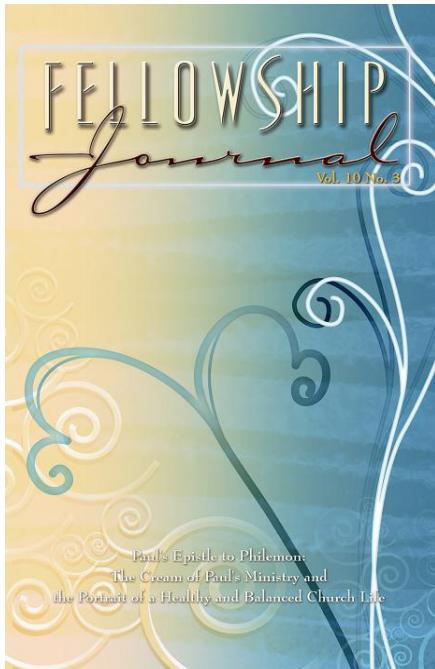


FELLOWSHIP

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Philemon:

A Sweet Church Life
Exhibiting the Highest
Virtues Upheld by Five
Crucial Pillars

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Vision Week

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*Messages given by Titus Chu
from July 11 to July 16, 2011,
at Ashland Woods Fellowship Center
near Sullivan, Ohio.*

Vision Week

MESSAGE ONE:

PHILEMON: EMBODYING & REALIZING PAUL'S MATURE MINISTRY

THE ROMANTIC LIFE WITH THE DIVINE FOUND IN WHAT IS COMMON

As SEEN IN JOB

Job is the most romantic book in the Bible. In it Satan walks up to God and God politely asks him where he has been. Satan responds that he has been walking to and fro on the earth, and God asks if he has considered His servant, Job. Then Job's riches, children, health and all he could rely upon are taken away from him. All that is left to him is his wife who, instead of trying to comfort him, recommends that he curse God and die! How romantic! Then his friends come and speak nonsense with him for a very long time. Job replies he hasn't done anything wrong to deserve his treatment and eventually a young bystander named Elihu cannot take anymore and also speaks. Finally, God comes in. Compared to everyone else, God doesn't speak long. He speaks to Job about how He made the crocodile and some other creatures. How strange that God used such things to defend Himself!

Job covers four levels of understanding towards God. At the most basic level are the "church goers," who really have little spiritual understanding. The second level is seen in the young man Elihu. At least he has some points! The third level is he who really honors God. God has a way to work with this one. Unlike what many of us might have done, Job did not give up God, no matter what he went through. Therefore God was able to work with him! At that point, Job was at the third level. Eventually, however, God Himself came in with a living demonstration of Himself. After nearly forty chapters of talk God appears and says, "Consider the crocodile!" Doesn't this seem peculiar? But because of this, Job was able to say, "I heard of You with my ears, but now I SEE You." To see is very precious. He had been to many "meetings" and "conferences" and heard so much, but now, because of what he had experienced and because of the Lord's appearing he was able to say, "Now I see You." How romantic was Job's experience!

All Christians love the Lord either religiously, selfishly or romantically. Romance focuses on whether or not something crucial happens as hoped for. If it does, it brings joy; if it does not, there is a crushing. Either way, life is not routine! In this kind of life, even small things such as deciding what to wear become a part of the romance. The Lord's presence or absence in the small details or in the things that confine us become very important to us as we advance. In this we see that the more we grow spiritually, the more "common" we become! In the Bible the most spiritual persons appear the most "common" in their living.

As SEEN IN GENESIS

Next to Job, the most romantic book in the Bible to me is Genesis, which starts from zero and ends up nearly back at zero! In the presence of nothing, God begins to speak, then there's light and then everything God desires comes forth. God creates man and woman, and breathes into them and they become living souls with a spirit (Zech. 12:1). Think of how God created woman from Adam. How romantic that is! Then think about Adam's declaration, in comparing Eve to the rest of creation, when he says, "This is now bones of my bones and the flesh of my flesh!"

Following this, the wife and husband fail God and blame each other. In this regard, Genesis is much richer than Job. Following Adam and Eve come figure after figure, person after person, story after story, reaching the point where God gains Jacob and can finally bless him as His Israel. But where does Genesis end up? After all is said and done, Jacob's bones end up in Egypt along with all of God's people, far from the good land. Isn't that discouraging? Genesis ends with Egypt. Think about such a life. We may want the Lord to work on us, but we must realize that His view is very different from our view and His ways are very different from our ways. His expectations and what He has designed for us will be very different from what we hoped for or envisioned for our life.

