alongside of these sophisticated philosophical evaluations. The depersonalize functional view of man expressed in first century slavery has persisted in the racial and social prejudices of the twentieth century. The minority individual is placed into a general category from which there is hardly any escape. He is deprived

the opportunity to press through interpersonally as a distinct individual. Housing is an issue which goes to the heart of this problem. When men cannot be neighbors they are denied the privilege of becoming fully personal to each other; interpersonal encounter is a live option to the neighbor next door. The minority individual becomes in most communities an economic rather than a personal factor. Real estate benefits by his existence in that were he not in existence he would be unavailable to increase the distinguished property value precisely by his exclusion from that property. Country clubs and swank residential parks would lose their psychological appeal were threat of the unwanted person not a considered factor. Fear and greed have always bonded brothers.

There are other equally deadly forms of depersonalization which result from a doctrine of man and God. The intellectualism that will not hear the voice of the educated is infected with the poison of depersonalization. In this instance the individual who cannot match the intellectual achievement of another is not regarded as seriousness, he isolated by condescension. Any form of cynicism or self-righteousness that reads off another individual, trapping him in a fixed and isolated place is drugged with the functional perspective, rendering the neighbor useless. As this letter unfolds, Paul's portrayal of man will sketch a totally new understanding

I "useful man." In a sense this brief document becomes a kind of valedictory to the whole sweep of New Testament thought regarding man: who he is, what he is worth, how he discovers himself and discovers his brother. The New Testament doctrine of man recognizes the mixture within man of his profound needs which only God can suffice, his greatness as the one beloved of God (a greatness founded more in redemption than in creation) his capacity for faith, love, relationship both toward God and man.



Note the classic discussion in Romans 8:1-39. There is here no evasion of man's weakness yet in grand design a view of his greatness. I Cor. 12:1-13:13 provides an equally important portrayal which recognizes man in community, man the recipient hope, faith, love, the most holy gifts of God. II Cor. 4:1-5;21 sketches in magnificent prose the new point of viewing man emphasizing the pervasive grasp that -The grace of God is capable of in the life of man, the earthen vessel. The writer of Hebrews (Heb. 2:5-3:6; 10:19-25, 11:1-12:2) gives the most complete discussion emphasizing the vast worth of man in the divine economy. That which Onesimus had lost significantly to give was blocked in his two previous conditions, both as a slave and as a fugitive. Onesimus could not know and be known as an individual, love, be loved, because relationship at the deeper levels possible between men was locked by human barriers. Onesimus was useless as a man and was not permitted to fulfill his own name. But now the fences are irrevocably gone for better or for worse. In this hour each one will see deeply into the soul of the other; Jesus Christ's done it.

"I am sending. . . my very heart." This sentence breaks through every argument as a refreshing wind. Paul avoids the self-righteous stuffiness of a social reformer's harangue; he rejects the angry old man pose. As wrong as the useless time imposed upon Onesimus was, Paul drops the subject in order to share from his own experience what can happen in human relationships between a Roman citizen and a slave.

The aging apostle had no discrimination in his bones. God had taken it away at the beginning of Paul's Christian pilgrimage. The proud Pharisee Saul had encountered Jesus Christ on the Road to Damascus. In the temporary blindness of that meantime of his life he was healed and loved in the grotto home of Ananias by people whom he had always considered scum of the earth. Paul, the intellectual, the cultured student of Gamaliel found his first steps as a Christian man in that grotto home.

From that decisive moment to his last days Paul would be able to relate to every kind of person without embarrassment or fear. The New Testament story of this apostle's encounters with people is an amazing record of contrasts and unlikely associations. Paul is at home with the interracial church at Antioch, and precipitates a famous argument with Peter in that city over the issue of racial superiority vs. the gospel. (Gal. 2:11-21). In fact, the principal point of the book of Galatians is that a man need not become Jew to be a Christian. Therefore it was not strange that the pathetic Onesimus was able to find his way into the intimate friendship of Paul so that his leaving to take the long road home meant to Paul something akin to the losing of his own heart. Following Damascus and Antioch Paul would never be at ease in the manicured and protected lawns of middle class culture. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that wants it down."(17)

## CHAPTER V

### RADICAL INTERVENTION

Verses 15-16.

