

*servant in the Lord*: one fit therefore for the service intimated. When Paul says to Titus, *Be diligent to come to me to Nicopolis, for I have determined there to winter*, it is plain that the epistle was not written from Nicopolis, as the postscript would have it, for then he would have said, *I determined here, not there, to winter*.

2. The other personal charge to Titus, is, that he would bring two of his friends *on their journey diligently*, and see them furnished, so that *nothing should be wanting to them*. This was to be done, not as a piece of common civility only, but of Christian piety, out of respect both to them and the work they were sent about, which probably was to preach the gospel, or to be some way serviceable to the churches. Zenas is styled *the lawyer*, whether in reference to the Roman or the Mosaic law, as having some time been his profession, is doubtful. Apollos was an eminent and faithful minister. Accompanying such part of their way, and accommodating them for their work and journeys, was a pious and needful service. And to further this, and lay in for it, what the apostle had before bid Titus teach, (v. 8.) he repeats here.

14. And let our's also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.

Let Christians, those who have believed in God, learn to *maintain good works*, especially such as these, supporting ministers in their work of preaching and spreading the gospel, hereby becoming *low-helpers to the truth*, 3d epistle of John, v. 6—8. *That they be not unfruitful*. Christianity is not a fruitless profession; the professors of it must be *filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God*. It is not enough that they be harmless, but they must be profitable, doing good, as well as eschewing evil. "*Let our's set up and maintain some honest labour and employment, to provide for themselves and their families, that they be not unprofitable burthens on the earth;*" so some understand it. Let them not think that Christianity gives them a writ of ease; no, it

lays an obligation upon them to seek some honest work and calling, and therein to *abide with God*. This is of good report, will credit religion, and be good to mankind; they will not be unprofitable members of the body, or burthensome and chargeable to others, but enabled to be helpful to those in want. *To maintain good works for necessary uses*; not living like drones on the labours of others, but themselves fruitful to the common benefit.

The apostle concludes with salutations and benedictions.

15. All that are with me, salute thee Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.

Though perhaps not personally known, (some of them at least,) yet all by Paul testify their *love* and good wishes to Titus, owning him thereby in his work, and heartening him to go on therein. Great comfort and encouragement it is to have the heart and prayers of other Christians with and for us. *Greet them that love us in the faith, or for the faith*, who are our loving fellow-Christians. Holiness, or the image of God in any, is the great endearing thing, what gives strength to all other bonds, and is itself the best. *Grace be with you all. Amen*. This is the closing benediction, not to Titus alone, but to all the faithful with him: which shews, that though the epistle bears the single name of Titus in the inscription, yet it was for the use of the churches there, and they were in the eye, and upon the heart, of the apostle, in the writing of it. "*Grace be with you all*, the love and favour of God, with the fruits and effects thereof, according to need; spiritual ones, especially, and the increase and feeling of them more and more in your souls." This is the apostle's wish and prayer, shewing his affection to them, his desire of their good, and a means of obtaining for them, and bringing down upon them, the thing requested. Observe, Grace is the chief thing to be wished and begged for, with respect to ourselves or others; it is, summarily, all good. *Amen* shuts up the prayer, expressing desire and hope, that so it may, and so it shall be.

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AN

# EXPOSITION,

WITH

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE

## EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO PHILEMON.

*Completed by Mr. J. Smith.*

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THIS epistle to Philemon is placed the last of those with the name of Paul to them, perhaps because the shortest, and of an argument peculiar and different from all the others; yet such as the Spirit of God, who indited it, saw would, in its kind, be very instructive and useful in the churches. The occasion of it was this—Philemon, one of note, and probably a minister in the church of Colosse, a city of Phrygia,

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had a servant named *Onesimus*, who, having purloined his goods, ran away from him, and in his rambles came to Rome, where Paul was then a prisoner for the gospel, and providentially coming under his preaching there, was, by the blessing of God, converted by him; after which he ministered awhile to the apostle in bonds, and might have been further useful to him; but understanding him to be another man's servant, he would not, without his consent, detain him, but sends him back with this letter commendatory, wherein he earnestly sues for his pardon and kind reception.

**B**EFORE we enter on the exposition, such general things as follow may be taken notice of from the epistle, and what relates to it; namely,

I. The goodness and mercy of God to a poor wandering sinner, bringing him by his gracious providence under the means, and making them effectual to his conversion. Thus came he to be *sought of him that asked not for him, and to be found of him that sought him not*, Isa. 65. 1.

II. The great and endeared affection between a true convert and him whom God used to be the instrument of his conversion. Paul regards this poor fugitive now as *his son in the faith*, and terms him *his own bowels*; and Onesimus readily serves Paul in prison, and would gladly have continued to do so, would duty have permitted; but, being another's servant, he must return and submit himself to his master, and be at his disposal.

III. The tender and good spirit of this blessed apostle Paul. With what earnestness does he concern himself for the poor slave! Being now, through his preaching, reconciled to God, he labours for reconciliation between him and his master. How pathetic a letter does he here write in his behalf! Scarcely any argument is forgotten, that could possibly be used in the case; and all pressed with such force, that, had it been the greatest favour to himself that he was asking, he could not have used more.