Most have some idea of what they would like to be someday, but the Lord Jesus says, "I don't want wealthy men and I don't want glorious servants. What I desire is someone like Job who can say, 'Now I see You, God, and repent in the dust'." God desires Jacob, but look at this man, Jacob, and look at His people! Even after so many years in Egypt, they remained identified with the land God had given them. They did not become joined to Egypt. They still kept their identity as the people of God, but they became very common.

To become common is the opposite of being outwardly prevailing. As I minister, I cough a lot. Some may say, "If your God cannot heal you, then where is your God?" My God doesn't want to make me that prevailing. Young men are robust and hopeful, but not me. Once the air conditioning blows on me, you will see how fragile I am. An old man such as I understands the picture in Genesis, where Jacob, the result of all of God's profound work, ends up in such a state. I do not think a confident young person

who still has dreams of spirituality can easily take in this picture. But can they be more spiritual than Job? However, look at how Job's book concludes with God's revelation and Job's repentance! Like Jacob (and Paul!) how common Job becomes!

As SEEN IN PHILEMON

It is healthy to be filled with dreams and hopes for the future when you are young. But this week we will be covering a book written by one old spiritual man to another old spiritual man. And having become old, they have become very lovely. Paul's name means "little," and this is what Paul "the aged" has become. The other brother's name, Philemon, means "loving" from the Greek word for human affection, yet Paul refers to him as "beloved" using the term for the divine love (*agape*). Both of these mature brothers are filled with love and have become common, or "small."

When an old man writes a book to another old man, it is extremely profound, being the fellowship between two such men. On the other hand, they both are extremely common! How different their lives are than those who are young! The young comb their hair for a certain effect, but old men no longer have much hair to allow a comb to work with. With age, even your hair becomes "common"! Maturity removes the "specialness" of so many things. Instead, there is restfulness rather than carefulness. You come to a certain state before the Lord in which you are just thankful to be who you are with Him, even though others may see you as of little value. The young person's word is, "Let me become somebody! Let me have something!" whereas the old man's word is, "I am joyful and have become content with what I have and who I am."

PHILEMON PRESENTS US WITH THE CULMINATION OF PAUL'S MINISTRY

THE PROGRESSION DEPICTED IN PAUL'S MINISTRY

The apostle Paul wrote this epistle to Philemon, a leading brother in Colossae. This writing of one old man to another is the conclusion of all the apostle Paul's writing. Paul's writing really begins with the book of Romans, which stands as the foundation for our knowledge and experience of the reality of the New Testament. Following Romans, we have three very messy books: First and Second Corinthians and Galatians. First Corinthians reveals that the church life can be more messy than you might ever have imagined. In First Corinthians, the Lord Jesus has, in His government, introduced us to every terrible problem that would crop up in the coming 2000 years of church life experience. Thus it can be taken as a very discouraging book! And it is followed by Second Corinthians, where we find out that once we grow out of those problems, we may still end up with a problem concerning our relationship with the servant of the Lord...the very one who is struggling to raise us up. Paul had labored in Corinth for a year and a half, house to house, and yet the saints there, having received all the benefit of his labor, rejected him.

Are you ready? After a wonderful salvation, are you ready for the messy church life? And, as you are helped out of one mess after another, are you ready to be in a place where people question the one who helped them to grow to the point they could focus on such issues rather than the totality of the messiness they were in? Paul helped the Corinthians to realize Christ was theirs just as much as He was Paul's (1 Cor. 1:2). He helped them grow unto a certain point that they themselves entered another stage, but every stage possesses its own dangers.

What about the next stage, represented by Galatians? The danger of that stage is that, even though we may no longer have a problem among the saints in the church life, or with the apostles, we may end up having a problem having to do with Christ Himself! In this situation the saints end up caught with what they think is right about something rather than following Christ Himself. Christ gets replaced by what seems right.

The ugly problems that surface in the church life from time to time do not bother me too much. They are not as serious as they seem. The more serious problems are those that cause the churches to lose the help the Lord provides through the workers. But even more serious than this is when the churches are drawn off after something that seems good, but is not Christ Himself. The churches must remain focused on Christ to be the testimonies of Christ!

If there is anything good to be said for the second and third problems, it is that they indicate that some growth has taken place, but not enough! The whole thing is a process. We grow from the richest purity in Romans into a troublesome church life. Then we grow from a troublesome church life into trouble with the coworkers. These two to me are not as serious as the third, when some reach their way to the thought: "What does Christ know about people today? This is the 21st century! I know what we should do!" The strange thing is that even as you think you are with Christ, you are so much against Him!

