

Dr. Daniel Darko, Prison Epistles, Session 17, Philemon

© 2024 Dan Darko and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Dan Darko in his lecture series on the Prison Epistles. This is session 17 on Philemon.

Welcome to our biblical studies lecture series on Prison Epistles.

We have covered Colossians, and now we move to look at Philemon. Philemon is a very interesting book. It is only one chapter.

I don't know how many of you like to read Philemon for fun. I don't know if you have even taken the trouble to actually study Philemon on your own. I don't even know, frankly, if you have taken the time, even in your devotion time, to read Philemon.

Or maybe I should ask, have you had a sermon on Philemon? When you think about Paul's letter to Philemon, what comes to your mind? But before we get into the letter, we'll have to look at some interesting things that actually emerge in modern scholarship as we think about this letter. The first thing that we look at in light of modern discussion is the dates and the authorship. We call prison epistles this particular lecture series.

At the very beginning of this lecture, I actually drew your attention to the fact that some of the books in this collection of prison epistles are disputed by scholars as not having been written by Paul. Two of those books that stood out is Colossians and Ephesians. The two that are undisputed in the Prison Epistles collection that we look at in this study series is Philippians and Philemon.

If you like, call it the PMP. Paul's authorship of Philemon is not disputed. Yet, Philemon continues to pose all kinds of questions to scholarship today.

So, let's begin the discussion on Philemon assuming or establishing that Paul wrote this. At least most scholars haven't actually found any serious argument to dismiss Paul and authorship. So, Paul is the author of Philemon.

When was Philemon written? As we think about Philemon, we think about specific dating. Since I mentioned to you earlier on that this letter was probably written from Rome, the dating for Paul's imprisonment in Rome is placed between 61 and 63 AD, or as we will use it in modern days, CE, referring to the Christian era. Some have suggested that Paul was imprisoned somewhere, and this could be Caesarea or Caesarea, depending upon your pronunciation, or Ephesus, and they will play around the dates.

But whatever location you put Paul's imprisonment, the dating is not going to be significantly removed from each other. It's never going to be like 5 years removed from each other. By the way, I should draw your attention to the fact that all New Testament books are dated between 50 to 180 50 years.

So, there's no such a remarkable change for us to be able to work with and say, oh, the time went on. To some degree, that is the easier part of our New Testament studies, unlike our Old Testament colleagues, who have to work so hard to establish the dating between the events and the writing of the event.

And the dating of the writing of the event, the traditional dating, and what some scholars think is dating based on vocabulary and all kinds of issues that emerge. New Testament, we get a pass on that. It's fairly straightforward.

Mid to the end of the first century. This particular letter for specific can be placed between 55, 68 maximum. It is more narrow, as most scholars will argue today, and as I would argue, between 60 and 63, there in that bracket.

And if we take that, then Paul would be writing this from his jail in Rome. Paul claims authorship, and he claims that he is writing this explicitly in Philemon 1, Philemon 9, and Philemon 19. Remember that Philemon does not have chapters, so when I say Philemon 1, I mean the first verse, the ninth verse, and the 19th verse.

But as you think about Philemon, you also want to think about another letter. Because where was Philemon written? This is almost a straight-shot question for scholarly discussion. Most likely, this letter was written to Colossae, and it was written to a specific individual and a church at his home in Colossae.

So, it makes sense always to look at the relationship between this letter and Colossians. Because not only do we establish this, but internal evidence between these two letters shows that there is enough reason to actually suggest that these are close letters that are related. The only irony in this whole thing is that one is undisputed about what Paul wrote, and the other scholars dispute what Paul wrote.

So let me just point out some of this to you. Relationship between Philemon and Colossians. Both letters were written from prison.

So that should give you a sense of how Paul introduces himself. Timothy and Paul are presented as the authors of these books. Paul says he's writing with Timothy.

He says that about Colossians, and he says that about Philemon. The people mentioned in the greetings of both letters overlap. In fact, as I will show you in a few

minutes, you will see that Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke also appear in Philemon, as you find in Colossians.

And interestingly, the slave in the account of Philemon, Onesimus, is also mentioned in Colossians 4, verses 7-9. So, you can see what is going on here. When we think about a church in Colossae, we don't think about a church in which you have one cathedral and 200 people come to church every Sunday. No.

