

A STUDY ON



TITUS
&
PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION

Who is Titus?

Titus - much like Timothy - was one of Apostle Paul's protégés. Very little is known about Titus when compared to Timothy. The name Titus appears in only three of Paul's other letters - 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, and 2nd Timothy. However, from the little information available to us, we can deduce that Titus was one of Paul's closest and most trusted friends. The very greeting in Titus 1:4, "*my true son in our common faith,*" bears witness to a special relationship.

Paul writes to Titus, who is on special assignment in Crete, urging him to bring some order and direction to the churches there. When Paul wanted someone to do a tough job, he called on Titus. We can say that Titus was one of Paul's most trusted and capable ambassadors.

Who is Philemon?

Philemon was a wealthy, influential man who was also an elder in the church at Colossae. Philemon became a follower of Jesus during one of Paul's missionary trips to Ephesus. Soon, he emerged as a leader in the church and transformed his home into a meeting place for the new Christian community.

Paul writes a personal letter to Philemon, along with the letter to the Colossians, to reinstate Onesimus - a slave who had run away from Philemon's house. The gentle reconciliation that Paul initiates between Onesimus and Philemon draws us to this person and the letter.

THE BIG IDEA OF TITUS

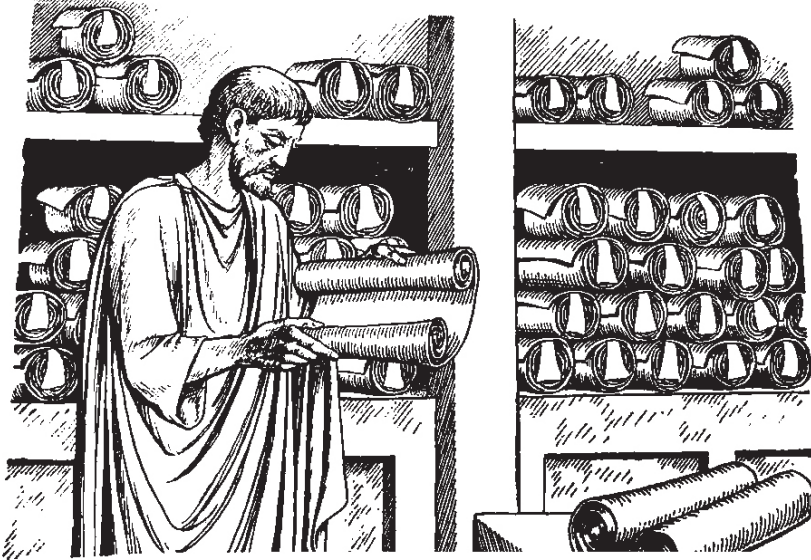
If the letter to Titus can hinge on a central text, it must be this: “...that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works” (3:8). The entire letter is based on an inseparable relationship between doctrine and good works.

How important it is for the church to maintain this balance in every generation!

We have a tendency to emphasize one at the expense of the other. When doctrine becomes the end goal, we often lose sight of good works, which results in a lack of genuine love and empathy. On the other hand, when good works are isolated from the truth (e.g., “it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere and loving”), it results in actions with distorted morals. In essence, if there is no ultimate moral law-giver (God) to guide our actions, we are free to define and redefine morals to suit our circumstances. In Titus, Paul calls us to a sound doctrine that expresses itself continually in faith and good works.



THE BIG IDEA OF PHILEMON

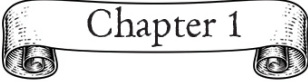


Philemon is the shortest of Paul's letters. It contains his passionate plea to Philemon to reinstate Onesimus, a slave who had run away from Philemon's house, possibly after committing some fault. He wanted Philemon to forgive Onesimus, to accept the slave as a brother in Christ. The gentle reconciliation that Paul initiates between Onesimus and Philemon draws us to this letter.

