

**Series:** Philemon

**Title:** Benefits of the Body

**Text:** Philemon 20-22

**Date:** July 7, 2024

### **Verse 20**

In verse 20, Paul continued his appeal by making a request for himself. He said, “Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ” (Philemon 20). The Greek word for “benefit” (onínēmi) phonetically sounded like Onesimus’ name. Paul apparently used a word play to portray the way Philemon, Paul, and Onesimus could all benefit one another. The apostle had spoken of Onesimus’ usefulness earlier in Philemon 1:11.

In our current passage, Paul envisioned Philemon being useful to to himself as an apostle. It is helpful for us to consider type of usefulness Philemon could have conveyed to Paul. How would it have been possible for Philemon to help Paul when Paul was imprisoned hundreds of miles away? Note what Paul said: “Refresh my heart in Christ.” His focus was on spiritual refreshment. The word for “heart” was an onomatopoeia in the Greek. The word (splágchnon) was used of the visceral part of the human body. It was commonly used to speak of the supposed seat of human emotions and affections. The splágchnon was the place of one’s motives, volitions, and affections. Interestingly, Paul used the term three times in his letter (Philemon 7, 12, 20). As used in our current verse, the term revealed that Paul’s desire for refreshment was a spiritual desire. Though Philemon and Paul were separated by great distance, Philemon had the capacity to provide Paul within spiritual refreshment.

In the original language of the text, the pronoun for “my” was in an emphatic position. Paul placed emphasis on his desire to be spiritually refreshed by Philemon.. Earlier in Philemon 7, Paul used the same terms for “refresh” and “heart” to speak of the way Philemon had spiritually encouraged believers throughout Asia Minor. He knew the man had the capacity to spiritually refresh others and he wanted to receive refreshment himself from the man. Though he was imprisoned hundreds of miles away, he could receive encouragement through news that Philemon was obedient to forgive Onesimus.

In speaking of Philemon’s capacity to provide Paul with spiritual refreshment, Paul was intentional to note the source of such refreshment. Note the way he indicated that such refreshment was come “in Christ.” Those two words constituted Paul’s great descriptor for the Christian’s standing before the Lord (Romans 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25-26, 31; 16:2, 15; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:1-2; 14:33; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:12; Ephesians 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:18; 4:12; Philippians 1:1; 4:21, 22; Colossians 1:4, 12, 26; 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Timothy 5:10). Paul used the phrase “in Christ” earlier in his letter to Philemon (Philemon 5 and 7). The phrase referred to realities associated with a doctrine we call “union with Christ.” As used in our current verse, Paul’s phrase revealed that Philemon’s ability to “refresh” Paul came via his relationship to Christ. When writing to the Romans, Paul spoke of the way in which the believer’s ability to live a new life comes from his or her union with Christ:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-4).

Because of believers union with Christ and new life in Christ, they have the supernatural ability to impart spiritual refreshment to others.

### **Verse 21**

Paul expressed his belief that Philemon would receive Onesimus by saying, “Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say” (Philemon 21). Paul’s demand demonstrated the confidence he had in Philemon. Paul practiced what he heard of concerning Philemon’s character. He knew the man had the practice of believing the best about other believers (Philemon 1:5). In making a request of the man, he himself exhibited a firm belief in Philemon. Paul chose to practice Christian charity, a love that “...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7). He expressed a confidence that Philemon would extend Christian hospitality toward him when he visited. The apostle’s confidence provided an example for believer’s of all generations. Christians are under obligation from the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) to believe the best about their brothers and sisters in Christ.

In expressing confidence in Philemon, Paul spoke of how he believed the man would exhibit “obedience.” It is worth considering what type of obedience Paul had in mind. It is unlikely that Paul had obedience to him as an apostle in view. Earlier in his letter, Paul clearly chose to not reference his apostolic authority (Philemon 1:1). It seems more likely that Paul had obedience to the Lord’s commands in mind. It is likely that Paul was thinking of Jesus’ commands concerning Christian love (Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:34-35) and forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22). Through his confidence in Philemon, Paul modeled Christian love, but he also mandated it.

## **Verse 22**

Before concluding his letter, Paul made a request for himself. He said, “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” (Philemon 22). Concerning the words “At the same time,” one has said that the language carried the idea of our modern, “Oh, and by the way....” It seems Paul casually and conversationally transitioned his letter to a different subject. Whereas he had spent most of his letter appealing for forgiveness from Philemon, he now transitioned to make a personal request.