That is not how the early Christians in the first century functioned. They actually met in people's homes. We know from archaeological evidence that rich people had enough space for clubs and various societies to have meetings.

However, one of the things that perhaps should be stressed here or put forward here is that we don't have any evidence to suggest that there are homes that can take more than 50 people at a time due to the size of the living rooms. So when we imagine the early church and their meetings, we imagine house churches, not more than 50 people at a time, and multiple house churches in the bigger city. That is what should come to mind as you think about the churches in Colossae.

And so, when Paul draws our attention to the church that meets in Philemon's home, that is the imagery we should have. So, it is very likely that the church that is going to have access to Philemon or hear the content of Philemon would also have access to Colossians and have it read to them aloud in their church meeting. If that is beginning to make clear, let me show you some of the internal evidence that links these two letters.

One, look at the introductions of these two letters. Philemon 1 and Colossians 1. Philemon 1 actually begins by saying Paul is the one writing it, and he is doing this with Timothy, our brother. In Colossians 1 verse 1, Paul is the one writing it, and he is writing it with Timothy, our brother.

Note there is a major shift in the conversation because I will bring something up from here later on. Here, Paul introduces himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. But in Colossians, he introduces himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus.

Hold on to the thought that in Philemon, he introduces himself as a prisoner for Christ Jesus. Let me go on and also show you another internal evidence to show you a parallel in these letters. When you look at Philemon, you see that in the last greetings, Paul mentions Epaphras.

In Colossians chapter 4, Epaphras is mentioned here. You see, Mark mentioned, and Mark is mentioned in Colossians 4. You see another name there, Aristarchus. Aristarchus is mentioned first on the list in Colossians 4. We see the name Demas.

Well, Demas is mentioned in Colossians 4:14. You see Luke. Luke is mentioned in Colossians 4:14. And perhaps the only place Paul refers to him as a physician that we will come to know about. So, one of the things you are beginning to see in this comparison is that Philemon and Colossians are letters that will be accessible to both churches.

And letters that are written by the same person. Except you hold to the argument that Colossians was written by someone. That was why when we were discussing Colossians, I was quick to point out that one of the things that works to undermine the argument that Paul didn't write Colossians is the very fact that the authorship of Philemon is not disputed.

If these close parallels are evident, then how can you say Paul actually wrote one, but Paul didn't write the other? Is the church so dumb that they can have one that is written by a fictitious figure pretending like Paul and doing all these things within such a time frame and have them sit back and say, Oh yeah, we believe that probably Paul wrote it. Paul didn't write it. And then, think about this: 1900 years later, we figure out that actually Paul didn't write it.

In the first century, they were deceived. And the church, the rest of the church, has been deceived for almost 1800 years, believing a lie. We have just figured out Paul didn't write it.

The evidence and the way the arguments go is interesting, and that is an understatement. In modern assessment, it is good to see increasing patterns and acknowledgment of Pauline's authorship for both letters. So, we treat this letter as a letter that went together with Colossians and as a letter that was written by Paul.

And by the same person who wrote Colossians. Now, this letter is addressed to Philemon. It actually begins like this: Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our beloved fellow worker, and Aphia, our sister, and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and the church in your house.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. So, the question may be asked, who is Philemon? Philemon was someone by indications that we get from this particular letter that he was probably a rich person. He probably belonged to the upper class in the city of Colossae.

He owned a big house enough to have a church meeting in his house. Definitely, he owned slaves. But I should qualify that owning a slave is not by itself any particular indication of the wealth of an individual.

Because in the ancient world, as I mentioned in the discussion on Colossians, slavery was common. In a major city, between 30 and 35 percent of the population would be made up of slaves. Slavery was not linked to race.

If your neighbor owes you a whole lot of money, the neighbor could exchange that with a daughter or son who is brought in as a slave to serve you in exchange for the debt. That is why there was something called manumission. One could pay their way and buy their freedom as slaves.

Think about wealth in those terms and imagine that people who have slaves are not necessarily super wealthy. But the other indications we have in the text do suggest that Philemon was economically sound or wealthy. His profession, we don't know.