This briefest of Paul's letters bears a vivid representation of the essence of the gospel message. All of us are sinners who have run away from God, but He restores us to a better status than we had before. Neither did Paul minimize Onesimus' sin nor did he ask Philemon to set Onesimus free. Rather, he focuses on Christian love and forgiveness. He urges Philemon to accept him as a fellow Christian, which kindles a new way of living with new definitions for relationships.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

TITUS

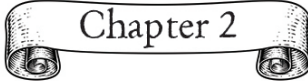


Chapter 1

Christian and The Truth

Titus 1:1-2,

“Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, ²in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.”



Chapter 2

Christian and Godly Living

Titus 2:11-14,

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹²teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.”



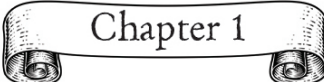
Chapter 3

Christian and Good Works

Titus 3:1,

“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, ²to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

PHILEMON



Chapter 1

Partnership & Reconciliation

Philemon 1:6,

“I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.”

TITUS-1

Christian and the Truth

Titus 1:1-2, “Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness,² in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,”

Firstly, in the introductory sentences to the letter, Paul makes a profound doctrinal statement of his understanding of truth: his authority is grounded in “*the faith of God’s elect*” (v. 1). This means that Paul’s apostleship, and thus his authority, is fully consistent with the faith which God’s elect have received. Truth is derived from the Lord Jesus alone – He is our fixed north star by which all doctrine is measured.

Secondly, Truth is “*according to godliness.*” Doctrine becomes deadly when it is divorced from godly living. Truth must produce goodness, or it is not truth. Living everyday in the character of God and pursuing Christlikeness will draw us closer to godliness.

If God is love, godliness consists of loving in word and deed. If God is mercy, godliness consists of being merciful. If God is patient and kind, godliness is expressed through patience and kindness. While our expressions and behaviours will never achieve godly perfection, we are called upon to reflect the nature of God Himself through our devotion and obedience to Christ.

Godliness is not an achievement of a special few. It is the natural flow of life in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Thus, truth is always inseparably linked with godliness. For example, there are too many Christian folk who heap unkind and unloving abuse upon their spouse and children, but regard themselves as godly because they do not “smoke, drink, or chew.” It is for us to remember that “*truth is according to godliness*”, which is the beginning of wisdom, both in doctrine and in practice in every area of our lives.

Thirdly, Paul’s doctrinal statement in this greeting is the “*hope of eternal life*” (v. 2). Of this, Paul says three things:

- It was promised by God before time began
- It is now manifested through preaching
- Paul’s preaching of this was commanded by God

Eternal life is a hope because it is not yet a tangible reality in our experience. In one sense we have eternal life in Christ now. But in another sense, it is yet to come. To be in Christ is to have eternal life. “He who has the Son has life” (1 John 5:12). We do not have to wait until we die to receive eternal life. In this sense, eternal life refers to quality more than duration. But eternal life is also an affirmation that death is not the end of our lives. We will not experience the reality of eternal life until we die, and in that sense, we live in the *hope* of eternal life. And this hope is not a mere wish-dream because of Jesus’ victory over death in His Resurrection.

Confront False Teachers

Titus 1:16, *“They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*

2:1 *But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine:”*

A mark of false teachers in every age is described in this passage by Apostle Paul. False teachers are *“insubordinate, idle talkers and deceivers.” (v.10)*” which is to say they are unruly and undisciplined. They are fiercely unaccountable and have a lifestyle that doesn’t match their talk. They lead people away from the truth. Any teaching that adds to or detracts from a basic love for and commitment to Jesus Himself is ultimately deceptive.

The most effective antidote to a false teacher is a true teacher. The test of conduct measures our knowledge of God by our actions, not by our claims. Words of love without deeds of love do not make a loving relationship. Talk of mercy without kindness and forgiveness only denies the presence of God. It is our actions, not our claims, that witness to our knowledge of God.

Titus’ endeavour to silence and rebuke false teachers is evidenced in the text, *“speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine. (2:1)”* Here is a clear appeal to that beautiful blend of character and conduct, belief and behaviour, words and deeds, which is always the mark of a true teacher.