"Perhaps. . ." In these verses Paul will venture to interpret what has happened in the lives of these two men and contextualize the events into a meaningful whole. The Christian theologian is instinctively a historian with highly unsensitized interpretive interest. This is because Christ, by his decisive act has become within history the interpretive center of history. This new pivotal reality grants an awareness of the purpose and meaning of the whole. "Remembering the stable for once in our lives everything became a you and nothing was an it."(18)

Though the interpretation will be marked with boldness and breadth the apostle begins with the moderate word "perhaps" Paul is a wise theologian and philosopher who organizes his own interpretive limitations. This is the first mark of good theology. Precisely because Christ is the Lord and finality of history, Paul is not, and there Paul's theories about historical events are not therefore final. This awareness does not

inhibit this thought but he refuses to absolutist the judgments that result. This awareness does not inhibit his thought that revealed in other books as well as here. In Paul's most majestic historical survey (Romans 8,9,10) after having made statements of the most sweeping implication he interrupts his own argument with the prayer of Romans 11:33: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has seen his counselor? or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him

and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen." This benediction ~~is~~ the frailty of Paul's best thoughts and interpretations. Only the Father him-

self is absolute therefore theology must by nature recognize its own tentativeness. This reserve does not blunt affirmation rather the freedom from the absolutization of my own words enables dialogue within the community of faith and enables each Christian to thoughtfully through to the truth which Christ alone possesses. The important Confession of May 29-31, 1934 acknowledges this theological modesty in its opening

"Try the spirits whether they are of God! Prove also the words of the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church to see whether they agree with Holy Scripture and with the Confessions of the Fathers. If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God, in order that God's people be of one mind upon earth and that we in faith experience what he himself has said: 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you.' Therefore, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'"

This brave document is not the less imperative because it honestly bowed before the gospel as witnessed to by the Holy Scriptures and the historic Creeds.

The inevitable result of theology which does not admit to its limitations is cluttered dogmatism and cultism. In this way Jesus Christ is displaced at the true center by the particular system of doctrine that has been designed. The true center ~~is~~ blurred by what are at best secondary questions, and the result is that faith is shifted from Christ himself to the peculiar specialized "truth" of the cult. Cultism, both secular and religious hates the honest modesty of Paul's prior word, "perhaps."

Paul's use of "perhaps" sets Philemon free from the tyranny of language so that he can face its imperative and judgment without either defensiveness or blind submission. In a rich sense the word "perhaps" is a confession of faith in itself which expresses confidence in God's truth to prevail and with more penetration than were the words of Paul forced down Philemon's throat.

". . . he was parted from. . ." "Parted" is a strong, volitionally decisive ~~is~~. (19) By the use of the passive Paul suggests that it was God's will to intervene in the relationship of Philemon and Onesimus parting the slave from his owner. This is the revolutionary God of the Bible, the God unafraid of the radical break

in human relationships. The God who parts men so that the healing of redemption can happen. The crises of these men is for their sake, individually and together. They are not parted for the benefit of the movement or of the dialectic inevitability of

a dogma of history in Paul's historical analysis holy healing moves first toward the most basic level, to the interpersonal/personal place. There is an inevitable "fall-cut" of the effect of this healing to the brokenness of other human relationships but the reason for the parting is in their favor as individuals and community. The break, though difficult and frightening, has resulted in health and love - grace and peace. Slavery is so completely disastrous to human values that there seemed to be no other way to grapple with this tragedy. It was not an Onesimus, wearied of "keeping his place" but the Holy Father who illegally parted him from Philemon so that the young man could be found. The basic wrongness of slavery had to be broken for the sake of both men. Philemon's moderate policies as a slave holder would not suffice; his Christian character and leadership in the Church was not able to reach Onesimus, to find him. There were no refinements or reforms within slavery as a institution which could make Onesimus Philemon's brother, and in Paul's interpretation God would settle for it, is alone, other lesser options were intolerable.

The Christian has always had in his blood this revolutionary legacy. Try as he may to blunt its edge with the various sandpapers of disobedience and fear the revolutionary God is still there to haunt his people's establishments. Jesus Christ defies every confinement. The Christ of Christianity is in the temple unnering the settled grip of triteness; he is placing his hands upon the grotesque wounds of lepers; he is

preoccupied with the needs of pathetic forgotten folk while the important men of influence wait; he is at ease with the worst sinners, with the stuffiest religionists, with playful children, with twelve unlikely disciples. Jesus Christ is stripped and impaled to the vicious Roman cross; and he is vindicated against all human expectation in the

triumph of his flesh on the third day. It is this risen Lord who sends eleven men into the whole world to share the radical fact of his leadership. "All authority in heaven

and earth is given to me - go therefore. . ." (Matthew 28:18). This is the Lord of surprise who finds men when they are most lost, who forgives when they feel most unworthy, who leads his people into the unexpected moment of opportunity when they feel totally weak and uncreative

