

THE
 EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE
 TO
 PHILEMON.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

THIS short, but lovely Epistle, must have been written while *Paul* was a prisoner at *Rome*: and at that time when he had liberty to receive in his own hired house, all that came to him. Acts xxviii. 30. This seems evident, because *Onesimus*, on whose account the Apostle wrote to *Philemon*, then attended *Paul's* preaching, and the LORD blessed the word to him. Hence the probable date, was Anno 60; though some place it later.

The design of this letter seems to have been, to reconcile *Philemon* to his runaway servant, *Onesimus*. The outlines of the subject is in the Epistle. It will not be necessary, therefore, in this place to enlarge upon it. As the HOLY GHOST hath classed it among the writings of his inspiration, it will be proper to enter upon the perusal of it in prayer. May the LORD bless it to the glory of GOD, in our edification, through JESUS CHRIST.

THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON.

CONTENTS.

The Apostle very affectionately addresseth Philemon, on the Subject of his receiving back his Servant Onesimus, and forgiving him all Wrongs. He opens his Epistle, with his usual Salutation, of Grace, and Peace; and closeth with the same.

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:

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

We never can sufficiently admire the uniformity in *Paul's* writings, in his entrance on all, how grace was always uppermost in his heart. It is a blessed testimony our Lord himself hath laid down, of what is the ruling principle within: *when out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* Luke vi. 45. And the Apostle appears to be speaking forth his very soul, whenever the Name of his Lord is in his discourse. And it is worth noticing, though of very inferior consideration to what hath been just said, that as *Paul* was attempting by this letter, to conciliate the affections of *Philemon*, towards *Onesimus*, he joins in his address his beloved *Timothy*, as probably well known to *Philemon*; and includes the beloved *Apphia*, and *Archippus*, among the addressed: the former it should seem to have been the wife, or sister of *Philemon*, and the latter the minister of the Church to which *Philemon* belonged. See Coloss. iv. 17. and the two lines after the 18th verse. I have just glanced at these things, before we enter upon the subject of *Paul's* letter, as proper not to be overlooked. And would now beg the Reader's attention to the Epistle itself, than which, in whatever way or manner it be considered, nothing can be found, among all the records of antiquity, of a more beautiful, and highly finished composition. If it were not where it is, folded up in the sacred pages of divine truths, it would be classed among the first productions of mankind, be carefully deposited in every museum of literature, and recommended by all the admirers of the fine arts, as the most correct standard of letter writing. But while this view of the Epistle, upon these grounds, becomes matter of reproach to those who despise, or overlook its beauties, merely because it is scripture; this is not the cause for which the child of God chiefly prizeth it. The best recommendation in it is, that it is the word of God. And the beautiful feature which endears it to the affection, is the grace it holds forth to the Church, as exemplified in the Lord's mercy to *Onesimus*. We shall form discoveries of this, as we prosecute the Epistle.

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.

It is a blessed thing, when we find errands to the mercy-seat in blessing God, for grace shewn to his people and it should seem, that *Paul* found frequent cause to go there, for the Lord's blessing on his ministry. The Apostle hath given a very honorable testimony to the character of *Philemon*. But let the Reader observe, to whom *Paul* gives all the glory. Every good thing in *Philemon* is ascribed

wholly to the LORD JESUS. And though *Paul* was now writing to this man on a subject of favor, he would not compliment him at the expence of truth, and in the fashion of modern times, extol the creature, and bolster him up in fancied worth, when both his ability to refresh the bowels of the saints, and an heart to do it, were from the LORD. Oh! how much to be wished it were, that such faithfulness was in all ministers, and people, professing godliness. What volumes, on the contrary, have been printed and published, of thanks to men, where no mention hath been made of God!

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 an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

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

11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:

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

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 nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

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

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?