[In Contrast, Paul gives Titus three important criteria for identifying leaders in Titus 1:5-9: they must be blameless in their marriage and home life, in their lifestyle and their doctrinal beliefs and teachings. Paul contrasts the negative behaviours with six positive behaviours they should demonstrate as a leader: *hospitality, a desire for good, self-control, uprightness, holiness, and discipline (1:8).*]

TITUS-2

Christian and Godly living

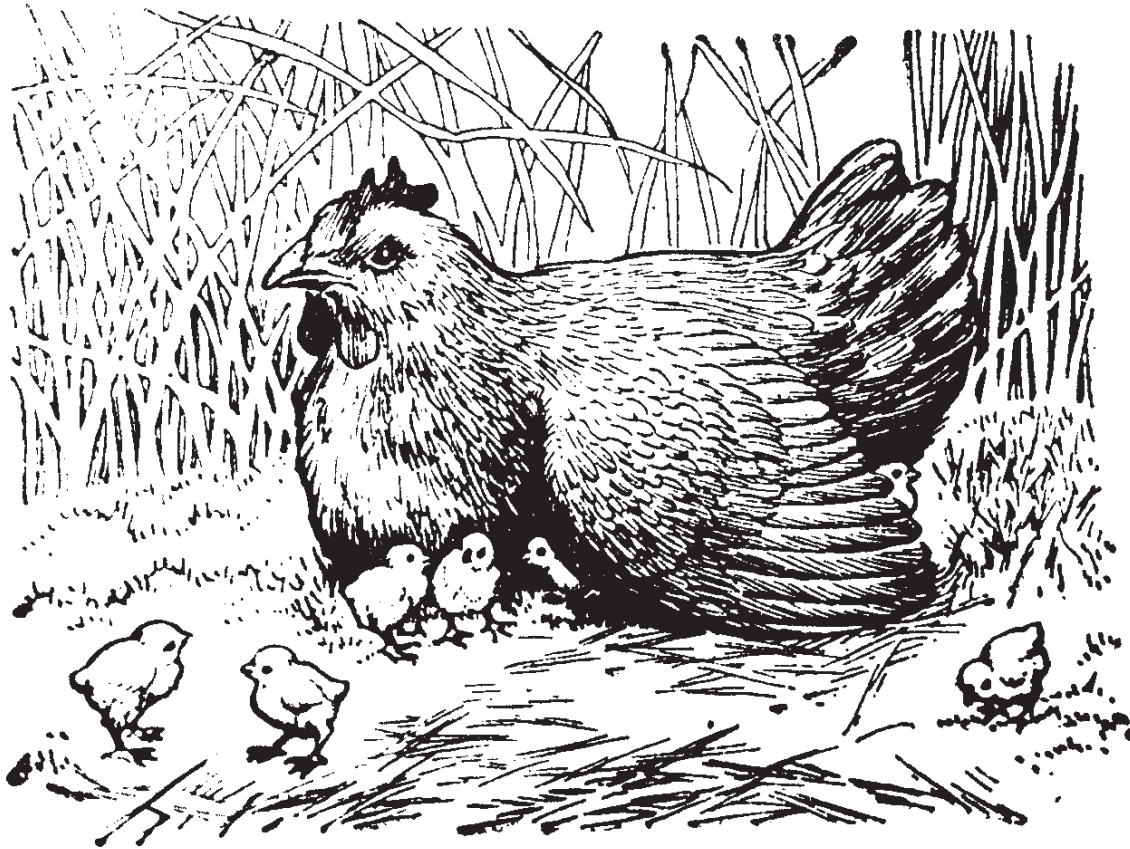
Instructions for Older Men & Women

Titus 2:2-3, “² Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.³ Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.”

Maturing in Christ is to grow in the awareness that all of life is sacred and that everything we do has a direct impact on our relationship with God. In less than two lines, Paul gives profound guidelines on positive maturity for older men and women. The tragedy is aging without maturing. Blessed are those who do both together.