It has been a mark of heresies throughout the history of Christianity that their determined effort in one way or another has been to coerce and limit the freedom of the sovereign God to act. Heresy always limits God; in some way it seeks to accommodate the benefits with the complex network of law and liturgy. Gnosticism overruled the God of the incarnation and spiritualized away the crude reality of Jesus of Nazareth. In their

dogma God was not permitted to really invade human history.(21) This limiting fact has been present in 19th and 20th Century cult movements which in every case borrow heavily from the first century gnostic and legalistic treasury. Any movement which describes itself as the sole guardian and possessor of truth has attacked the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. Exclusive by nature, these movements are an affront upon the God who is the gatherer of his own people and who alone has the privilege of inclusion and conclusion.(22) The cultic movements have tragically elevated the specialized dogmas of their own preference to become the real object of faith for the believer. They achieve at that moment in the lives of people an effective defense against the God who acts in history. In this way religion has frequently become the deadly foe of Jesus Christ while publicly praising the "Christ" of the religious conception. When Christ

and the gospel is disarmed by religious conceptual specialization the most terrible falsehood is proposed in the name of sacred religion "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction"(23) The result is a worshipped gospel which bestows its own kind of gifts to the devoted. "You made men



free but we have made them happy" is the accusation that the grant inquisitor hurls at Christ. (24)

"Parted...for awhile." This qualifying adverb is remarkable in the check

it places upon revolutionary extremism which becomes as cultic as anti revolutionism. The tragedy of most revolutions rests in their degeneration into absolutized terror and fatal extremism. When the French Revolution which began with the thoughtful aspirations of liberty, fraternity and equality absolutized itself, it could see no further than the act of revolution itself and history discovered that protest of itself is the bitterest of all poverty. When initial, sensible objectives had been achieved the course of the revolution became destitute of noble perspective and

restorted to what it knew best-terror. Onesimus was parted for awhile. The parting, daring and radical as it was, is not a worthy end in itself. Onesimus wandering around Rome confused and bitter is no solution to his needs or to anyone else's. ". . . that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you. . ."

The logic of this sentence is shattering and liberating. Philemon has lost forever the slave who was absolutely under his control according to Roman law and

now has back in his house a brother to be loved. It is interesting that Paul does not feel any need to spell out the details of what Philemon's new relationship with Onesimus should be like. He has penetrated a deeper level and having settled the basic nature of their relationship he need not imbalance the letter with rules and suggestions for the conduct of that relationship. Each of the men are trusted to settle these issues as they arise interpersonally and in their new contextual setting.

Onesimus standing at Philemon's door precipitates a greater crisis than his leaving. If Philemon welcomes the young man as a beloved brother what then shall happen to the morale of other slaves in his household. This institution as a workable and placid asset is lost for him. What of Philemon's relationship to fellow slave owners in Colosseae; he would be to them a "slave lover" and whatever influence he may have once possessed was now in jeopardy. What of his relationship to other Christians who might resist his welcome to Onesimus as dangerous to the peace and y of the church and who may argue that the church's witness to the affluent is burned. Each thought may have raced through his mind as he for one all important split second had the unique moment to decide. This was the same knife edge that every disciple had faced when he first heard Jesus Christ speak "follow me." "It is Jesus who calls, and because it is Jesus, Levi follows at once. This encounter is a testimony to the absolute, direct, and unaccountable authority of Jesus."(25)

Philemon had only the Gospel of Christ to go on in making this crucial decision.

No one of importance but the imprisoned, doomed Paul will know if he chooses against the gospel, if he chooses the other way then the whole earth will know. The next phrase is Paul's letter will make Philemon's task even more difficult and important.

". . .both in the flesh and in the Lord."

The apostle's understanding of interpersonal relationship and world view come through in these few words with significant impact. Paul uses the word flesh (saux) and thereby endorses the whole man, heading off any possible creeek trick of irreligious rdefinition. Onesimus as concrete reality, is a brother, and no amount of spiritualization can enable Philemon to avoid Onesimus concretely o.s a person. The Bible uses (so UJC) flesh and (som) body, along with (psyche) soul and (pneuma.) sph,i t ns words for the whole of man. In Romans 12:1f2

Paul calls upon the Romans to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. It is clear that the apostle uses the word body as a concrete, whole term for man, heading



eff any separation of the spiritual decision from the physical decision. The hope of the resurrection is an affirmation of the worth of each of the whole man. The gospel is so total that it reaches to the benevolence of a man and unites every part to an integrated whole of sacredness before God.