We can only surmise, based on Paul's itinerary, that he was perhaps a businessman that Paul came into contact with on one of his trips. We know that as far as his conversion to Christianity is concerned, Paul led him to Christ. And Paul would be quick to mention that as one of his leverage points to make an appeal to this man.

Paul is also quick to point out in this letter that Philemon has worked in ministry with him. He calls him a fellow worker and a partner in Philemon 1 and in Philemon 17. He ministered alongside Paul.

As far as leadership is concerned and what we know about Philemon's leadership, Philemon actually has people meeting in his home, which suggests to us that he was probably the leader of the church in his home. So, let's put this into context as we go on to examine more of the background before we look at the text a little bit more closely. Paul, who was in jail in Rome, was writing to his former convert at Colossae.

His name is Philemon. He was probably a businessman, but as far as his close relationship with Paul is concerned, he has actually worked side by side with Paul in ministry and even a church that meets in his home. Perhaps Paul has even been a distant consultant to this guy.

I'm saying all this to actually refresh your mind and to bring you to the point that Paul had a close relationship with this guy. Let's see how Paul uses that in the course of the discussion. Before we turn into this text I want to draw your attention to a few things about this letter.

In modern scholarship, there have been arguments, and the argument continues in fact. As a matter of fact, just two years ago, I was part of a major debate on this particular subject at the Institute of Biblical Literature at our international conference. Who was Onesimus in Philemon? Well, one reading of the place or the role of Onesimus is to see him as a runaway slave. Fugivitus is the Latin expression we sometimes use.

And to say he was a runaway slave is to say that Onesimus was a slave to Philemon, and Onesimus somehow got the opportunity to run away, and he just took off and ran. And ran far away so that his master could not get hold of him. He had not become a Christian, so he was being such a rebellious slave who would actually move quickly and do everything he was supposed not to do.

But guess what happened? While he was still out there, he came across a man that his master knew by the name of Paul. Perhaps he had heard his name somewhere. This man was in jail.

He perhaps had contact with Paul, and Paul led him to Christ. And things changed. The runaway rebellious slave began to change his way of conduct.

As Paul said later in his letter, he would become useful to Paul in many ways. Paul would have the confidence to be able to send him back to his master. So that's one reading of Onesimus in the text.

A scholarly argument on who is Onesimus, the second argument actually goes as this. We like to use Latin expressions sometimes to impress each other and show that we know what we are talking about. And the Latin expression for the second view is *amicus domini*.

Which is to say he was a runaway slave but he did not run away with the intent to run away for good. He found an opportunity to run away with the intention to go and talk to somebody his master knows so that the person will come and intercede for him. Do you see the difference between this and the previous one? In this instance, he was a runaway slave.

But he was a good runaway slave. Because he was not running away at the loss of his master. But he just doesn't like the way his master is treating him.

So, he runs away to find someone his master respects so that he can appeal to him to talk to his master so that his master will be very nice to him. Some scholars do read this letter from that point of view. So, Onesimus is not depicted as a bad guy who is going to be a major loss to his master or who deserves to be punished as soon as his master sees him.

One thing you want to note about that view, as I would argue with some of my colleagues, is the very notion that only Onesimus knows what his intent was. But as far as his master is concerned, he could still see him as a runaway like the first view that he ran away. The master would not know that he was running away to ask for someone to intercede and all that.

This is actually a disclosure of intent on the part of Onesimus and not the perspective of Philemon. Some scholars will still insist that the dynamic should be changed, including the way the letter is received and the way Philemon treats Onesimus. And then there is a third reading.

The third reading says, wait a minute, the guy was not a runaway slave. The guy was a slave, but actually, the guy was a slave who was sent by his master Philemon to go and help Paul while he was in jail. And so, after helping Paul, Paul sends him back.

So, in this view, Philemon is the good guy. He is the good guy who has always been loyal, faithful, and wonderful to Paul and who has Paul's deepest interest at heart and says I need to get somebody to go and help my friend Paul while he was in jail. And so, I'm sending one of my slaves, Onesimus, perhaps one I can trust, to come back and be good to Paul to go and serve him in his jail and then later on come back.