How do you know you have a problem with Christ? It is when your focus becomes things for which there is no clear word in the Bible. The things that you do, no longer have Christ as the center, but rather He becomes a means or a way to do those things. If something is neither sinful nor worldly, we may feel free to make use of it. But should that thing become your stress, your problem will be with Christ. When we are wrong, we may feel Jesus is wrong. Just remember, if you ever feel Jesus is wrong, that certainly does not mean He is wrong; it means you are wrong.

Once, when visiting a city, I asked whether we could visit a certain congregation. We arrived and saw everyone praying in a very godly way. The speaker was very gifted. He showed me around their new hall, which was fashioned in a particular way and could hold a great many people. He was very upbeat about it, but my word to him was "Brother, the outer covering of the tabernacle was porpoise skin." They

were very active and everyone was offering and many were being contacted, but in the midst of it all, Christ seemed to have disappeared.

Paul wrote these three epistles (along with the Thessalonians' epistles, which focus on Christ's return) before he was imprisoned. What led up to his imprisonment? He claimed it was due to his stand for the resurrection (Acts 24:21), but really it was because he had agreed to go with some brothers in Jerusalem to sponsor a religious vow! He had gone to the temple to help them make the necessary sacrifices. In a way, Paul could claim that if he had not taken the way of standing for the Lord's resurrection, he would not have ended up where he was, but from another angle it was God's discipline upon what he was doing, for if he had succeeded, it surely would have undermined what he preached! Even so, he was able to stand and declare before Agrippa, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).

PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT AND THE ADVANCE OF HIS MINISTRY

During his imprisonment in Caesarea and Rome, he must have spent a lot of time thinking about his circumstances and reconsidering all that the Lord had shown him. He was about 60 years old, according to my calculation. During these years, most likely, he was asking, "Why?" Eventually, as he considered before the Lord all he had seen and experienced, something became very clear and he could write Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. Then he wrote Philemon.

I believe that it was around 64 AD that Paul's eyes were really opened to see what God is after. It was then he could shout, "This is God's economy! This is God's eternal purpose! This is God's plan!" It became so clear that he began writing Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians and at the same time, Philemon.

Let us reconsider the progression. After seeing Christ and His salvation in Romans, we enter the messy church life in First Corinthians. Eventually, we have problems with the workers, and even problems with Christ. Paul saw all of this. This was the level of Paul's labors up to that time. When the churches had reached this point, and when Paul had reached this point in his own labor, the Lord said, "Now it is time to put you into prison."

After six years of experiencing confinement, from around 58 to 64 AD, something became much more clear. Paul more clearly saw what God was after, and wrote the book of Ephesians, in which we can see the local church building itself up in love. The church is portrayed very clearly. Then in Philippians Paul was able to say, "I am considering whether I should die or not, for to be with Christ is far better!" Paul was someone who had been to the third heavens (2 Cor. 12:2-4), so he truly knew what the rest of us only guess at, which is, how good it is to go to be with Christ! How many among us, after preaching on such a message, would be hoping to be killed in a car accident so we might swiftly go to be with the Lord? But with Paul it was so, for

Paul had been there and had come back. He was in Paradise. He knew exactly how good it is. In addition to this, he had also seen the “why” to everything! He had seen all he had written of in Ephesians and Colossians. So when he wrote Philippians Paul must have really struggled between his desire to be with the Lord in paradise and his new realization of God’s economy and purpose that the saints needed to know.

We still struggle for that little piece of bread or meat and some shelter, and we feel comforted that we are still able to live. Paul could say, “I have been to the third heavens. I was in Hades. I heard the words of mystery that men are not allowed to speak of.” He was suffering under imprisonment, wondering, “Why, Lord, do you keep me on this earth?” Then he received revelation upon revelation until the picture became so clear and he could write Ephesians and Colossians. By the time he wrote Philippians, he felt like he could go! It really was a difficult choice to make.

The Paul we see writing to the Philippians was another person, particularly when he said, “I know that I shall live and shall be with you for your progress and joy in the faith!” (Phil. 1:25). In Ephesians, we find his revelation of the church and in Colossians his revelation of Christ. In Philippians we have a book full of practicality. This is particularly seen in Philemon where he writes, “Prepare a lodging for me.” Paul’s word indicated he was coming from Rome. He was no longer questioning the fact, nor wondering whether he should stay among the saints or go to be with the Lord!