IV. The remarkable providence of God in preserving such a short writing as this, that might be thought of little concern to the church, being not only a letter to a particular person, (as those to Timothy, and Titus, and Gaius, and the elect lady, likewise were,) but of a private personal matter, namely, the receiving of a poor fugitive servant into the favour and family of his injured master. What in this is there that concerns the common salvation? And yet over this has there been a special divine care, it being given (as the other scriptures were) by *inspiration of God*, and, in some sort, as they are,

*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.* God would have extant a proof and instance of his rich and free grace for the encouragement and comfort of the meanest and vilest of sinners, looking to him for mercy and forgiveness; and for instruction to ministers and others not to despise any, much less to judge them as to their final state, as if they were utter cast-aways; but rather to attempt their conversion, hoping they may be saved; likewise how to behave toward them. Joy must be on earth, as well as there is in heaven, over one sinner who repenteth; they must now be loved and helped and confirmed in good, and furthered in it; and in their outward concerns, their comfort and welfare must be consulted and promoted as much as possible. And on their part, they must be humble and grateful, acknowledging God and his instruments, in what good they have received, ready to all suitable returns, making what reparation they can in case of injuries, and living a life of thankfulness and obedience. To such purposes may this epistle have been written and preserved. And perhaps,

V. There may be something further in all this; at least, by way of allusion, it is applicable to the mediation and intercession of Christ for poor sinners. We, like Onesimus, were revolters from God's service, and had injured him in his rights; Jesus Christ finds us, and by his grace works a change in us, and then intercedes for us with the Father, that we may be received into his favour and family again, and past offences may be forgiven; and we are sure that the *Father heareth him always*. There is no reason to doubt but Paul prevailed with Philemon to forgive and receive Onesimus; and more reason have we to be confident that the intercession of Christ with the Father is prevalent for the acceptance of all whose case he takes in hand, and recommends to him. From these general observations we come to the epistle itself.

## PHILEMON.

In this epistle, we have, I. The preface, v. 1..7. II. The substance and body of it, v. 8..21. And then the conclusion, v. 22, to the end.

1. **PAUL**, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon *our* dearly beloved, and fellow-labourer, 2. And to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus *our* fellow-soldier, and to the church in thy house.

In these two first verses of the *preface* are the persons from and to whom it is written, with some annexed note or title, implying somewhat of argument to the purpose of the letter.

1. *The persons writing*: Paul, the principal, who calls himself a *prisoner of Jesus Christ*, that is, for Jesus Christ. A prisoner simply is no comfort or

honour; but such as Paul was, *for the faith and preaching of the gospel*, this was true glory, and proper to move Philemon upon the request made to him by such a one. A petition from one suffering for Christ and his gospel, surely would be tenderly regarded by a believer and minister of Christ, and especially when strengthened too with the concurrence of Timothy, one eminent in the church, sometimes called by Paul *his son in the faith*, but now, it is likely, grown more in years, he styles him *his brother*. What could be denied to two such petitioners? Paul is not slight in serving a poor convert; he gets all the additional help he could in it.

2. *The persons written to*, are, Philemon and Apphia, and with them Archippus, and the church in Philemon's house. Philemon, the master of Onesimus, was the principal, to whom the letter is inscribed; the *head* of the family, in whom were the

authority, and power of taking in or shutting out, and whose property Onesimus was : with him therefore chiefly lay the business. *To Philemon, our dearly beloved, and fellow-labourer* ; a good man he was, and probably a minister, and on both accounts dearly beloved by Paul. *A lover of good men* is one property of a good minister, (Tit. 1. 8.) and especially must such love those who *labour with them in the work of the gospel*, and who are faithful therein. *The general calling as Christians*, knits those together who are Christians ; but when conjunction in the *special calling as ministers* is added, this will be further endearing. Paul, in the highest degree of ministry, not only calls Timothy, an evangelist, *his brother*, but Philemon, an ordinary pastor, his *dearly beloved fellow-labourer* ; an example of humility and condescension, and of all affectionate regards, even in those that are highest in the church, towards others that are labourers in the same special heavenly calling. With Philemon Apphia is joined, probably his yoke-fellow ; and having a concern in the domestic affairs, the apostle directs to her likewise. She was a party offended and injured by Onesimus, and therefore proper to be taken notice of in a letter for reconciliation and forgiveness. Justice and prudence would direct Paul to this express notice of her, who might be helpful, furthering of the good ends of his writing. She is set before Archippus, as more concerned, and having more interest. A kind conjunction there is in domestic matters between husband and wife, whose interests are one, and affections and actings must be according. These are the principal parties written to. The less principal are, *Archippus, and the church in Philemon's house*. Archippus was a minister in the church of Colosse, Philemon's friend, and probably co-pastor with him ; Paul might think him one whom Philemon would advise with, and who might be capable of furthering the good work of peace-making and forgiveness, and therefore might judge fit to put him in the inscription of the letter, with the adjunct of *fellow-soldier*. He had called Philemon his *fellow-labourer*. Ministers must look on themselves as labourers and soldiers, who must therefore take pains, and endure hardship ; they must stand on the guard, and make good their post : must look on one another as *fellow-labourers*, and *fellow-soldiers*, who must stand together, and strengthen one another's hands and hearts in any work of their holy function and calling : they need see to it, that they be provided with spiritual weapons, and skill to use them ; as *labourers*, they must minister the word, and sacraments, and discipline, and watch over souls, as *those that must give an account of them* ; and as *soldiers*, they must fight the Lord's battles, and not entangle themselves in the things of this life, but attend to the pleasing of him who hath chosen them to be soldiers, 2 Tim. 2. 4. To these it is added, *And to the church in thy house*, his whole family, in which the worship of God was kept up, so that he had, as it were, a *church* in his house. Observe, Families which generally may be most pious and orderly, may yet have one or other in them impious and wicked. This was the aggravation of Onesimus's sin, that it was where he might and should have learned better ; it is likely that he was secret in his misconduct, till his flight discovered him. Hearts are unknown but to God, till overt-acts discover them ; yet this one evil servant did not hinder Philemon's house from being called and counted a *church*, for the religious worship and order that were kept up in it : and such should all families be —nurseries of religion, societies where God is called on, his word read, and sabbaths observed, and the members instructed in the knowledge of him and of their duty to him : neglect of this is followed with ignorance and all corruption. Wicked families are