So it was while he was coming back that Paul wrote a letter to say thank you for sending this guy to me. I want you to receive this guy now in a new spirit. He's been a great guy.

Give him promotion among the other ranks of your slaves. Treat him nicely. Be wonderful.

Whatever view you hold in the way you approach this text affects the way you look at Philemon affects the way you look at how Paul is making his appeal on his behalf. And it also affects your imagination of how this guy is coming back to the house, he's physically coming back, what would be the state of his mind. If he was going there to find an intercessor, he should still be scared because his master didn't know that he went in to look for an intercessor.

If his master sent him, he should be coming with some degree of confidence. I get to come back and use my bedroom again. Then, I got to meet some of my slave friends in the house.

It's a whole scenario when you imagine this. I should say the difficulty is that the text of one chapter is such that you can actually make all these arguments stand somehow. I like to read Philemon as a letter written by Paul to Philemon, appealing on behalf of his runaway slave.

Whether he's a runaway slave seeking the help of an intercessor to negotiate on his behalf or running away for good, the recipient of the letter carelessly and really had no idea of the intent of the runaway slave. The runaway slave should be scared trying to come, and hopefully, hopefully, hopefully, hopefully, the church that meets in his house had the opportunity to read Colossians first. Even though those letters were all coming at the same time, they got the opportunity to read Colossians first, in

which they hear Paul mention Onesimus and actually give him some really good spin over there so that Philemon would say, Oh! Is that my slave? What is he doing with Paul? At least prepare the ground a little bit.

If not, imagine Onesimus coming back scared to death and when he sees his master ready to pee in his pants. I read this letter that way, and because of that, I would suggest that Paul needs to make such a strong appeal both to convince Philemon that this runaway guy is now good and Onesimus knowing that this is no good news coming back can be little bit relaxed that if his master gets this letter at least, he gets to read the letter first before he finds some really cause to whip him or give him some brutal treatment. If we work that way, then we will look at this in a very special way.

If we work with the fact that he was sent by Philemon to Paul to help him, then we are suggesting that Paul is appealing for some degree of manumission. Paul is trying to say he should release his slave and negotiate to release him, and scholars who make that argument appeal to these verses, and I would like us to read that so that you make up your mind whether it makes sense. From verse 11, it reads Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

I am sending him who is my very heart back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.

Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever. No longer as a slave and note verse 16. No longer as a slave but better than a slave as a dear brother.

He is very dear to me but even dearer to you. That word, translated as dear and dearer, thinks about Agapito's beloved, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

So those scholars will pick this text and say this actually argues that Paul wants manumission for Onesimus. I would suggest that that is not clear in this text at all. When he said he was separated from you for a reason, he did not say you sent him to me for a reason.

For me the clue around there in verse 15 seems to suggest that Philemon has not done something willingly sitting back and expectantly anticipating the return of his wonderful emissary to Paul in Rome. That is why I like to read it the way I proposed to you earlier. But I also want to draw your attention to another issue about this letter.

Please promise me not to laugh, promise me not to scratch your head because scholars talk about things like this, too. It is proposed that Onesimus was actually a slave of Philemon and that Philemon, though a Christian, enjoys using sexually as a homosexual partner. When Paul was in jail, he thought of the slaves that he was so good at, making me think this one would be good for Paul.

And so he sends him to Paul so that Paul can also enjoy a sexual relationship with him. On the homosexual argument, it is, in fact, sometimes suggested that if that was not the case, then the reason why Paul and Onesimus ran away from Philemon was because Philemon was abusing him sexually as a homosexual partner. This is a topic we will get into.

Scholars are in the habit of trying to hide the names of their colleagues who stand behind these things because they may change their minds. Or they don't want them to be objects of ridicule. But I'll mention at least one.

But before I do that, let me state that slave masters using their slaves sexually was not new in the ancient world. In fact, slave masters had the right to use their slaves sexually. So that was not the issue.

And slaves were sometimes abused. Female and male slaves were abused sexually by their masters. We know that sometimes some masters, in trying to entertain their guests, would actually make slaves available at their disposal.