Paul is clear that older people in the church are to be natural leaders and examples to the younger generation. Titus is to teach them to live respectably and with dignity. The words, *temperate, worthy of respect* and *self-controlled* encourage a life without foolish behaviour. They are to demonstrate maturity by being strong in their faith, in love and endurance.

Paul’s instruction for older women is very similar to those for older men. In both cases, the goal is a life that is respectable and dignified.



Paul's instruction for older women is very similar to those for older men. In both cases, the goal is a life that is respectable and dignified. Women are to avoid slander (slandering is the spreading of stories, true or false, that bring hurt or pain to others) and drunkenness (vices that were commonly associated with older women in the Greco-Roman society). This was to ensure that their examples and teachings would have a strong influence on younger married women (2:4).

Instructions for Younger Men & Women

Titus 2:6-8, "Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; ⁷ in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, ⁸ sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

Paul encouraged young people to cultivate restraint and self-control. They are reminded of their responsibility to be a credit to the Word of God and to refrain from blaspheming it. The three basic strands of a young person's life are "to exemplify good works," "maintain purity in doctrine," and "strive to be of sound speech."

In good works, we are called to create a pattern that others can emulate. The Greek word for pattern is *tupos*, from which we derive the word "type." It conveys a picture of the impression made by a stamp or die.

In doctrine, Titus is called to lead a life of "*integrity, reverence, [and] incorruptibility.*" The word for integrity means untainted, especially with reference to motives. Such traits are in stark contrast to those cultivated by false teachers. Nevertheless, we do well to recognize that there is always some impurity even in our best intentions, and trust in God's mercy and grace.

In "*sound speech,*" the goal is to teach in such a way that we do not invite or allow rejection because of our carelessness or shabbiness of speech.

Paul tells Titus that both his teaching and living must be solid, so that those who oppose him may be ashamed. Each one of us must give constant, prayerful attention to our own conduct, doctrine, and speech.

Instructions to Slaves

Titus 2:9-10, *“Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them,¹⁰ and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.”*



Christian slaves and Christian masters were faced with ambiguity as there were no clear answers that factored in the prevalent culture. In this passage, there is nothing to indicate that the masters were Christians. The teaching is directed to slaves who were Christians, presumably under both Christian and non-Christian masters. The instructions were plain and simple, needing no special comment.

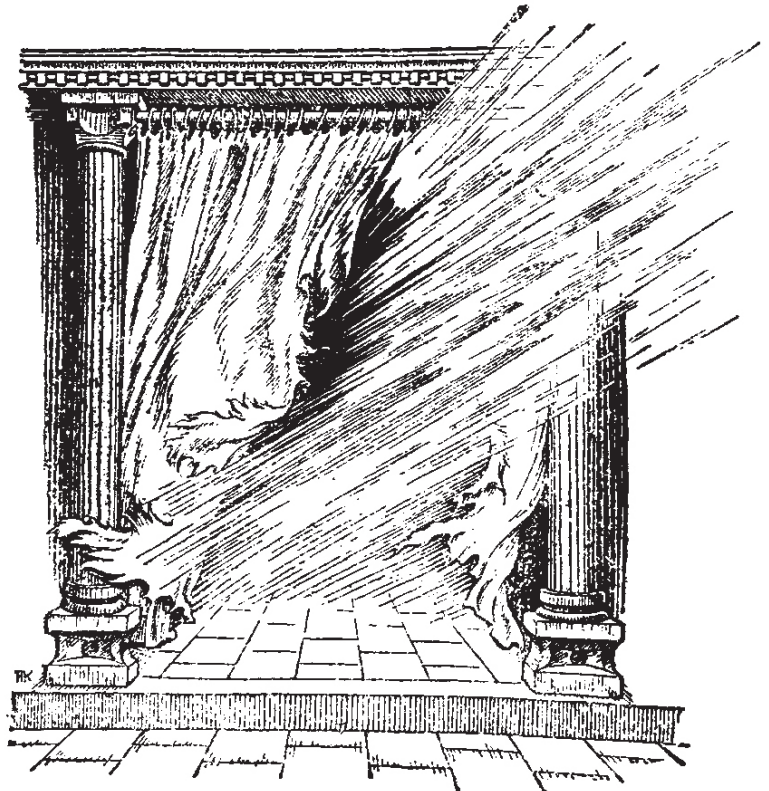
The principle was to do everything good, which enhanced the appeal of the gospel and made it attractive for others to follow. This is a fascinating idea, applicable to all areas of human relationships. But it was the prerogative of the slave to choose to submit—even to injustices—and make the gospel more attractive. This principle of voluntary submission is frequently more powerful in changing social structures than the way of violence.