nurseries for hell, as good ones are for heaven. Masters and others of the family may not think it enough to be good, singly and severally in their personal capacities, but they must be socially so ; as here Philemon's house was a *church* : and Paul, for some concern that all might have in this matter of Onesimus, directs to them all ; that their affection, as well as Philemon's, might return to him ; and that in their way and place they might further, and not hinder, the reconciliation wished and sought. Desirable it is, that all in a family be well affected towards one another, for furthering their particular and the common good and benefit of all. On such accounts might it be, that Paul inscribes his letter here so generally, that all might be the more ready to own and receive this poor convert, and to behave affectionately toward him. Next to this inscription is, *the apostle's salutation of those named by him*.

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

This is the token in every epistle ; so the apostle writes. He is a hearty well-wisher to all his friends, and wishes for them the best things ; not gold or silver, or any earthly good, in the first or chief place, *but grace and peace from God in Christ* ; he cannot give them himself, but he prays for them from him who can bestow them. *Grace*, the free favour and good-will of God, the Spring and Fountain of all blessings : *and peace*, all good, as the fruit and effect of that grace. *To you*, that is, be bestowed on you, and continued to you, with the comfortable feeling and sense of it in yourselves. *From God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*. The Holy Spirit also is understood, though not named ; for all acts toward the creatures are of the whole Trinity : from the *Father*, who is our Father in Christ, the first in order of acting as of subsisting ; and from Christ, his favour and good-will as God, and the fruits of it through him as Mediator God-man ; it is *in the beloved* that we are accepted, and through him we have peace and all good things ; who is, with the Father and Spirit, to be looked to, and blessed and praised, for all, and to be owned, not only as Jesus and Christ, but as Lord also. In 2 Cor. 13. 14. the apostle's benediction is full ; *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen*. Observe, Spiritual blessings are first and especially to be sought for ourselves and others. The favour of God and peace with him, as in itself it is the best and most desirable good, so is it the cause of all other, and what puts sweetness into every mercy, and can make happy even in the want of all earthly things. *Though there be no herd in the stall, and the labour of the olive fail*, yet may such rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation, Hab. 3. 17, 18. *There are many that say, Who will shew us any good ? But if God lift up the light of his countenance, that will put more joy and gladness into the heart, than all worldly increase*, Ps. 4. 6, 7. And Numb. 6. 26. *The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace*. In this is summarily all good, and from this one Fountain, God the *Father, Son, and Spirit*, all comes. After this salutation of the apostle to Philemon, and his friends and family, for better making way still for his suit to him,

He expresses the singular affection he had for him, by thanksgiving and prayer to God in his behalf, and the great joy for the many good things he knew and heard to be in him, in the four next following verses.

### 4. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, 5. Hearing of

thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; 6. That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. 7. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

The apostle's thanksgiving and prayer here for Philemon are set forth by the object, circumstance, and matter of them, with the way whereby much of the knowledge of Philemon's goodness came to him.

1. *Here is the Object* of Paul's praises and prayers for Philemon; *I thank my God, making mention of thee in my prayers.* (1.) Observe, God is the Author of all the good that is in any, or that is done by them, (Hos. 14. 8.) *From me is thy fruit found.* (2.) Observe, To him therefore is all the praise due; (1 Chron. 29. 13, 14.) *But [or for] who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, both wherewith to offer, and the will and heart to do it.* On this account (says he) *we thank thee our God, and praise thy glorious name.* (3.) Observe, It is the privilege of good men, that in their praises and prayers they come to God as *their God: Our God, we thank thee,* said David; and *I thank my God,* said Paul. (4.) Observe, Our prayers and praises should be offered up to God, not for ourselves only, but for others also. Private addresses should not be altogether with a private spirit, minding our own things only, but others must be remembered by us; we must be affected with joy and thankfulness for any good in them, or done by them, or bestowed on them, as far as is known to us, and seek for them what they need. In this lies no little part of the communion of saints. St. Paul, in his private thanksgivings and prayers, was often particular in remembering his friends; *I thank my God, making mention of thee in my prayers;* sometimes it may be by name, or however having them particularly in his thoughts; and God knows who is meant, though not named. This is a means of exercising love, and obtaining good for others. *Strive with me, by your prayers to God for me,* said the apostle: and what he desired for himself he surely practised on behalf of others; so should all. *Pray one for another,* says St. James, 5. 16.

2. Here is the circumstance; *Always making mention of thee.* Always, usually, not once or twice only, but frequently. So must we remember Christian friends, much and often, as their case may need, bearing them in our thoughts, and upon our hearts, before our God.

3. *Here is the matter* both of his praises and prayers, in reference to Philemon.

(1.) Of his praises.

[1.] He thanks God for the *love* which he heard Philemon had toward the Lord Jesus. He is to be loved as God superlatively, as his divine perfections require; and as related to us, *the Lord, and our Lord, our Maker, Redeemer, and Saviour,* who loved us, and gave himself for us. Paul thanks God for what he heard of this, the signal marks and expressions of it in Philemon. And,

[2.] For his *faith* in Christ also. Love to Christ, and faith in him, are prime Christian graces, for which there is great ground of praise to God, where he has blessed any with them, (Rom. 1. 8.) *I thank my God because your faith is published throughout the world;* and in reference to the Colossians, (ch. 1. 3, 4.) *We give thanks to God since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus.* This is a saving grace,

and the very principle of Christian life and of all good works.