Some of these feature in satire and all kinds of expressions trying to even make fun of all those about this kind of subject. In relation to Philemon specifically, one of the recent articles on this subject is published by Joseph A. Markle. The title is The Usefulness of an Onesimus The Sexual Use of Slaves and Paul's Letter to Philemon in the Journal of Biblical Literature.

Here, arguing for the sexual use of slaves at the background of Philemon Markle states As we scholars struggle to find a sufficient context for this brief epistle, the sexual use of slaves can add shade and nuance to various hypotheses regarding the occasion of this letter. In terms of ancient legal, social, literary, and moral background, this condition of slavery has nearly as much historical attestation as the conditions lifted up by furious fugitive slaves, emissaries, apprentice slaves, and third-party intercession hypotheses that have assembled around the interpretation of this letter. In other words, if we take all the three views we point out, we should add this view to it as well.

What is the evidence? Why should that be suggested? Well, the evidence points to the very reason that slave masters used their slaves. But let me also remind you that in the ancient world as it is today, popular culture and ideal virtues are not one and the same. Philosophers and moralists would argue for what is virtuous for society

and for decent people. It doesn't mean what they are arguing for is what is practiced in popular culture.

So, the fact that homosexual slaves were used homosexually does not necessarily mean the philosophers thought it was a virtue. And if that is so, then a noble person who had become a Christian would have to justify further whether the early Christians have clear liberty given to them to abuse or use their slaves sexually as such. Michael actually brings some of these tests to our attention.

Musonius Rufus is one of my favorites, and look at how a philosopher addressed the issue. In this category belongs the man who has relations with his own slave maid. This is something that some people consider quite without blame.

Since every master is held to have the power to use his slave as he wishes. In reply to this, I have just one thing to say. If it seems neither shameful nor out of place for a master to have relations with his own slave, particularly if she, even referring to female slaves if she happens to be unmarried, let him consider how he would like it if his wife had relations with a male slave.

Would it not seem completely intolerable not only if the woman who had a lawful husband had relations with a slave but even if a woman without a husband should have. Musonius says those who even do that in society have to rethink that. But Michael says, look at this kind of test.

And as you look at this test, doesn't it tell you that this is so common and prevalent that it's an important part to consider in the discussion? In Herodas, Bithyna I am a slave. Use me as you wish.

In other words, a slave can be used by the master as they wish. Well, Musonius said that, yeah, everybody knows that. Horace, now really, when your truth is part of the test, you don't ask for golden goblets, do you? When you are hungry and you don't turn your nose up at everything but peacock and turbot, do you? When your crotch is shrubbing, and there is a slave girl or a homegrown slave boy ready at hand whom you could jump right away, you don't prefer to be with your hat on, do you? I certainly don't.

In other words, they prevail on the slaves sexually. In Horace's satire, I like sex that is easy and obtainable, referring to slaves. I am pointing out the evidence that is used by a scholar like Michael to bring sexual relations of slaves into the discussion to actually suggest to you that, in my view, it is far-fetched to bring this into the conversation.

That is not to say we shouldn't know about it but what seems to be going on in this letter doesn't seem to have much in that regard. When we look specifically to

Philemon Onesimus and the use of slaves, it is important to note that it was not morally wrong for masters to use their slaves for sexual gratification. It is also important to point out that the slave-master relationship in the New Testament does not explicitly state anything to promote the name or indict the sexual use of slaves.

So that is a fact we should acknowledge. Some have argued, though this argument is fading away pretty rapidly, that early Christians were not forbidden to use their slaves for sexual purposes, so chances are that Philemon could use that as well. I am suggesting to you in our treatment of this letter that is far from being brought into the discussion to make any reasonable conjecture.

I think with all honesty, care, and concern for friends, relatives, brothers, and sisters who have come out to declare their sexual orientation as gays, occasionally scholars have fallen into the trap of trying to argue backward to justify something that is so close to home. I am not in any way negating the seriousness of some of those issues we deal with on a regular basis in our Western civilization. I'll be the first to suggest that the call to love our neighbor as ourselves is a mandate that extends to all human beings made in the image and likeness of God, including our homosexual brothers, sisters, friends, neighbors, and relatives.

