

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Philemon 1-21 (EHV)**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon, our dear friend and coworker, <sup>2</sup>to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your house:

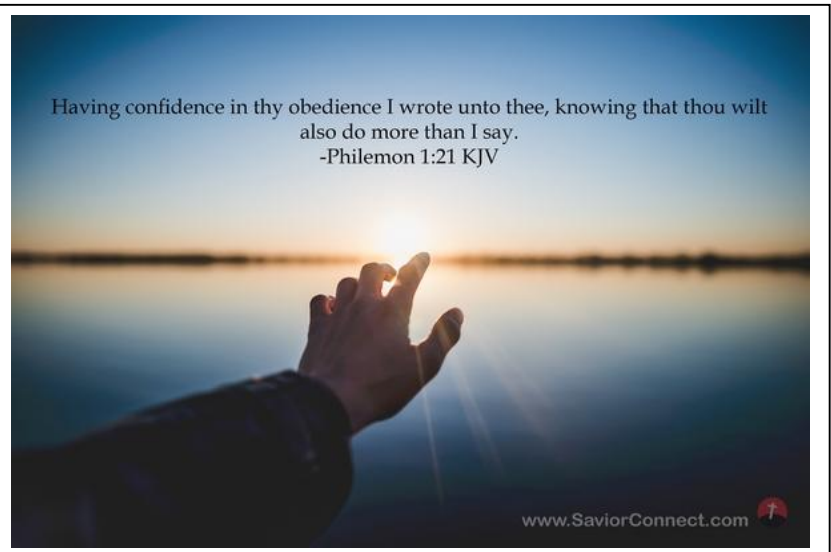
<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup>because I hear about your love and faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints. <sup>6</sup>I pray that this fellowship of your faith may become active in

understanding every good thing that belongs to us in Christ. <sup>7</sup>For I have received great joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

<sup>8</sup>For that reason, even though I have plenty of boldness in Christ to order you to do what is proper, <sup>9</sup>I am appealing to you, instead, on the basis of love, just as I, Paul, am an old man and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup>I am appealing to you on behalf of my child Onesimus. I became his father while I was in chains. <sup>11</sup>There was a time when he was useless to you, but now he is useful both to you and to me. <sup>12</sup>I have sent him (who is my very heart) back to you. Welcome him. <sup>13</sup>I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might serve me in your place while I am in chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup>But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that your kindness would not be the result of compulsion, but of willingness. <sup>15</sup>Perhaps this is why he was separated from you for a while: so that you would have him back forever, <sup>16</sup>no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave, as a dear brother. He certainly is dear to me, but he is even more of a dear brother to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup>So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup>And if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup>I, Paul, have written this with my own hand: I will repay it—not to mention that you owe me your very self. <sup>20</sup>Yes, brother, I am asking for a favor from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>21</sup>Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.



*Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so we may all prove useful as we live out the reality of our faith in your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

There's a saying which goes: 'One man's trash is another man's treasure.'

And certainly, there are some who go along to garage sales and buy what people want to get rid of. With appropriate skills, and a little hard work, some of the unwanted items may become valuable and desirable once more.

Similarly, there are some who love to fossick for gems. They might look at a piece of rock which seems worthless in many people's eyes and see the potential within. Again, with some appropriate skills, and a little hard work, the once-worthless and ignored rock may reveal the glorious colours within to become valuable and treasured in many people's eyes.

If only we would do the same for people!

Too many people are told they're worthless, useless, and a waste of space. Even sadder, many believe what they're told. Too many consider themselves to be insignificant or a liability in other people's eyes. They might struggle to have any sense of self-worth, no matter how much encouragement or support they might get from those around them. They may think of themselves as 'trash.'

If anyone has ever tried to convince any of us that we're useless, worthless, or hopeless, does their opinion change who we are? Do we have to believe their cruel label for us is true?

Similarly, some of us might struggle to receive compliments because we already consider ourselves to be worthless, pathetic, or incompetent. We might not believe anything else they say about us because we're already believing the negative description we give ourselves. However, do our own thoughts about ourselves define who we really are?

Unfortunately, many of us put each other down, especially when we have arguments or try to be funny at other people's expenses, and some might start believing they're not loved or valued. Not only this, but we might be tempted to put ourselves down because we make stupid decisions. We may start to think no-one would really love us.

As a result, many of us have trouble seeing ourselves, or each other, as valuable. And, even if some were to see something special in us, we might choose not to believe them.

However, no matter what others say about us, or what we say about ourselves, is that really who we are? Is that who we are in Christ? Is that how we're supposed to view each other, despite the fact we've all been adopted as God's dearly beloved children, we're all covered with the innocent blood of Jesus, we've all been made holy and righteous in the sight of God, and we've become heirs of eternal life through faith?

As we consider the way we devalue each other and how God restores our true value through faith, today we have the rare opportunity to consider a whole letter written by St Paul. It's an unusual letter, not just because it's his shortest, but because it's his most personal letter.

He doesn't give his usual theological arguments but makes a personal and heartfelt appeal for two people to view each other differently for the sake of their faith in Christ and, as a result of this, to be reconciled with each other.

We learn this letter is written specifically for Philemon. We don't know a lot about him, but can presume he had previously met Paul, and came to faith through Paul's ministry. Most likely he's an important and influential Christian living in Colossae

and may have owned the house where people met for worship.