PAUL’S ULTIMATE REALIZATION BOUND HIM EVEN CLOSER TO THE SAINTS

Why could the apostle Paul be so sure to say to Philemon, “I am coming”? It was based on all his experience as seen in the book of Romans onwards. With Romans as the base we begin to realize, “Oh, how amazing the church life is!” Brothers, you just don’t know how amazing the church life is yet. I hope the Lord might provide you further experiences in the church life so that you might further know Christ as you confront so many different situations. When you see the saints exposed in so many different ways, on the one hand it is hard, but without such things you never learn what it means to love a brother or sister. No matter how someone is exposed, you have to learn to love him. It is easy to love the saints when they seem so sweet and spiritual, but can you love them when you really find out who they are, even though it is nothing like what you expected?

When parents hold their child as an infant, all kinds of imaginations go through their minds. “I’m holding a PhD-to-be!” “I’m holding a future leader!” As they grow, however, parents continually discover ways in which their children do not meet up to their expectation. But the funny thing is that they never say, “Since you are this way, you are no longer my child.” Instead, they love their children even more and fight for them more! The Lord wants us to love the saints in this way. That’s why the Lord brings us into the church life: to expose all the brothers to us and then reveal to us that

these are the ones He loves and that we should love. He gives Himself to them and we should give ourselves to them as well.

The problems revealed in First and Second Corinthians and Galatians adequately reveal all the dangers and pitfalls to be expected as the saints grow in the church life. Paul then began to establish something very positive, but what enabled him to do this was a hard thing to experience. Even with such a one as the apostle Paul it required six years' imprisonment. For the majority of those six years he had no idea why he was experiencing it. That's why he never felt he could say, before he wrote Ephesians, "I can now go." When he wrote Philippians, however, he felt very clear about the purpose of it all. He understood why he had to go through all those troublesome things. He had received visions and continued to receive revelations. Now he could write Ephesians. Now he could write Philippians, and say, "I am ready to go. Caesar is not in charge of my life. God is in charge of my life." But more than that, he could speak about Christ as Head over all things in Colossians. And he could tell Philemon, "Get a place ready for me."

Brothers, do you realize Philemon represents the conclusion of Paul's ministry? Thus you realize it is a profound book; but even so, you will find out that it is easy to enjoy all that is contained in its 25 verses. What Philemon presents us with as a conclusion to all of Paul's foregoing writing is something very simple and practical.

The first time I read the book of Philemon, I couldn't figure out why it was in the Bible. I felt it was better to read all the books in which the problems were treated negatively or in which the revelation was made clear positively. I enjoyed them but did not spend time on this book. One day, however, I was opened a little to realize how our Christian life requires so much to develop. If your Christian life is healthy, you will arrive at such a restfulness before the Lord as you reach your maturity in Him. You will begin to realize that Christ and you operate as one. In this operation everything becomes extremely simple. There's no struggle for attainment or manifestation. You are just who you are as you serve God. If you are young, you are still en route, still struggling. I enjoy Philemon so much because I can now relate to it much more. As I read it today, I feel, "That's right." I tell you brothers, this is the journey of life you are in!

Even if you were to read Colossians over and over, it would still not be fully yours, for the headship of Christ cannot really become yours until you go through these things. May we tell the Lord, "We are very young. The brother seems to have picked up the wrong book for us, but even so, we have no problem with the servant of the Lord." (Don't worry. There may be some words that will stir you up, but I would ask, "What do you need to get stirred up FOR?") Let us tell the Lord, "Whether I am in Romans or First or Second Corinthians or Galatians or Ephesians or Philippians or Colossians, don't allow me to settle there, for my desire is to arrive at and settle in Philemon."

Vision Week

Message Two:

A Sweet & Multifaceted Portrait

The peak of the entire Bible is found in Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. These books could only be produced and arrived at, however, after Paul had received much revelation and passed through much dealing.

PAUL'S LONELY IMPRISONMENT

Paul's long imprisonment was a difficult and lonely experience. When he was arrested, the church in Jerusalem made no effort to rescue him. He had been falsely accused of bringing a Gentile onto the temple grounds (Acts 21:28). The fact is, those he was helping with their vow might have been among those who initiated the accusations! Why? Because James may have seen Paul's visit as an opportunity to silence him. It may be otherwise, but it looks like the whole thing was a set-up. It must have been a shock to Paul as he sat imprisoned and nobody cared! The church in Jerusalem had thousands of saints (Acts 21:20). Some had to have held high social status. The church had resources. But it seems instead that they were celebrating his predicament instead of standing with him. No one helped him in his defense before the Roman government (Acts 24).