[3.] He praises God likewise for his *love to all the saints.* These two must go together; for he who *lovetli him that begat, must and will love them also that are begotten of him.* The apostle joins them in that, (Col. 1. 3, 4.) *We give thanks to God since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints.* These bear the image of Christ, which will be loved by every Christian. Different sentiments and ways in what is not essential, will not make difference of affection, as to the truth; though difference in the degrees of love will be according as more or less of that image is discerned. Mere external differences are nothing here. Paul calls a poor converted slave *his bowels.* We must love, as God does, *all saints.* Paul thanked God for the good that was not only in the churches, but in the particular persons he wrote to; though this too was known to him merely by report; *Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.* This was what he inquired after concerning his friends, the truth, and growth, and fruitfulness of their graces, their faith in Christ, and love to him and to all the saints. Love to saints, if it be sincere, will be catholic and universal love towards all saints; but faith and love, though in the heart they are hidden things, are known by the effects of them. Therefore,

(2.) The apostle joins prayer with his praises, that the fruits of Philemon's *faith and love* might be more and more conspicuous, so as that the communication of them might constrain others to the acknowledgment of all the good things that were in him and in his house toward Christ Jesus; that their *light might so shine before men, that they, seeing their good works, might be stirred up to imitate them, and to glorify their Father which is in heaven.* Good works must be done, not of vain-glory to be seen, yet such as may be seen to God's glory and the good of men.

4. *He adds a reason,* both that of his prayer and praises; (v. 7.) *For "we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.* The good thou hast done and still doest, is abundant matter of joy and comfort to me and others, who therefore desire ye may continue and abound in such good fruits more and more, to God's honour and the credit of religion; (2 Cor. 9. 12.) *The ministration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God."*

Thus far is the preface to this epistle. Now,

He comes to that which is the main *business* of it — to plead with Philemon in behalf of Onesimus, to receive him and be reconciled to him. Many arguments he urges to this purpose, from v. 8, to 21, inclusive.

8. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, 9. Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Here is the

1st *Argument*, from what was before noted, and is carried in the illative *wherefore*; "Seeing so much good is reported of thee and found in thee, especially *thy love to all saints,* now let me see it on a fresh and further occasion; *refresh the bowels of Onesimus and mine also,* in forgiving and receiving him who is now a convert, and so a saint indeed, and meet for thy favour and love." Observe, A disposition to do good, together with just instances and

expressions of it, is a good handle to take hold on for pressing unto more. "*Be not weary of well-doing, go on, as thou art able, and as new objects and occasions occur, to do the same still.*"

*2d Argument*, is, from the authority of him that is now making this request to him; *I might be much hold in Christ, to enjoy thee that which is convenient.* The apostles had under Christ great power in the church over the ordinary ministers, as well as the members of it, for edification; they might require of them *what was fit*, and were therein to be obeyed, which Philemon should consider; this was a matter within the compass of the apostle's power to require, though he would not in this instance act up to it. Observe, Ministers, whatever their power be in the church, are to use prudence in the exercise of it; they may not unseasonably, or, further than is requisite, put it forth; in all they must use godly wisdom and discretion. Wherefore this may be a

*3d Argument*, Waving the authority which yet he had to require, he chooses to entreat it of him; (v. 9.) *Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee.* Observe, It is no disparagement for those who have power to be condescending, and sometimes even to beseech, where, in strictness of right, they might command; so does Paul here, though an apostle; he entreats where he might enjoin, he argues from love rather than authority, which doubtless must carry engaging influence with it. And especially which may be a

*4th Argument*, When any circumstance of the person pleading gives additional force to his petition, as here; *Being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.* Years bespeak respect; and the motions of such, in things lawful and fit, should be received with regard. The request of an aged apostle, and now suffering for Christ and his gospel, should be tenderly considered. "If thou wilt do any thing for a poor aged prisoner, to comfort me in my bonds, and make my chain lighter, grant me this which I desire; hereby in a manner you will do honour to Christ, in the person of an aged suffering servant of his, which doubtless he will take as done to himself." He makes also a

*5th Argument*, from the spiritual relation now between Onesimus and himself.

10. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

"Though of right and *in civil respect* he be thy servant; yet in a *spiritual sense* he is now a *son to me*, God having made me the instrument of his conversion, even here where I am a prisoner for Christ's sake." So does God sometimes honour and comfort his suffering servants, not only working good in themselves by their sufferings, exercising and improving thereby their own graces, but making them a means of much spiritual good to others, either to their conversion, as of Onesimus here, or of their confirmation and strengthening, as Phil. 1. 14. *Many brethren, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word of the Lord without fear.* When God's servants are bound, yet his word and Spirit are not bound; spiritual children may then be born to them. The apostle lays an emphasis here: *My son whom I have begotten in my bonds*; he was dear to him, and he hoped would be so to Philemon, under that consideration. Prison-mercies are sweet, and much set by. Paul makes an argument to Philemon from this dear relation that now was between Onesimus and him, his *son begotten in his bonds.* And a

*6th Argument*, is, from Philemon's own interest.