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

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,

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

The Apostle now enters upon the principal subject of his Epistle, and for which he wrote. And, if we gather into one point of view, the several parts of his letter, it should seem, (though we have no certain history to determine it by,) that this *Onesimus* had ran away from his master; and, it is probable, had robbed him. Fleeing to *Rome*, he had there been brought under the ministry of the Apostle. And it should seem likely also, that the LORD had done by him as the LORD did by *Lydia*, had opened his heart, to attend to the things which were spoken of Paul. Acts xvi. 14. After the LORD had wrought this work of grace upon the mind of *Onesimus*, Paul sent him back to his master, with this letter of recommendation; and in this most engaging manner, sought to influence the mind of *Philemon*, not barely to forgive him, but to rejoice over his conversion, and receive him as a brother in CHRIST. And, it is well worthy the Reader's observation, how striking the arguments, Paul adopted, to prevail upon the affections of *Philemon*.

First. He observes, that if the Apostle rejoiced in his recovery by grace, to whom *Onesimus* was a stranger, how much more (saith he) unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the LORD. Masters are secondary parents, a kind of foster-fathers. And believing masters exercise a spiritual guardianship over their household. And to have servants who are brethren in the LORD, not only secures their fidelity, but their affection; and opens to a better alliance of nearness, and dearness, which is to last for ever.

Secondly. Paul toucheth another string of melody, when he saith: if thou count me a partner, receive him as myself. This riseth yet higher, though on the same scale. For this considers CHRIST and his members as one. And, therefore, Paul, and *Philemon*, and *Onesimus*, being in grace, are all partners in all that belongs to CHRIST JESUS.

Thirdly. The Apostle adds another very forcible argument namely, that if *Onesimus* had wronged *Philemon*, or owed him aught, he would be answerable for it. Though in saying this Paul insinuated, that so much on spiritual considerations *Philemon* was indebted to him, that even himself he owed to him. Hence, Paul assumed for granted, that *Philemon* would refresh his bowels, in complying with his wishes, and even doing more than he asked. Who, but must admire the affection and wisdom of the Apostle, in this beautiful Epistle, ended as it evidently was, by the HOLY GHOST.

But when the Reader hath paid all due attention to the subject, as it relates to those several parties; I would ask, is there not an instruction arising out of it, which opens to a subject yet more profitable, both to the Writer, and the Reader of this *Poor Man's Commentary*? When a poor long lost sinner is recovered by sovereign grace, from all his departures from the LORD, in the Adam-nature of sin, by which from the first in original apostacy, we have all run away from God; how blessed, when brought back, and discovered to be a brother beloved, especially to all his spiritual relations, who then find their double relation to him both in the flesh by nature, and in the LORD by spirit? Surely, whoever by his own regeneration, knows his partnership in CHRIST's mystical body, must

receive such an one, as one in the Lord. And whatever wrongs may have been done, before the work of grace was wrought; conscious of mutual corruption by nature, and by practice; how unanswerable the argument, to mutual forgiveness? Yea, as we have all sinned, and have all wronged, and come short of the glory of God; oh! how sweet, that all is put to Jesus's account, and who hath been, and is, the Surety, and Sponsor of all his people. Precious Jesus! who, that in this view of thy paying our debt of ten thousand talents; can go forth against a brother for his hundred pence. Here, dearest Lord, as in all things, thou shalt have the pre-eminency!

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

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

23 There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus;

24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers.

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

Written from Rome to Philemon, by
Onesimus a servant.

I do not think it needful to detain the Reader, on what is contained in these verses. They serve to express the love, and attachment of the saints, to each other, in the first ages of the Gospel. The Lord grant, if it be his blessed will, that the latter day dispensation, may be so distinguished!

REFLECTIONS.

READER! do not fail to observe in this short Epistle, short as it is, the wonderful ways and works of God. In the family of *Philemon*, under all the means of grace, the heart of *Onesimus* remains hardened! But after his departure and unfaithfulness to his Master, the grace of God meets him elsewhere, and the Lord changeth the heart of stone into an heart of flesh. And who of God's redeemed Ones; but can say the same? Blessed Jesus, thou art the Brother born for adversity. Do, thou, Lord receive all thine as those for whom thou hast answered! Praised be a Covenant God in Christ for all his mercies. Amen.