They deserve our love and our care, and we should give them that love and care. It is another thing, though, to try to push this back into the scriptures and make where there is no reference a related issue. It is for that reason I submit that this particular argument with the sexual use of slaves is not strong enough to even feature in a serious conversation, but because it has popped up in scholarship, I feel I owe it to you to let you know that some scholars think this way but most scholars don't buy the argument.

I hope that helps. That brings us to the letter itself now that we have looked at some of the background issues. In the opening of the letter, Paul does not introduce himself as an apostle.

We know that of all Paul's letters, the only other letters he did not introduce himself as an apostle are the letters that are written to his Macedonian friends. We know he loved his Macedonian friends. He brags about them in his letter to the Corinthians.

They are the most wonderful people, and these are the churches in Philippi and Thessalonica. In those churches, Paul did not refer to himself as an apostle. Does it mean he did not want to express his strong sense of authority in that conversation? Some think that is what is going on here.

Clearly, here in Philemon, with a sensitive issue at stake with a runaway slave returning home, Paul doesn't want to begin his conversation with someone he is

going to ask for a favor by showing how powerful he is. If he pulls out his business card too quickly, he may lose the battle. So perhaps he holds back.

The co-author is Timothy, and the letter is addressed not only to Philemon but also to the churches in his house. In fact, this is how the line states To Philemon, our beloved fellow worker, and Apher, our sister, and Archippus, our fellow soldier and the church in your house. Often, we have looked at this letter as only being written to Philemon.

But think about the pressure, and I'm going to draw your attention to the pressure Paul is using here. Philemon, I am making a personal appeal because as soon as he finishes the introductory remarks of greetings and all that, he goes on to make things singular. He makes it a singular address, just Philemon.

I am writing to you, and I'm going to make an appeal to you. But, but, but, but I want you to think about this. The letter is also for the church that meets in your house.

Oh, what is going on? I want the people who know you as a Christian leader to know what it is that I wrote to you about and how you are responding to that. Do you think it's a pressure? Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

The bishop has written to the pastor of the parish and said, hey, pastor, you know that stubborn guy who caused trouble in the church and all that? He has come to me he's very, very good and I'm sending this letter. Please take good care of him. He has changed his life.

I want you guys to give him a hug, take care of him, and give him a walk in the church. By the way, this letter is not only for you personally. I want the church to know what I wrote to you.

So that there is accountability. Oh, yeah. That's Paul.

And look at how Paul is going to handle the rest here. Paul is clever. As for Douglas Moo, I find Douglas's discussion in this letter very useful.

So, I depend on him heavily in terms of how I arrange this material. Douglas Moo writes that Paul's imprisonment is a subtle reminder of his own sacrifices for the sake of the gospel and should lead Philemon to look at his request with sympathy. Paul empties himself of his rights to compel Philemon also to waive his rights.

So, he will not say I am an apostle. He will say, I'm a prisoner. Philemon, you were my baby in the Lord, and I mentored you.

Now that I'm in jail, and at some point, he's going to say, I am an old man. I need your favor, please. Think about your conscience.

If you are in that place and you don't do what he's asking you to do. Paul is good. But before we go on to verse 4, let's look at the key people mentioned in the letter.

Philemon is greeted. We also find the name Avia there, and scholars believe that Avia is actually a wife or a sister of Philemon. Then someone else is mentioned as a fellow soldier, Archippus.

It is suggested that he might be Philemon's son a minister of the gospel or both. A Philemon's son who is also a minister of the gospel. If that is so, then it makes all the more sense that all these names are members of Philemon's household, so as soon as Paul finishes that, he will then turn to the church that meets at your house.

To set the stage for his Thanksgiving. It is from here that Paul will go on to give thanks. I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.

And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you. Key things in this thanksgiving are the emphasis on his love and his faith.

Perhaps I should draw your attention quickly here that there is an issue here to deal with whether the love and the faith are all towards all the people or not. So, you may see some changes in your translation. But I prefer to read it as referring to his love for all his people and his faith in Christ Jesus.

And as Paul goes on in verse 8, he makes a tentative appeal but doesn't go on to the point. He says accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required. Remember, he didn't say I'm an apostle. I am bold enough to ask you what is required, yet for love's sake.

Oh, you have love for the people. I mentioned that. You know that.