The main subject of Paul's letter is Onesimus, who was once a slave owned by Philemon. His name means 'useful' or 'profitable', but he hadn't lived out his name very well, because he had run away from Philemon. In this way, 'Mr Useful' became 'Mr Useless.'

However, even though he had run away, he was still Philemon's property. This meant Philemon had the legal right to do anything he wanted to Onesimus, including putting him to death.

In fact, most runaway slaves deserved death because they had proved themselves untrustworthy. But, unknown to Philemon, Onesimus had met Paul during his time on the run. Not only this, but Onesimus had come to believe in Jesus through his ministry.

Thankfully, Paul was good at seeing people from God's perspective and, now that Onesimus is in Christ (and therefore a new creation covered by the blood of Jesus), he now has the potential to live up to his 'useful' name in renewed service as a fellow Christian to his estranged owner.

In the hope to see these two reconciled, Paul introduces himself in his letter, not as an *apostle* to Christ with certain rights, privileges, and authority, but as a *prisoner* to Christ. Imprisoned in Christ, he sends Philemon grace and peace, hoping what he says will be received in a gracious and peaceful manner.

As Paul extends grace and peace to Philemon, he tells him of his continuing prayers and constant thanksgiving for Philemon's faith in Christ, which gives Paul joy and comfort.

Now, Paul's not trying to flatter Philemon in order to manipulate him but is simply reminding him of the spiritual reality which is his through faith.

Paul reminds Philemon that he's a child of God through faith. Therefore, no matter what anyone else thinks, or what Philemon thinks of himself, he's received the very nature of God through faith. He's dearly loved and valued by God and by Paul. Not because of anything Philemon's done or achieved, but because of what Christ has done for him.

As Paul shares how much he's encouraged by Philemon's faithful witness of Christ to those around him, Paul asks him to demonstrate his faith once more, but this time toward Onesimus.

The question in Paul's mind may have been, would Philemon really show grace, love, and mercy to his once rebellious runaway slave?

Of course, because of the debt Philemon owes Paul, and also because of Paul's position as an apostle of Christ, Paul could demand he would show grace, but he won't. He appeals to Christ's grace, love and mercy toward Philemon, hoping he would show the same toward Onesimus, and that he'll do this freely as a result of his faith in Christ.

In other words, Paul was reminding Philemon who he is in Christ. And then he reminded Philemon who Onesimus is in Christ. Because of who they are in Christ, Philemon's forgiveness toward Onesimus could prove to form a fruitful partnership in faith.

So, where Onesimus was once trash because of his break of trust and his running away; he now returns as a treasure – a treasure to God, a treasure to Paul (who wanted to keep him), but also a treasure to Philemon. He doesn't return to Philemon as 'Mr Useless', but as 'Mr Useful.'

In this way Philemon's loss of Onesimus is now converted to a gain; the worthless and rebellious slave is now returned to Philemon as a brother saved. No matter whether slave or master, they're both brothers in Christ.

Now, we don't know what happened as a result of this letter, but the fact this letter is in our bibles suggests the reconciliation was successful. We also know from history, a man named Onesimus later became a bishop in Ephesus – which is only about 150km's from Colossae.

But, coming back to us...are we trash or treasure?

Well, from an earthly point of view, we're all trash. We've all made mistakes. We've all stuffed up. We've all hurt God and each other. We don't always do the good we're supposed to be doing, but we keep doing the wrong thing. So, in God's sight, we're all sinners, slaves to fear, and a prisoner to our own desires. Just like Onesimus, as a result of our sin, we all deserve punishment and death.

But from a heavenly point of view, that's not the whole picture. Through faith in Jesus Christ, who suffered, died and rose again for us, we're all new creations. Through Jesus and all the benefits of his suffering, death, and resurrection given to us through baptism and faith, we're all dearly beloved treasures – not because we had any spark of treasure within us to start with, but because we're now in Christ.

Through faith in Jesus Christ who shed his innocent blood for us so that we would be made holy and innocent in God's sight, we're treasures dear to God's heart because all he sees when he looks at us is his own dearly beloved innocent and obedient Son.

We're all children of God who are destined to receive the very same inheritance of

heavenly glory as Jesus Christ himself – not because we deserve it, but because we're now in Christ who will receive all these things.

No matter what you think of yourselves, through faith in Jesus Christ, God calls you his children. God calls you holy. God calls you pure and innocent. God calls you forgiven. God calls you valuable and dearly loved. God has covered you, bought you, and cleansed you, with the precious blood of Jesus. Because of what Christ has done for you, trash has been turned into treasure. That's who you are. That's also how you're to see each other.

You see, as a result of God's powerful work of reconciliation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, your fellow Christians are also treasures. No matter how they've hurt you, this is how you're to see each other through faith.

Your fellow beloved treasures of God may also need you to remind them that, through faith in Christ; they're holy, innocent, pure, forgiven, valuable, appreciated, and loved. They may need you to see them the way Christ sees them. They may need to hear God's, and your, forgiveness for their own failures. They may need to know you're at peace with them for the sake of Christ.

Through faith in Christ, may you see each other, and treat each other, as valuable people who have been made holy and innocent through the blood of Jesus.

Through faith in Christ, may you live as restored and reconciled people in Christ; willingly forgiving and serving each other as you're being forgiven and served by Christ.

Through faith in Christ, may you believe you're all treasures close to his heart so that...

*...the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ will be with your spirit. Amen.*

Pastor Stuart Kleinig  
South Burnett Lutheran Parish  
13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18)  
7<sup>th</sup> September 2025