Another thing I don't quite understand is what happened to the other churches. He had stopped to see saints on the way and had been warned in Caesarea by Agabus (Acts 21:1-12). He was held prisoner in Caesarea and from there was sent to Rome because of his appeal to Caesar. Brothers met him when he arrived near Rome (Acts 28:15). Yet neither these brothers nor any he mentions in his epistle to Rome (ch. 16) seem to have visited him in his imprisonment in their city. We just read at the end of Acts that he was available in his rented place to receive visitors. He was there, saying, "If anyone wants to, they are welcome to come see me." Shouldn't Paul have even needed a secretary to handle all those who wanted an appointment? You would think his schedule would have been very tight during those years, considering all the saints and churches he had helped or raised up. But instead he was very lonely.

If it were me, I might have quit! Looking at the situation, he may have been able to say, "Lord, I have no regret for all the physical suffering I have endured for Your sake, but when I look at all the brothers and churches I have raised up, it is not worthwhile to spend time with such human beings."

I believe he was sitting there wondering, "Lord Jesus, why am I here?" He must have thought about Jerusalem and the circumstances surrounding his arrest. Wouldn't he have wondered, "What kind of church is that? Where is my help?" No lawyer was sent to defend him. A few such as Luke were with him in Rome, but overall, among all the churches, who was standing with him?

While he was there during those long days, I believe he would have gone over the Scriptures again and again. Initially, after he was saved he went away to Arabia (Gal. 1:17) where he must have thoroughly digested the Old Testament in light of Jesus Christ. It was there he saw so much about Christ and the church. He saw, for instance, how Adam was Christ and Eve was the church. He saw how Adam said Eve "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" and how the Lord's side was opened as Adam's was. Therefore he realized that the church must be out of the life of Christ. He knew the Hebrew and what the word we translate "rib" really meant. When Jesus' side was pierced, it was blood and water, not bone, that issued forth. Paul also realized the depth of mankind's fall and how the very physical universe changed when God judged mankind. The sun, the moon, the day and the length of human life... everything changed. Their eating was not merely a mistake! That was something absolutely against God's plan, and yet necessary, for though man was forbidden to eat, he had to eat the wrong tree for God's plan to unfold. Paul gained a lot of riches of understanding. After around two and a half years, he left the wilderness and went back to Damascus where he preached the gospel. He was so powerful that the Jews tried to kill him. Therefore he went to Jerusalem where they again tried to kill him. What an impact he had!

PAUL'S ARRIVAL AT THE INTRINSIC REVELATION OF GOD'S PLAN

What Paul saw up until his imprisonment was still not the core of what was in God's heart, however. Then he was in jail for six years, which was a lonely, boring, sad experience. Jerusalem made no effort to rescue him. It seems they were very happy to see Paul imprisoned. (Therefore if you hear bad words about me don't defend and say, "Titus isn't as bad as that." Titus may not be as bad as some say, but Titus isn't all good, either! Christians are the most untrustworthy people. When you are with Christians, you tend to trust them, and that is why being among them is dangerous. When I work with unbelievers, I know what is involved. But when it comes to money, many Christians no longer have Christ! Many Christians care for money more than they care for Christ. Of course afterward, they

offer a little bit, and the Lord forgives them and their conscience is peaceful, so they often just keep doing what they are doing. Christians are very funny beings, but the Lord Jesus loves them so you have no right to criticize them!)

After Paul arrived in Rome, I think the elders there would have surely brought different groups of saints to him at his rented dwelling and asked Paul to work with them. Paul's time would have been full! For some reason, however, there was no indication that any such thing happened. I hope Priscilla and Aquila visited Paul, for that would be too discouraging if they didn't. They were among Paul's closest companions. But in the face of all of this, Paul saw the church.

He was seeking to understand and to get at the meaning of all these things. He was forced to go deeper and ask, "What is really behind all of this?" Remember, Adam typifies Christ. The intrinsic question is Why? Eve typifies the church. The intrinsic question is Why? The clothing that God made for them represents Jesus Christ as our righteousness. The question is Why? Have you ever considered why? Paul had been preaching these things for years, but then he was put into prison.