For love's sake I prefer to appeal to you. I Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus I appeal to you for my child Onesimus whose father I became in my imprisonment. Here Paul is hinting if you're Onesimus the first two minutes of reading the letter now you get this anxious desire to know more about what is going on here and then Paul will come in and lay out his appeal highlighting relationships.

Relationships as core things here. He will appeal on the basis of he and his relationship with Onesimus. He will appeal on the basis of Paul's relationship with Philemon Onesimus' master, and he will strengthen and make a case for the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus, which is why his appeal should be taken very, very seriously.

So, let's look at the first one. Relationship between Paul and Onesimus He became a Christian through Paul. The former slave had proven useful. He had been useful to his master, and he has been useful to Paul in prison. Paul called him a dear brother. He is Paul's son, and he is very hot. Philemon should know that.

He, Paul, has a personal relationship with this guy, and he sent him back. The next relationship to form the basis for this appeal is the relationship between Paul and Philemon. Philemon should know that he also became a Christian through him. Just in case you have forgotten, they are all his spiritual children. Philemon should remember that he is a partner with him in ministry. In other words, he is a minister who should have shared his conviction with Paul.

Paul will appeal this sympathy to Philemon. Hey Philemon, listen to me. I am an old man asking you for a favor.

I am a prisoner. I am in chains. I am a partner, and I am a brother.

Note: Onesimus was a brother. Philemon is a brother, and Onesimus is a son. Philemon is a son Hey guys, you are siblings.

You have more in common. I am your spiritual father. Could you listen to what I am trying to say and just help me out, Philemon and Onesimus? Paul now wants to draw his attention for something interesting here.

Onesimus was useless in the past. Paul says I will not deny that He was useless to you in the past. He probably defrauded you with some money.

He says, I will pay it from my own pocket He is now useful to Paul. Paul says he will become useful to Philemon, too. Paul argues that he has now become a beloved brother of Philemon in the Lord.

You don't just have a brother, and you don't have a brother that you hate. Sometimes, brothers fight. No, you have a beloved brother.

In fact, let me read what the text says in verse 16. No longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. Paul says you don't just have a brother here. You have a brother you should love.

He's a beloved brother. Give him a hug and a kiss, and embrace him. Well, this is a slave that should come with strong anticipation that he deserves a spanking, needs a spanking or needs some form of punishment for what he had done.

Paul is appealing strongly to him. Paul's strategic appeal is this. Explaining his circumstances, he's sending Onesimus back to Philemon.

He pressures Philemon by appealing to his sympathy, given his difficult situation. And he acknowledges that it may actually be costly because what he did was not good. But for Paul, he is not going to let that go.

And so, he will state his purpose with a high degree of clarity, which I call purpose and pressure. So, if, verse 17, you consider me your partner, receive Onesimus as he would receive me. If he has wronged you at all or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

I, Paul, write this with my own hand. I will repay it. To say nothing of your owing me, even your own self.

Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord, so refresh my heart in Christ: more pressure, verse 21. Confident of your obedience, because I know you obey me anyway, I'm confident of that.

I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I say. At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers, I will be graciously given to you. I will come and visit you to see how you are handling this issue with Onesimus.

Paul then draws a conclusion from this letter. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with your spirit. With the coming of the returning slave, Paul appeals that Philemon receives a brother. It is in this spirit of unity, in this spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, that perhaps we all Christians can also think, in the area of application of this particular letter, that forgiveness can be part of our lives.

Reconciliation could be part of our lives. For Paul, pressure was necessary, and yet Philemon was the one giving every freedom to make the decision. Paul hopes and prays.

We don't know how it turns out, but we all hope that with this form of letter, Onesimus was embraced with love and accepted in the community of faith. Thank you for this discussion on Paul's letter to Philemon. I hope it has shed some light on your understanding.

And I urge you to read this letter in your own time and read more about it. It's fascinating. If you are a preacher, preach from it.

Draw some important lessons from it. I don't hear so much about this letter. I don't hear all kinds of good things that are in this letter out in the public's place.

And I hope you have enjoyed it so far. Thank you for studying with us in this biblical study series. Thank you.

This is Dr. Dan Darko in his lecture series on the Prison Epistles. This is session 17 on Philemon.