"... in the Lord." As their relationship basically is concrete and inescapable so it is an interpersonal relationship in Christ. Jesus Christ, mediator between man and God, is also the strong mediator between man and his neighbor. Paul has come in this sentence to the center of his theological thesis. Philemon and Onesimus are brothers because of one fact - because Jesus Christ has intervened in their lives individually as Lord and therefore they belong to each other. Because of this fact it is impossible for the Christian and the Church to ignore the brother in Christ whoever he is and wherever he is. This new brotherhood is the gospel's gift and takes precedent above every other fact, alibi, or reason for division. Racist doctrines have in one way or another depended upon some form of order of creation" argument asserting that God has made the races in a different fashion, some superior to others, so that the inferior should serve and be separated from the superior. Paul is uninterested in order of creation arguments because the gospel has brought to birth a new order, the "order of redemption." This new order has broken every other barrier. Paul refers to this new fact frequently. Note Col. 2:8-3:11. "... here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and all." See also Ephesians 2:11-22. "... so then you are no longer strangers and sojourners but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...."

The Christian doctrine of the worth of man is founded upon the order of redemption. Because of belovedness man is of ultimate worth. It is not contingent upon his knowing or trusting that belovedness. Christ has already loved us before we could ever embrace that love. Therefore every man whether he is a Christian disciple or not is of worth in the eyes of the Christian perspective because of the grace of God reward him which was settled at the cross. Therefore it is not possible for the Christian to regard any person as of inferior worth or secondary worth.

verses 17-25.

#### I WILL REPAY

"So if you consider me your partner..."

The theological argument breaks into the personal without any perceptible shift in syntax. The RSV is correct in preserving this flow of argument by avoiding a paragraph division between 16 and 17. The apostle moves from intense theological affirmation to the oldest argument in the history of human affairs, the personal request. For Paul, this is a characteristic pattern because there is in his experience an indissoluble marriage between theology and life. This mixture of personal and academic argument is present throughout this writing. Note Gal. 1:6. "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ. . . . II Cor. 13:1 "I, Paul, myself entreat you ..." II Tim. 3:10 "Now you have observed by teaching, my conduct, and my aim in life. . ." The theology is stronger and more tireless than the personal request of these sentences but the important effect of these lines lay in the continuing tie of his own life to the theological thesis which he had just spoken so well. He will rightly involve his own destiny with theirs. He refuses to take the balcony option and objectify the demand, that underlies this letter. Such an option is not without its justification because the writer has rightly stated correctly the gospel's perspectives could then be free to move on to more important

Kingdom issues. His usefulness to the many would not be hindered by his involvement with the fowo Also this option would leave Paul basically unaffected by the crises that his argument initiated.

Paul elects the more dangerous option and implicates himself as deeply as possible in this historic conspiracy against chains.

"If he has wronged you. . . charge it to my account. I, Paul write this with my own hand, I will repay it. . ." The apostle recognizes the possibility of injustice and guilt on Onesimus' part in the relationship, but Onesimus can do nothing apart from turning to the household whore that wrong occurred. Only Paul is left to offer immediate repayment. To his scribe Paul dictated the financial offer and then seized into his own hand the pen for an added imprimatur.(26) He scratches across the page the impetuous words, "I will repay it.."

Paul's personality is warm and electric and this personal section of the letter portrays this aspect of his life with humanity and obvious love. ". . . to you nothing of your owing me even your own self." There is no element of falseness with Paul. The young man whose life is at stake may color and influence the pressing language of these words but Paul is no beggar in interpersonal relationship. The apostle is aware of his own personal importance to Philemon and is not unwilling to remind Philemon of this debt. Here is an individual who has frankly faced his own gifts from God and at the same moment possesses a healthy understanding of his frailties. Paul frequently mentions his own strengths and weaknesses. Note Romans 1:11-12; II Cor. 4; Phil. 1:19-26; and the famous passage II Cor. 10, 11, 12, 13. Also Luke records Paul's discouragement in Acts 28:11-16 with realistic affection for the aging saint who was capable of both strength and frailty. More than any other writer in the New Testament(27) Paul preserves his own identity and humaneness to an extent which allows the reader to be human, too.

". . . confident that you will do even more than I say. . ." Legalism is never confident that its adherents will do even more than was asked. It is the mark of legalism that wages are received for the exact amount of labor required. At critical moments throughout history God's people have given beyond what was needed because they were free. Ernest Gordon in the book, Through the Valley of the Kwai (28) tells his own survival at a dark and unexpected moment when a handful of fellow prisoners treated his diseased body. They helped him when they did not have the time to do it; when no one would have known or cared had they not; the laws and requirements of military tradition and government had already caved in to the brutal law of the jungle -- yet at that incredible hour a fellow prisoner fed him and healed his wounds. Paul expects a miracle to happen. He knows that God will not strand these two men at their sunrise hour.