This all happened because of God's care for him. God seemed to be saying, "You are such a diligent and faithful worker. Whosoever comes to you, you like to see them. The only way to save you is to keep everyone away from you. I will even tell Priscilla and Aquila not to visit you anymore." So he was there considering what was going on. Eventually, he was granted to arrive at and see the innermost, most intrinsic truth. He realized, "It's not just that Adam typifies Christ; it's that Christ is everything. It's not just that Eve typifies the church, but that the church is the fullness of Christ who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). Suddenly all the things on the surface were seen as part of a much deeper whole. When that happened I believe Paul must have been beside himself. I think Luke and Timothy and Epaphroditus must have asked, "What has happened?" He would have replied, "Now I have it! Now everything is crystal clear!"

PAUL'S CLARITY MEANT THE WORK OF HIS IMPRISONMENT WAS ACCOMPLISHED

You should begin to see why the books of Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians are so precious. Secondly, you should be able to see why Paul says his imprisonment was effectively at an end. He now had the boldness to tell Caesar, "My time here is done."

Confucius has the proverb: "If in the morning you find the truth, in the evening you may go and die." This is a foolish proverb, for it means once you find out life's meaning, your life means nothing! So, is the truth for you to die? How stupid. Paul, however, once he saw the truth, did not have this reaction! After he saw the central truth, he wrote the three books, and told the Philippians, "I was ready to die, and I know how much better it is to be with the Lord, but instead I am going to remain for

your advancement and joy in the faith." Then he even told Philemon, "Prepare a place for me, because I am coming!"

Actually in the Bible, there's no record he had been in Colossae, but he spent much time laboring in Ephesus, which is very close to Colossae. No doubt he knew the saints he mentions in Philemon well. They were the reason for this last writing we have of his to the churches (or to individuals in the churches.) This last writing contains Paul's word that he was coming to their place for a period of time.

THE APOSTLE'S COMING WOULD BE AS GRACE

Paul's coming was not as a great apostle, but as a brother. He was not coming to check on how well they were doing. His coming was to be grace with them. This is the conclusion of all the apostle Paul's writings. After this are the greetings by those with him. The ending of all the apostle Paul's writing is the request for lodging in anticipation of his coming to be grace with them. Such a great apostle concludes his writing in such a sweet way. Everything in all of Paul's ministry is here, but in the way of living rather than teaching.

THE WAY OF HELPING OTHERS BY THE WAY OF WHAT IS DEPICTED IN PHILEMON

This book is a picture of a beautiful and heavenly church life. Do you want to be in the church life? One way I might help you is to instruct you on all the particulars that I think are important. Maybe I would even say, "The church is Christ! You must have Him all the time! No self life can be involved. Your flesh has to go. Furthermore, you have to grow!" I imagine that if I took this way, everyone who heard me would want to drop the church life! Another way is to see a picture of the church life. This is Philemon.

Western art often portrays one event, like the Lord's supper, or God stretching out his finger to Adam, imparting life to him (which doesn't seem logical, since Adam would have had to have life to lift up his finger). Even with the Mona Lisa, the world's greatest painting, you only see one lady! In China there is a famous painting called "Dwelling on Fuchun Mountain." Why is this so famous? It is not a Jesus with twelve apostles or a lady with a famous smile or a God who stretches a finger to a non-living being who strangely knows how to respond. It just portrays to you all the things you can see when you are going by this river. For instance, you will see a village there, a fishing port here, and further down a market. You see all kinds of things. Philemon is such a picture.

THE FIRST PART OF THE PICTURE PAUL PAINTS IN PHILEMON: THE FIVE PILLARS

This "painting" is of three sections. In the beginning, Philemon presents us with five pillars. In the middle, it tells you what is really in the church life. The church life

is mainly a life of love. Out of love is generated a life of faith. Out of faith is generated a life of receiving. And out of receiving is generated a life of indebtedness. Then out of indebtedness is generated the welcoming of whosoever can be grace to us. (These things can be seen in all of Paul's books, but when we come to the picture of Philemon, it all becomes very simple.) Finally, it is supported at the end by four kinds of co-workers, servants of the Lord who are able to stand with the church. (You also have to be aware of a particular one who is not good at all.) That is the church life.