Grace of God That Transforms

Titus 2:11-14, *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”*

The passage is a concise summary of our faith in Christ. The doctrinal basis of goodness is grounded in the incarnation. The keyword in Verse 11 is *“appeared”*. The grace of God is a person, not a set of ideas. This is like the language of John: *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—”* (1 John 1:1).

God didn't drop a scroll of theology out of heaven; He came Himself! His coming is His grace that brings us salvation.



In a time when so many messages are beaming at us, affirming to tell us how to find the good life, Paul gives us a very simple instruction, which calls us to “*deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*” and live “*soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.*”

To deny ungodliness is simply to affirm godliness. To affirm godliness is to recognize God’s influence in all areas of our life. On the other hand, ungodliness is to live as if there were no God. To deny worldly lusts is an extension of the same thought. Worldly lusts are all desires centred in and growing out of the social, political, and economic systems of this world. These systems are always portrayed against the kingdom of God. The only adequate response of believers to Christ’s grace and his sacrificial death is to live in purity as God’s own people (2:14). We are to live in the present, which is illuminated by both the past (Christ’s sacrifice) and the future (his glorious return). Neither should our faith be a merely spiritual matter, nor should it prompt us to live in isolation from the world. We must live in full engagement with the world.

In this letter Paul uses the word “Sober” three times, which emphasises the need to be sensible and prudent in the way we live in this world. We are called to live in a growing relationship with what we believe and what we practice. In every context of our lives, let us strive to be the light and the salt of this Earth to ensure that God’s kingdom is experienced by all.

TITUS-3

Christian and Good Works

Good Works in Action

Titus 3:1, *“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, ²to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.*

After writing about godly living in church and home, Paul moves on to the topic of godly living in wider society. Once again, he spells out duties and ethical instructions with a reminder of the doctrinal foundations for ethical living.

Paul instructs Titus to constantly remind the flock of certain disciplines:

- **Duty towards those in authority:** Instead of rebelling against authority (which will further alienate people from the gospel), followers of Christ are *to subject themselves to rulers and authorities, be obedient, and prepare to do whatever is good (3:1)*. The last clause makes it clear that this verse cannot be used to justify Christian passivity during times of corrupt and evil governments.
- **Responsibility to maintain good relationships with all people by being respectable in both words and deed:** Slanderous speech and a quarrelsome attitude have no place in a Christian’s life (3:2). Paul exhorts us to avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless (3:9).

- **Called to serve others:** Because of God’s work in our lives, we are to devote ourselves to doing what is good, excellent and profitable for everyone. **Titus 3:8**, “*And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.*”



Our faith in God must issue forth good works on a regular basis. This requires a high degree of intentionality. We must be careful when we say that good works are a product of God’s kindness and love. For good works don’t just happen as though we were passive bystanders, watching God work through us. There’s always a debate on the right balance between God’s enforcement of our good works and our cultivated desire to help others.

This ambiguity is put to rest by Paul in his letter to the Philippians when he states:

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13).