The word for “guest room” was one that literally referred to “a place of entertainment.” As used by Paul, the term may have denoted “quarters in an inn or a room in a private house.”<sup>1</sup> It seems Philemon was a man of means and that he was known for his generosity toward the cause of Christ (Philemon 2). Having never been to Colossae personally, Paul had a desire to see the churches of Lycus Valley personally. He made mention of his desire to see the Colossians face-to-face in Colossians 2:1.

By modern standards, such a request may seem a bit presumptuous. We deem it unseemly for one to “invite oneself over.” Individualism in Western culture would make many think it tacky for one to make a request like the one Paul made in our text. However, it is important to remember that providing lodging for traveling friends was customary, and even expected, in the ancient world (Judges 19:16-21; Acts 16:15). Paul’s words should be regarded as a request for culturally-expected hospitality. Such hospitality may look different from generation to generation; however, Christians driven by a commitment to the Christ commandment will be (Matthew 22:37-40) will see the need to show culturally-appropriate hospitality to all. The author of Hebrews reminded his readers of the need for such virtue: “Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:1-2).

At first glance, Paul’s request for lodging may seem a bit awkward.<sup>2</sup> How could the apostle make such a request, given the situation at hand? What if Philemon wasn’t inclined to

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 515.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, John. *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 360.

forgive Onesimus? What would that have meant for Philemon's willingness to receive and host Paul?

The answer to the aforementioned questions rests in a couple of realities. First, remember from verse 20 that Paul was confident that Philemon would obey the Lord's commands concerning love and forgiveness. Also, consider Paul's use of the word "hoping." The act of "hoping" was not a fickle or fleeting act for Paul. Modern believers may be tempted to mischaracterize hope. Sometimes hope is regarded as a doubtful type of thing by modern society. However, biblical hope involves a confident expectation in a divinely promised future. Such hope is one of the predominant Christian virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13).

In writing to Philemon, Paul didn't have an eschatological hope in mind, per se. Instead, he had a practical hope concerning an earthly matter in mind. He had faith that he would get to visit believers in the Lycus Valley. When writing to the church at Rome, he exhibited a similar hope regarding a visit to that city (Romans 1:11-16). Maybe Paul had received an apostolic, direct revelation concerning the Lord regarding future travel plans to Colossae. There is evidence in Philippians 1:19-25 that the apostle sometimes received such revelations concerning the Lord's plan for his life. Whatever the case, as Paul wrote to Philemon, he was governed by a hope that he would see the man, as well as other believers in the Lycus Valley, face-to-face. As a result, his request for lodging was well founded.

The Greek word translated "graciously given to you" appeared as a passive voice verb. Some would identify Paul's language as involving what is known as a "divine passive." Such verbiage was used to speak of the providential activity of God. It seems the apostle intended to depict his firm belief that the Lord would sovereignly work to secure his release from prison. Afterwards, Paul would have the opportunity to visit his friends in the Lycus Valley.

Paul's reference concerning a visit to the Lycus Valley was related to his confidence in the prayers of believers in that region. He said, "I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you." His words served as a testament to the power of Christian prayer. One has rightly referred to the believer's personal prayer time as "The Hour that Changes the World."<sup>3</sup> God's people often "have not" because they "ask not" (James 4:2). Believers should always remember that prayerlessness is godlessness, fruitlessness, emptiness, nothingness, and powerlessness. E.M. Bounds rightly said, "Failure to pray is failure along the whole line of life. It is failure of duty, service, and spiritual progress."<sup>4</sup> Believers should often think about the truth of James 5: "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit" (James 5:16-18).

In regard to prayer, it is important to note the specific type of prayer Paul spoke of in verse 22. His attention was on what is known as "intercessory prayer," prayer that involves supplications on behalf of others. The apostle believed that the intercessory prayers of believers in the Lycus Valley would lead to his deliverance from Roman imprisonment. His words stand as a testament to the priority and power of intercession. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul mandated such prayer, saying, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior..." (1 Timothy 2:1-3). The story of Job provides a testimony to the benefit and blessing of such prayer. Near the end of Job's ordeal, we read, "And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10). Believers who are faithful to a local church know the blessing of intercessory prayer.

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<sup>3</sup> Eastman, Dick. *The Hour that Changes the World*. (Ada, MI: Chosen Books, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Bounds, E.M. *The Weapon of Prayer*. (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House Publishers, 1996).