THE BEAUTY CONVEYED BY THOSE SPOKEN OF IN PHILEMON

Thus Philemon is a picture of a beautiful and heavenly church life. This is why in this book we are able to see something so very heavenly and *profitable*. "Profitable" is the meaning of the personal subject of this book (Onesimus) and "profitable" is also used as a word in this epistle. Many books cause you to feel pressured by all that is contained and conveyed, but not so with Philemon. In the entire book, with but one exception, everyone is beautiful. The apostle Paul, Timothy, Philemon, Apphia and Archippus are beautiful. Mark, Luke, Epaphras and Aristarchus are also beautiful. The only one who is not beautiful is Demas. Do you know why Demas is included? It is because no matter how good the church life is in this age, God will always allow imperfection.

In this portrait you can see the inward beings of the apostles and the saints. The beauty of it has to do with what comes from the inward parts. For instance, when you see a mother and her baby smiling at each other, what do you see? The mother looks at the baby with a face that expresses how much the mother loves the young one. And the young one responds in love and dependence. When you see the apostle Paul in Philemon, you can see his inward being. When you see Philemon, you can see the inward being of Philemon. When you see Archippus, you can see the inward being of Archippus. Even when you see Apphia, the verse indicates that the inward being of Apphia was so one with Philemon and operated so well in the church life. This book is marvelous because even though it doesn't tell you so much, it expresses each person to you. And it indicates the reality of the divine attributes expressed in human virtues. There is some mention of the Lord's work, but basically it's not by teaching.

THE SECOND PICTURE SEEN IN PHILEMON: DIVINE ATTRIBUTES MANIFESTED IN VIRTUOUS HUMANITY

Philemon indicates the reality of the divine attributes lived by human virtues. In the whole book there is little mention of Christ and His work when compared to other books such as Ephesians or Colossians. Actually, the whole Bible is filled with teaching! But here Paul is a man who says: "I'm not telling you to be a certain way, but I know that if you have the divine attributes, in your living you will be this kind of person."

When you see a musician, you know that they are musicians for some reason. Something within them is expressed. (Some ask me, "Are you a doctor?" or "Are you a government official?" No one has asked me, "Are you a factory worker?") People see what is within you expressed as human virtue. As those who follow Jesus, we should become so pleasant, loving, and willing to make sacrifices for others. In Philemon Paul did not make any big issue about being an apostle. But as you read it, you are impressed with the kind of apostle he was. You also really appreciate brother Philemon. Archippus is just a young brother, but even so, as you read you really appreciate him as well. Something constituted into the beings of all these saints is expressed in this book.

IN PHILEMON, RADIANT LOVE AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE IS SEEN INSTEAD OF TEACHING

In Philemon, teaching is replaced with radiant love. In the church life it is too easy to give teachings. We must realize there is teaching and then there is teaching. When I was a student, the teachers often told us to do something. When I got home, my mother sometimes said the same thing, but the teacher said it as a statement, while my mother said it with her person!

It is divine nature that produces genuine human virtue, not teaching! No teaching without the substance behind it can produce what is real.

If teaching is conveyed with love, it has some value. And if teaching conveys truth, it really has value. But if teaching merely is about something you ought to do, it doesn't have power. Genuine teaching of truth relates to what the Lord desires to do and conveys a matter of truth through the fellowship of life.

For instance, I could tell someone, "Did you know that God is processed for His eternal purpose? He is Triune for His eternal economy." People may be impressed, but they may also feel it is academic. Another way is to convey such things to them in fellowship. Truth is conveyed through the fellowship of life.

I was allowed into a three-month training given by Brother Lee in 1956. I had no idea what was being taught most of the time, but I took notes. I had only been loving the Lord for one year. Nothing was clear to me, but every day after the meeting I felt very satisfied. Why? Because of love. I hope that our time together might be such a fellowship. Something exists that is very sweet among Christians. As we fellowship, we receive some element that makes us so happy! I may be struggling with limitations due to my age, and many of you may be very young, yet you are still able to enjoy what is conveyed by the fellowship of life.

I believe people received life from every book Paul wrote, but this book for some reason conveys the sense that all the saints presented here are in love and concerned

for each other. Paul writes because of his concern over a “hopeless” brother named Onesimus. We are not even taught, “You must fellowship in life!” or “The truth is life!” For some reason we begin to realize so much truth is found here, yet it is not so much taught as conveyed through the fellowship of life.

For instance, the apostle Paul addressed Philemon as “my beloved fellow-worker.” How much is conveyed in that phrase! “Philemon” comes from *philia*, meaning affectionate love. Yet Paul refers to him as his *agape* fellow coworker, referring to God’s divine love. This short statement is filled with the element of divinity, life, and the operation of the virtue of human life backed up with the substance of divine love. No other book conveys this so sweetly.