11. Which in time past was to thee un-

profitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:

(1.) Observe, Unsanctified persons are unprofitable persons; they answer not the great end of their being and relations. Grace makes good for somewhat; "*In time past unprofitable, but now profitable*, inclined and fitted to be so, and will be so to thee, his master, if thou receive him, as he has since his conversion been here to me, ministering to me in my confinement." There seems an allusion to the name Onesimus, which signifies *profitable*. Now he will answer to his name. It may be noted also how the apostle speaks in this matter, not as Onesimus's former case and conduct might warrant; he had wronged his master, and ran away from him, and lived as if he were his own, and not his; yet as God covers the sins of penitents, forgives and does not upbraid, so should men. How softly does Paul here speak! Not that Onesimus's sin was small, or that he would have any, much less himself, to take it so; but, having been humbled for it, and doubtless taken shame to himself on account thereof, the apostle now would not sink his spirit by continuing to load and burthen him therewith, but speaks thus tenderly when he was pleading with Philemon not to make severe reflections on his servant's misconduct, but to forgive. (2.) Observe, What happy changes conversion makes; of evil, good; of unprofitable, useful! Religious servants are a treasure in a family. *Now profitable to thee and to me.* Such will make conscience of their time and trusts, promoting the interests of those whom they serve, and managing all they can for the best. This then is the argument here urged; "It will now be for thy advantage to receive him: thus changed, as he is, thou mayest expect him a dutiful and faithful servant, though in time past he was not so." Whereupon,

*7th Argument*, He urges Philemon from the strong affection that he had to Onesimus. He had mentioned the spiritual relation before, *my son begotten in my bonds*; and now he signifies how dear he was to him.

12. Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is mine own bowels,

"I love him as I do myself, and have sent him back to thee for this end, that thou shouldst receive him; do it therefore for my sake, receive him as one thus dear to me." Observe, Even good men may sometimes need great earnestness and entreaty to lay their passions, let go their resentments, and forgive those who have injured and offended them. Some have thought it to look this way, when Paul is so pathetic and earnest, mustering up so many pleas and arguments to gain what he requests. Philemon, a Phrygian, might perhaps be naturally of a rough and difficult temper, and thence need no little pains in touching all the springs that might move him to forgiveness and reconciliation; but rather should we strive to be like God, who is *slow to anger, and ready to forgive, and abundant in pardons.* And again, an

*8th Argument*, is, from the apostle's denying himself in sending back Onesimus; though he might have presumed upon Philemon's leave to detain him longer, yet he would not.

13. Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: 14. But without thy mind would I do no

thing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

Paul was now in prison, and wanted a friend or servant to act for him, and assist him, for which he found Onesimus fit and ready, and therefore would have detained him to minister to him, instead of Philemon himself, whom if he had requested to have come to him in person for such purpose, he might have presumed he would not have refused; much less might he have reckoned that he would be unwilling his servant should do this in his stead; yet he would not take this liberty, though his circumstances needed it. *I have sent him back to thee, that any good office of thine to me might not be of necessity, but willingly.* Observe, Good deeds are most acceptable to God and man, when done with most freedom. And Paul herein, notwithstanding his apostolical power, would shew what regard he had to civil rights, which Christianity does by no means supersede or weaken, but rather confirm and strengthen. Onesimus, he knew, was Philemon's servant, and therefore without his consent not to be detained from him; in his unconverted state he had violated that right, and withdrawn himself, to his master's wrong; but now that he had seen his sin and repented, he was willing and desirous to return to his duty, and Paul would not hinder this, but rather further it. He might indeed have presumed on Philemon's willingness; but, notwithstanding his need, he would deny himself rather than take that way. And he argues further,

*9th Argument.* That such a change was now wrought in Onesimus, that Philemon needed not fear his ever running from him, or injuring him any more. There are those of whom Solomon says, *If thou deliver them, thou must do it again;* (Prov. 19. 19.) but the change wrought in Onesimus was such that he would never again need one thus to intercede for him.

15. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

Charity would so hope and judge, yea, so it would be; yet the apostle speaks cautiously, that none might be bold to make another such experiment in expectance of a like gracious issue. (1.) Observe, In matters that may be wrested to ill, ministers must speak warily, that kind providences of God towards sinners be not abused, to encouragements to sin, or abatements of just abhorrence of it; *Perhaps he therefore departed from thee for a season, &c.* (2.) Observe, How softly still the sins of penitents are spoken of; he calls it a *departure for a season*, instead of giving it the term that it deserved; as overruled and ordered by God, it was a *departure*; but in itself, and in respect of the disposition and manner of the act, it was a *criminal going away*. When we speak of the nature of any sin or offence as against God, the evil of it is not to be lessened; but in the person of a penitent sinner, as God covers it, so must we; *"He departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; that upon conversion he may return, and be a faithful and useful servant to thee as long as he lives."* *Bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him.* But it is not so with true penitents, they will not return to folly. (3.) Observe, The wisdom and goodness and power of God, in causing that to end so happily, which was begun and carried on for some time so wickedly; thus regarding a poor vassal, one of such low rank and condition, and so little regarded by men, working so good and great a change in him who was so far gone in evil ways, who had wronged a master so good, had run

from a family so pious, from the means of grace, *the church in his house*, that he should be led into the way of salvation, who had fled from it, and find means made effectual at Rome, who had been hardened under them at Colosse. What riches are here of divine grace! None so low, or mean, or vile, as utterly to be despaired of. God can meet with them when running from him; can make means effectual at one time and place, which have not been so at another. So was it in this instance of Onesimus; being returned to God, he now returns to his master, who will have more service and better hold of him than ever—by conscience of his duty and faithfulness in it to his life's end; his interest therefore it will be now to receive him. So God often brings gain to his people out of their losses. And beside interest, a

*10th Argument* is taken from the capacity under which Onesimus now would return, and must be received by Philemon.

16. Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord!