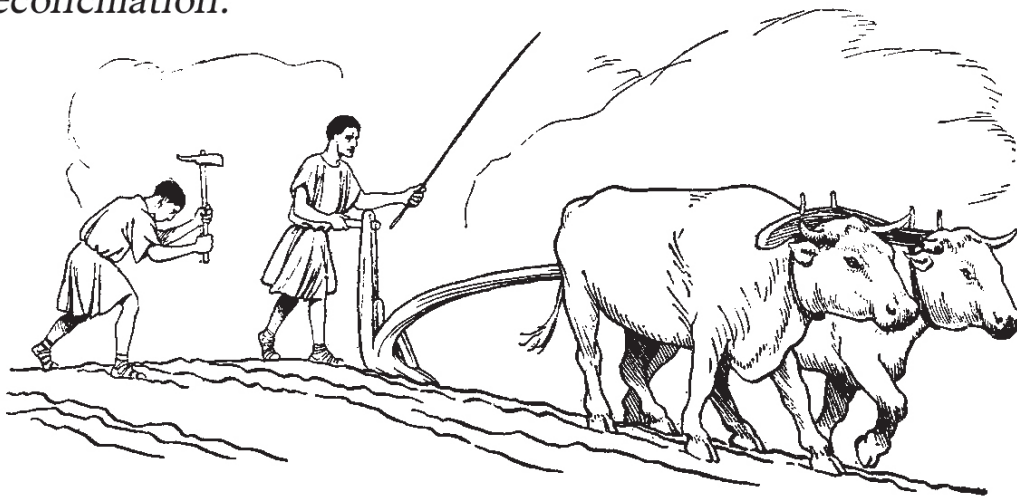
PHILEMON

The motivation for Paul to pen this short letter can be condensed to one sentence: Onesimus, a runaway slave of Philemon, was converted through the influence of Paul and became his trusted, valuable friend and co-worker during his imprisonment in Rome. He requests that Philemon forgive Onesimus and forego any punishment, while at the same time requesting that Onesimus return voluntarily to Philemon. He asks both men to treat each other as brothers, rather than slave and master. The power of the letter lies in the explosiveness of the issue of slavery (in their culture) and the depths of Paul's understanding and compassion for the master and the slave.

The book of Philemon gives us a template for appealing to our Christian brothers and sisters about issues of disagreement. While Paul never criticizes Philemon for owning slaves, he gently reminds him that Onesimus is now a brother in Christ and that this truth should now define the relationship. It is probable that Philemon freed his returned slave, as he adopted Paul's belief that under the covenant of grace, both master and slave have equal standing in the body of Christ. In Christ's kingdom, *"there is neither Jew nor Greek, ... slave nor free, ... male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (**Galatians 3:28**).

In relation to this letter to Philemon, one bible scholar says “*the word Emancipation seems to be trembling on his lips, and yet he does not once utter it.*” However, there is confidence that Philemon “*will do even more*” than he has been asked (v.21). The very fact that Philemon saved the letter and passed it on to future generations proves that he went the extra mile to do “even more”!

Two themes stand out in this letter – *partnership and reconciliation.*



- **Partnership**

Philemon 1:6, “*I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.*”

'Partnership' is the key to the whole letter, and Paul plays on it for all it's worth. The partnership in question is the partnership Paul and Philemon have in the gospel. It is the partnership that goes with our faith: that is, when people believe the gospel, they are also brought into that partnership with all others who believe it. Loving God and loving others – the essence of the gospel is evident in decisions that shape our daily affairs.

Paul, in fact, knows the dangers of trying to force someone to do something. His style throughout this letter is one of gentle, almost playful, Christian persuasion. There is a balance of *conviction* and *compassion*—conviction about the worth of Onesimus - a slave transformed into a Christian; and tender compassion for Philemon, and the dilemma of a slave-master becoming a Christian. He knows Philemon well enough to adopt the right tone. What he's going to ask is very, very difficult, but he is reasonably sure that Philemon will take the point and act on it. The redeeming love of Christ that transforms persons, relationships and circumstances, can be noted throughout the letter. The power of the gospel shines through with a rare brilliance.

- **Reconciliation**

Philemon 1:10,11, *“that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.
¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.”*

Reconciliation is another theme of this letter. Onesimus is reconciled to God. Also, he is in the process of being reconciled to a fellow believer, who is his master too. The reconciliation to a heavenly Master and earthy master is played out so beautifully in this letter. The basis for Paul's appeal to Philemon is the supreme Christian virtue of love. Paul praises Philemon for the love he has shown, not just to him but to all the believers in that area.