"Prepare a guest room for me. . ." The letter closes as it began with the genuine and buoyant expression of personal affection shared between friends. Paul ends with the names of people ringing in his ears; he is a man of many names. In the conspiracy against chains, of sin, of death, of even slavery, he had not become brittle and harsh. For better or for worse he really loved these people and he shares them the best treasure he knows, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

The End

FOOTNOTES  
Commentary on Philemon

- (1) Note the sweeping Pauline affirmation in Col. 1:15-20 as well as the Johann statement John 1:1-17.
- (2) Onesimus and Archippus are mentioned in the Colossian letter, 4:9, 17.
- (3) Pliny the younger notes the bond among Christians in his documents (pg. 3 Documents of the Christian Church, Oxford).  
"But they declared that the sum of their guilt or error had amounted only to this, that on an appointed day they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak, and to recite a hyan antiphonally to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, not for the commission of any crime but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery and breach of faith, and not to deny a deposit when it was claimed. After the conclusion of this ceremony it was their custom to depart and meet again to take food; . . ."
- (4) "Word and Work" are terms used by Karl Barth to describe the essence of God's Holy Act: transcendent word and historical event at the same time.
- (5) Note I John 1:1-5. ". . . that you may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father. . ."
- (6) "At the first organized meeting of the Klan, held in Nashville, Tenn., in the early summer of 1867, General Nathan B. Forrest, famous Confederate cavalry leader, was chosen as president or Grand Cyclops; the Klan was organized into local "dens"; and a declaration of principles was adopted, which defined the objects of the order, as follows: (1) to protect the weak and to relieve the injured and oppressed, (2) to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States and laws passed in conformity thereto and to protect the states and people from invasion from any source, and (3) to aid in the execution of the laws and to protect the people from unlawful seizure and trial except by their peers." Collier's Encyclopedia, W.M. Hesseltine article.
- (7) "In our Western world of today, the worship of Leviathan--the self-worship of the tribe--is a religion to which all of us pay some measure of allegiance; and this tribal religion is, of course, sheer idolatry. Communism, which is another of our latter-day religions. is, I think, a leaf taken from the book of Christianity--a leaf torn out and misread. Democracy is another leaf from the book of Christianity, which has also, I fear, been torn out and, while perhaps not misread, has certainly been half emptied of meaning by being divorced from its Christian context and secularized; and we have obviously, for a number of generations past, been living on spiritual capital, I mean clinging to Christian practice without possessing the Christian belief--and practice unsupported by belief is a wasting asset, as we have suddenly discovered, to our dismay, in this generation." (Civilization on Trial, Arnold J. Toynbee)
- (8) Compare Philippians 1:3-11; I Thess. 1:2,3; Col. 1:3-8; Eph. 3:14-20.
- 9) Note Colossians 2:9-10.

Note I John 4:1-6; Revelation 4:9-11 honors the God of Creation who is as well the God of Redemption. Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:10-18.



Footnotes - 2.

- (11) Note the reference in Phil. 1:1 to bishops (elders) and deacons suggesting that the church possessed organization with a recognized leadership. Note also the organization evident in Acts 4:32, 5:16; 6:1-7
- (12) Note this principle at work in Paul's mention endeavor of the interpersonal warfare in Philippians 4:2-3, "I ask you men help these women. . ." In Galatians 6:1-5 is a classic discussion of the relationship of Christians where exhortation is needed. II Cor. 10:1-6 also probes the issue of command between Christians.
- (13) Note in Galatians 5:13-15 Paul once again stresses freedom and love. "You were called to freedom...and through love be servants of one another." Responsibility grows out of the reality of freedom.
- (14) Note I John 4:18-20.
- (15) Tacitus, the First Century Roman historian, gives interesting insight into the culture, mood intrigue within the Rome of this period. (Note Book XIII, The Annals, Modern Library).
- 16) In the Republic the free men existed because of the existence of a greater number of slaves who were valued in little higher state than cattle.
- 17) "...Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offence.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down'. I could say 'Elves' to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'"  
The Oxford Anthology of American Literature - Robert Frost - Mending Wall
- 18) Pg. 465-466 W.H. Auden Collected Poems, Random House.
- 9) The word is used for divorce in I Cor. 7.
- 20) Galatians offers the classic Pauline attack upon legalism's effort to limit God's ability to save. Circumcision was the specialized practice that the legalists insisted for every Gentile, in effect controlling the grace of God in the narrow tunnel of the legalistic act.