*"Not now as a servant, that is, not merely or so much, but above a servant, in a spiritual respect, a brother beloved, one to be owned as a brother in Christ, and to be loved as such, upon account of this holy change that is wrought in him, and one therefore who will be useful unto thee upon better principles and in a better manner than before; who will love and promote the best things in thy family, be a blessing in it, and help to keep up the church that is in thy house."* (1.) Observe, There is a spiritual brotherhood between all true believers, however differenced in civil and outward respects; they are all children of the same heavenly Father, have a right to the same spiritual privileges and benefits, must love and do all good offices to and for one another as brethren, though still in the same rank, and degree, and station, wherein they were called. Christianity does not null or confound the respective civil duties, but strengthens the obligation to them, and directs to a right discharge of them. (2.) Observe, Religious servants are more than mere ordinary servants; they have grace in their hearts, and have found grace in God's sight, and so will in the sight of religious masters; (Ps. 101. 6.)  *Mine eyes are upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me. He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.* "Onesimus being now become such, receive and affect him as one that is partaker of the same common faith, and so a *brother beloved, specially to me* who have been the instrument of his conversion." Good ministers love not so much according to the outward good which they receive, as the spiritual good which they do. Paul called Onesimus *his own bowels*, and other converts *his joy and crown*. *"A brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more to thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord;* by a double tie therefore, both civil and religious; thy servant, thy property, one of thy house and family, and, in a spiritual respect, now thy *brother in Christ*; which heightens the engagement, he is God's servant and thine too; here are more ties than he is under to me. How readily therefore should he be received and loved by thee, as one of thy family and one of the true faith, one of thy house and one of the church in thy house!" This argument is strengthened by another, the

*11th Argument*, From the communion of saints.

17. If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

There is a *fellowship* among saints; they have interest one in another, and must love and act accordingly. "Now shew thy love to me, and the interest I have in thee, by loving and receiving one so near and dear to me, even as myself; own and treat him as thou wouldst me, with a like ready and true, though perhaps not equal, affection."

But why such concern and earnestness for a servant, a slave, and such a one as had misbehaved? *Answer*, Onesimus being now penitent, it was doubtless to encourage him, and to support him against the fears he might have in returning to a master whom he had so much abused and wronged, to keep him from sinking into despondency and dejection, and hearten him to his duty. Wise and good ministers will have great and tender care of young converts, to encourage and hearten them what they can to and in their duty. *Objection*, But Onesimus had wronged as well as offended his master. The answer to this makes a

12th *Argument*, A promise of satisfaction to Philemon.

18. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; 19. I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit, I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

Here are three things:

(1.) A confession of Onesimus's debt to Philemon; *If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought*. It is not an *if* of doubting, but of illation and concession; seeing *he hath wronged thee*, and thereby is become indebted to thee; such an *if* as Col. 3. 1. and 2 Pet. 2. 4, &c. Observe, True penitents will be ingenuous in owning their faults, as doubtless Onesimus had been to Paul, upon his being awakened, and being brought to repentance; and especially is this to be done in cases of injury to others. Onesimus by Paul owns the wrong. And,

(2.) Paul here engages for satisfaction; *Put that on my account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it*. Whence, [1.] Observe, The communion of saints does not destroy distinction of property: Onesimus, now converted, and become a *brother beloved*, is yet Philemon's servant still, and indebted to him for wrongs that he had done, and not to be discharged but by free and voluntary remission, or on reparation made by himself, or some other in his behalf; which part, rather than fall, the apostle undertakes for him. Upon which, [2.] Observe, Suretyship is not in all cases unlawful, but in some is a good and merciful undertaking. Only know the person and case, be not *surety for a stranger*, (Prov. 11. 15.) and go not beyond ability; help thy friend thou mayest, as far as will stand with justice and prudence. And how happy for us that Christ would be made the surety of a better covenant, (Heb. 7. 22.) that he would be made *Sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him!* And, [3.] Observe, Formal securities by writing, as well as by word and promise, may be required and given. Persons die, and words may be forgotten or mistaken; writing better preserves right and peace, and has been in use with good persons, as well as others, in all ages, Jer. 32. 9, &c. Luke 16. 5—7. It was much that Paul, who lived on contributions himself, would undertake to make good all loss by an evil servant to his master; but hereby he expresses his real and great affection for Onesimus, and his full belief of the sincerity of his conversion: and he might have *hope*, that, notwithstanding this generous offer, Philemon would not insist on it, but freely remit all; considering,

(3.) The reason of things between him and Philemon; "*Albeit, I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides; thou wilt remember, without my reminding thee, that thou art on other accounts more in debt to me than this comes to.*" Modesty in self-praises is true praise. The apostle glances at the benefits he had conferred on Philemon: "That thou art any thing in grace and acceptance with God, or enjoyest any thing in a right and comfortable manner, it is, under God, owing to my ministry; I have been the instrument in his hand of all that spiritual good to thee; and what thy obligation to me on this account is, I leave to thee to consider. Thy forgiving a pecuniary debt to a poor penitent for my sake and on my request, and which, however, I now take upon myself to answer, thy remitting it to him, or to me, now his surety, thou wilt confess, is not so great a thing; here is more *per contra*—*thou owest to me even thine own self besides.*" Observe, How great the endearments are between ministers and those toward whom their endeavours have been blessed to their conversion or spiritual edification! *If it had been possible*, (said Paul to the Galatians,) *ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me*, Gal. 4. 15. On the other hand he calls them his *children, of whom he travailed again, till Christ was formed in them*, that is, the likeness of Christ more fully. So 1 Thess. 2. 8. *We were willing to have imparted to you not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us*. By way of allusion, this may illustrate Christ's undertaking for us; we were revolted from God, and by sin had wronged him, but Christ undertakes to make satisfaction, *the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God*. "If the sinner owes thee ought, put it upon my account, I will pay the debt; let his iniquity be laid on me, I will bear the penalty." Further, a

13th *Argument*, is, from the joy and comfort the apostle hereby would have on Philemon's own account, as well as on Onesimus's, in such a seasonable and acceptable fruit of Philemon's faith and obedience.

20. Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

Philemon was Paul's *son in the faith*, yet he entertains him as a *brother*; Onesimus a poor slave, yet he solicits for him as if he were seeking some great thing for himself. How pathetic is he! "*Yea, brother, or O my brother; (it is an adverb of wishing or desiring; let me have joy of thee in the Lord.* Thou knowest that I am now a *prisoner of the Lord*, for his sake and cause, and need all the comfort and support that my friends in Christ can give me: now this will be joy to me, *I shall have joy of thee in the Lord*, as seeing such an evidence and fruit of thy own Christian faith and love, and on Onesimus's account, who hereby will be relieved and encouraged." (1.) Observe, Christians should do the things that may joy the hearts of one another, both people and ministers reciprocally; and ministers of their brethren. From the world they expect trouble; and where may they look for comfort and joy but in one another? (2.) Observe, Fruits of faith and obedience in people are the minister's greatest joy, especially the more of love appears in them to Christ and his members, forgiving injuries, shewing compassion, being merciful as their heavenly Father is merciful. "*Refresh my bowels in the Lord*. It is not any carnal selfish respect I am actuated by, but what is pleasing to Christ, and that he may have honour therein. [1.] Observe, The Lord's honour and service are a Christian's chief aim in all things. And, [2.] Observe, It is *meat and drink* to a good minister to see people ready and zealous in what is good, especially in acts of charity and beneficence, as occasions

occur, forgiving injuries, and remitting somewhat of their right and the like. And once more, his last, which is the

14th Argument, Lies in his good hope and opinion which he expresses of Philemon.

21. Having confidence in thy obedience, I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

Good thoughts and expectations of us more strongly move and engage to do the things expected from us. The apostle knew Philemon to be a good man, and was thence persuaded of his readiness to do good, and that not in a scanty and niggardly manner, but with a free and liberal hand. Observe, Good persons will be ready for good works, and not narrow and pinching, but abundant in them, (Isa. 32. 8.) *The liberal deviseth liberal things.* The Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to his apostles by the will of God, to do what good they could with what they had, according as occasions offered.

Thus far is the substance and body of the epistle. Now he comes to the conclusions; where,

1. He signifies his good hope of deliverance, through their prayers, and that shortly he might see them, desiring Philemon to make provision for him.

22. But withal prepare me also a lodging; for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

But withal, or moreover. He comes to another thing, yet, as may seem, not without some eye to the matter which he had been upon, that might be furthered by this intimation, that he hoped he should himself soon follow, and know the effect of his epistle, which Philemon would therefore be the more stirred up to see that it might be to his satisfaction. Now here is,

(1.) The thing requested; *Prepare me also a lodging*; under this all necessities for a stranger are included. He wills Philemon to do it, intending to be his guest, as most to his purpose. Observe, Hospitality is a great Christian duty, especially in ministers, and toward ministers, such as the apostle was, coming out of such dangers and sufferings for Christ and his gospel. Who would not shew the utmost of affectionate regards to such a one? It is an honourable title that he gives Gaius, (Rom. 16. 23.) *My host, and of the whole church.* Onesiphorus is also affectionately remembered by the apostle on this account; (2 Tim. 1. 16.) *The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; and in how many things he ministered to me at Ephesus, thou knowest.*

(2.) Here is the ground of the apostle's request; *For I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.* He did not know how God might deal with him, but the benefit of prayer he had often found, and hoped he should again, for deliverance and liberty to come to them. [1.] Our dependence is on God for life and liberty and opportunity of service; all is by divine pleasure. [2.] When abridged of these or any other mercies, our trust and hope must be in God, without fainting or succumbing, while our case is depending. But yet, [3.] Trust must be with the use of means, prayer especially, though no other should be at hand; this hath unlocked heaven, and opened prison-doors. *The fervent effectual prayer of the righteous availeth much.* [4.] Prayer of people for ministers, especially when they are in distress and danger, is their great duty; ministers need and request it. Paul, though an apostle, did so with much earnestness, Rom. 15. 30. 2 Cor. 1. 11. Eph. 6. 18, 19. 1 Thess. 5. 25. The least may this way be helpful to the greatest. Yet,

[5.] Though prayer obtains, yet it does not merit, the things obtained: they are God's gift, and Christ's purchase. *I trust that through your prayers, χαρισμομασι μιν—I shall be freely bestowed on you.* What God gives, he will yet be sought for, that mercies may be valued the more, and known whence they come, and God may have the praise. Ministers' lives and labours are for the people's good; the office was set up for them; *he gave gifts for men, apostles, &c.* Eph. 4. 8, 11, 12. I heir gifts, and labours, and lives, all are for their benefit, 1 Cor. 3. 21, 22. *All things are your's, Apollos, Cephas, &c.* [6.] In praying for faithful ministers, people in effect pray for themselves; *"I trust I shall be given unto you; for your service, and comfort, and edification in Christ."* See 2 Cor. 4. 5. [7.] Observe the humility of the apostle; his liberty, should he have it, he would own to be through their prayers, as well as, or more than, his own; he mentions them only through the high thoughts he had of the prayers of many, and the regard God would shew to his praying people. Thus of the first thing in the apostle's conclusion.

2. He sends salutations from one who was his fellow-prisoner, and four more who were his fellow-labourers:

23. There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; 24. Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers.