Paul does not ask Philemon to set Onesimus free. Rather, he focuses on forgiveness for his wrongdoing and acceptance as a fellow Christian. There is an implied understanding that this will deepen their relationship, and Christian love will help them transcend the tension between master and slave. Paul wanted to help Christians all around to see the importance of forming a community where former beliefs and practices were reviewed in the light of people's life changing experience in Christ.

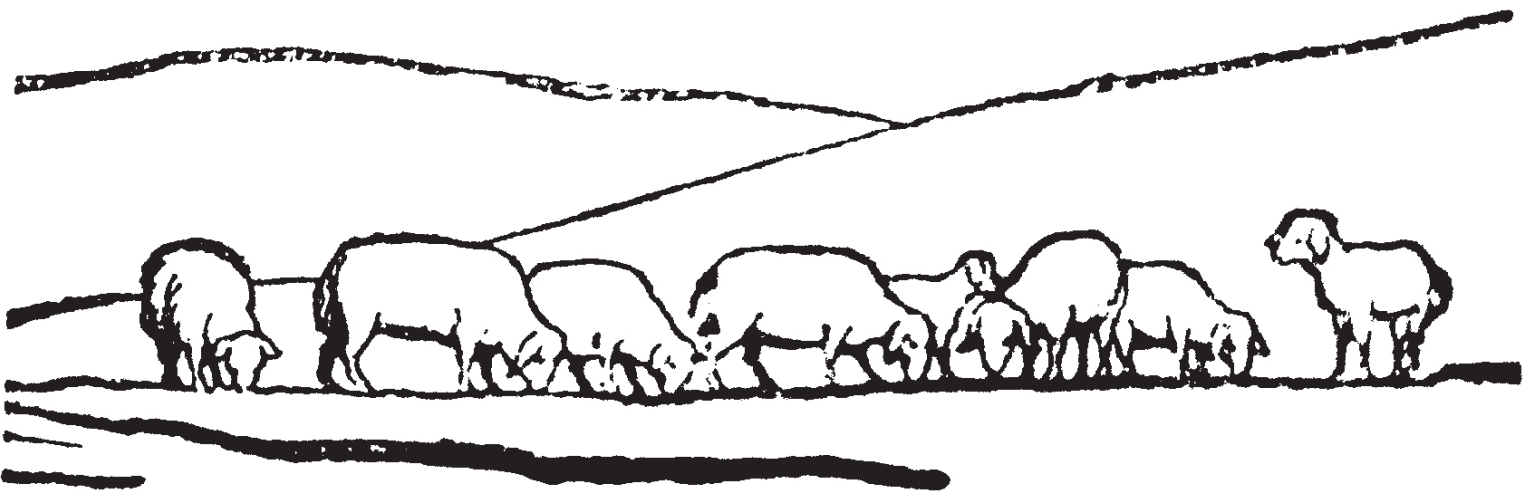
Each of the three main characters of this story (Paul, Onesimus and Philemon) must bear the risk of reconciliation. It does not come easy. Paul risks his request being rejected, being penalised for partnering with a runaway slave, and having to repay Onesimus' debts. Onesimus risks serious punishment or even death by returning to Philemon. Philemon risks losing a slave, for whom he may have paid a high price. All three were destined to grow in Christian character through the gospel of love.

This is the only letter where the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is not mentioned, as Paul becomes like Jesus - the **Bridge Builder** taking on the act of reconciliation between two parties.



CONCLUSION

Through the passages of Titus and Philemon, God's grace illuminates the path to living a godly life that leads to good works. One needs to understand that our new life in the Lord Jesus affects all of our worldly relationships. The mission of the gospel is not only to call people into the faith, but to nurture them in a new way of living so that they become mature followers of Christ.



Bethel AG Church International Worship Centre
#67 RING ROAD HEBBAL, BANGALORE 560024
24/7 PRAYER LINE: 080-67537777 | WWW.BETHEL.AG.IN