*Saluting is wishing health and peace.* Christianity is no enemy to courtesy, but enjoins it, 1 Pet. 3. 8. It is a mere expression of love and respect, and a means of preserving and nourishing it. *There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus.* He was of Colosse, and so countryman and fellow-citizen with Philemon; by office he seems to have been an evangelist, who laboured among the Colossians, if he was not the first convertor of them, for whom he had special affection. *Our dear fellow-servant,* (said St. Paul.) *and for you a faithful minister of Christ,* (Col. 1. 7.) and (ch. 4. 12, 13.) *A servant of Christ, always labouring for you in prayers.* I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, &c. A very eminent person therefore this was, who, being at Rome, perhaps accompanying Paul, and labouring in the same work of preaching and propagating the gospel, was confined in the same prison, and for the same cause; both termed prisoners in Christ Jesus, intimating the ground of their imprisonment, not any crime or wickedness, but for the faith of Christ and their service to him. An honour it is to suffer shame for Christ's name. *My fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus,* is mentioned as his glory and the apostle's comfort; not that he was a prisoner, and so hindered from his work; (that was matter of affliction;) but that, seeing God thus permitted and called him to suffer, his providence so ordered it that they suffered together, and so had the benefit and comfort of one another's prayers, and help, it may be, in some things; this was a mercy. So God sometimes lightens the sufferings of his servants by the communion of saints, the sweet fellowship they have one with another in their bonds. Never more enjoyment of God have they found than when suffering together for God. So Paul and Silas, when their feet were fast in the stocks, had their tongues set at liberty, and their hearts tuned for the praises of God. *Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers.* The mention of these seems in a manner to interest them in the business of the latter. How ill would it look by denial of the request of it to slight so many worthy names, as most of these, at least, were! *Marcus*, cousin of Barnabas, and son of Mary, who was so hospitable to the saints



at Jerusalem, (Col. 4. 10. Acts 12. 12.) and whose house was the place of meeting for prayer and worship of God. Though some failing seems to have been in him when Paul and he parted, yet in conjunction with Barnabas he went on with his work, and here Paul and he, we perceive, were reconciled, and differences forgotten, 2 Tim. 4. 11. He bids Mark to be brought to him, *for he is profitable to me for the ministry*, that is, of an evangelist. *Aristarchus* is mentioned with Marcus, (Col. 4. 10.) and called there by Paul his *fellow-prisoner*; and speaking there of Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, he adds, *touching whom ye received commandments; if he come unto you, receive him*: an evidence that he himself had received him, and was reconciled to him. Next is *Demas*, who hitherto, it seems, appeared not faulty, though (2 Tim. 4. 10.) he is censured as having forsaken Paul, from *love of this present world*. But how far his *forsaking* was, whether total from his work and profession, or partial only; and whether he repented, and returned to his duty, scripture is silent, and so must we be: no mark of disgrace lay on him here, but he is joined with others who were faithful, as he is also in Col. 4. 14. *Lucas* is the last, that *beloved physician* and evangelist, who came to Rome, companion with Paul, Col. 4. 14. 2 Tim. 4. 11. He was Paul's associate in his greatest dangers, and his fellow-labourer. The ministry is not a matter of carnal ease or pleasure, but of pains; if any are idle in it, they answer not their calling. Christ bids *to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers*, not loiterers, *into his harvest*, Matt. 9. 38. And the people are bid *to know them that labour among them, and are over them in the Lord, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*, 1 Thess. 5. 12, 13. *My fellow-labourers*, says the apostle: ministers must be helpers together of the truth; they serve the same Lord, in the same holy work and function, and are expectants of the same glorious reward; therefore they must be assistants to each other in furthering the interest of their great and common Master. Thus of the salutations, and then,

3. Here is the apostle's closing prayer and benediction.

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

Here is,

(1.) What is wished and prayed for; *grace*, the free favour and love of God, together with the fruits and effects of it in all good things, for soul and body,

for time and eternity. Observe, Grace is the best wish for ourselves and others; with this the apostle begins and ends.

(2.) From whom; *our Lord Jesus Christ*, the Son of God, second Person in the Trinity, *Lord* by natural right, *by whom, and for whom, all things were created*, (Col. 1. 16. John 1. 1—3.) and *who is Heir of all things*, and as God-man and Mediator, who purchased us, and to whom we are given by the Father, *Jesus*, the Saviour, Matt. 1. 21. We were lost and undone; he recovers us, and repairs the ruin; he saves by *merit*, procuring pardon and life for us; and by *power*, rescuing us from sin, and Satan, and hell, and renewing us to the likeness, and bringing us to the enjoyment, of God: thus is he *Jesus*, and *Christ* the Messiah, or anointed, consecrated and fitted to be King, Priest, and Prophet, to his church. To all these offices were there anointings under the law with oil, and to them was the Saviour spiritually anointed with the Holy Ghost, Acts 10. 38. In none but him were all these together and in such eminence: *He was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows*, Ps. 45. 7. This Lord Jesus Christ is *our's* by original title to us, and by gospel-offers and gift, his purchase of us, and our own acceptance of him, resignation to him, and mystical union with him: *Our Lord Jesus Christ*. Observe, All grace to us is from Christ: he purchased, and he bestows it. *Of his fulness we all receive, and grace for grace*, John 1. 16. *He filleth all in all*, Eph. 1. 23.

(3.) To whom; *Your spirit*, ἡ ψῆα τῆ συνήμαλς ἡμῶν, not Philemon's only, but of all who were named in the inscription. *With your spirit*, with you; the soul or spirit being the immediate seat of grace, whence it influences the whole man, and flows out in gracious and holy actings. All the house saluted are here joined in the closing benediction, the more to remind and quicken all to further the end of the epistle.

*Amen* is added, not only for strong and affectionate summing up the prayer and wish, *so let it be*; but as an expression of faith that it will be heard, *so shall it be*. And what need we more to make us happy, than to have *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with our spirit*? This is the usual benediction, but it may be taken here to have some special respect also to the occasion; the grace of Christ with their spirits, Philemon's especially, would sweeten and mollify them, and take off too deep and keen resentments of injuries, and dispose to forgive others as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.