PHILEMON TESTIFIES ALL MEN ARE EQUAL IN THE NEW MAN

The last point in this picture is the testimony that all saints are equal in the new man’s living (see Col. 3:10-11). This book is based upon a number of impossibilities. It was impossible that the apostle Paul would meet Onesimus and get him saved. It was impossible that afterwards Onesimus would desire to serve the apostle Paul. It was impossible that the apostle Paul would say, “Even though you desire to stay and serve me and are so useful to me, you must go back!” Furthermore, it was impossible that Philemon would just take Onesimus in as a brother. (Consider the complications that would arise!) But in the face of all these impossibilities, there is an apostle, Paul, whose name means small, and Philemon, a man whose name means love. They are filled with the divine element.

How could an escaped slave, who had stolen something from Philemon before he left, just return without consequence? There was no way an escaped slave who also committed theft could just go back with a letter and be bold enough to feel his life was safe. He could have been put to death! After Philemon read the letter and then called him “brother Onesimus,” I think Onesimus would have fainted! To him, Philemon was “Master.” Now, suddenly, Philemon was “Brother”! I believe Philemon would have said, “Now we are together in the church life. We are both members of the Body of Christ and of the household, the family of God. We are joint-partakers and a part of the new man.” How could this be? Yet it is all portrayed in this picture we call the book of Philemon.

Vision Week

Message Three:

Paul's Development & The Pillars

A CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL'S LIFE AND LABOR

I personally believe Paul was saved when he was around 38 years old, and was born at about the same time Jesus was. At that time, 38 was not young! The complete span of his Christian life was only about 30 years. If saved at 38, he began to travel in his ministry at around age 48 and was imprisoned at or around the age of 58. He was martyred then around the age of 68. He experienced ten years of learning, during which he also labored. During this time he was in Damascus, Jerusalem, Tarsus and Antioch. Then for ten years he traveled primarily through Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece. And what he produced in those ten years puts all of us to shame!

Through Paul's labor, a group of churches were raised up around Ephesus (Acts 19:10; Rev. 1:4,11), including in Colossae. These churches, such as Ephesus, Laodicea, and Colossae, must have been in close fellowship (Col. 4:16). Although John does not mention Colossae as one of the seven churches that the Lord walks among in the first chapters of Revelation, there may have been a number of churches in that area that simply did not get mentioned in Revelation.

People often refer to Paul's "three missionary journeys." The third, however, was just a continuation of the second, and therefore should not be called a separate journey. Paul had just returned to Ephesus. Because Jerusalem was trying so hard to destroy his work, Paul made the decision to go talk with them. When he arrived, it seems as if no one there wanted to see him. The writer of Acts was kind to those involved, yet it seems clear that Paul was being snubbed. After remaining a few days he gave up and went to Antioch. Yet because Antioch itself at that time had bowed to the "flow," he received as little attention there as he did in Jerusalem. How unlike the time he and Barnabas returned there after their first journey! That was the high point of the church life in the Bible. Not only he and Barnabas ministered, but also "many others" (Acts 15:35) who had undoubtedly been raised up through their ministry and had been ministering in Paul and Barnabas' absence for those two and half years.

This time when Paul showed up in Antioch the situation was different, so after a brief stay he returned to Ephesus. From there he eventually returned to Jerusalem to try to talk with James once more. Perhaps he wanted to ask James, "Why must you confine God to such a narrow way?" James must have clearly known Paul was coming. (You may think I am too hard on James, but many Christian teachers throughout

history have seen it the same way. James had produced such an unhealthy situation in Jerusalem that the Lord had to allow the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem in 70 AD.)

After returning to Ephesus, Paul did not travel that much. He stayed there for three years. The situation bothered him to the point that he had to return to Jerusalem again; but this time he was received by some who had moved to Jerusalem and knew Paul. He asked them to move there and they became operative there. They must have had a way to reach James for Paul in a way that wasn't possible during Paul's previous visit. Paul, through them, requested a time with James so that he might present what the Lord had done among the Gentiles, so that perhaps they might see it as something of God. But regardless of Paul's planning, things went differently. Instead of being able to present anything to James, he fell into his hands.

Those who had immigrated to Jerusalem and who knew Paul welcomed him. Then he was brought to someone, if not James himself, then perhaps a right-hand man.

THE INFLUENCE OF JAMES THE BROTHER OF JESUS ON THE SAINTS IN JERUSALEM

James gave Jesus headaches even during His ministry (John 7:1-9). His urging Jesus to go to Judea put Jesus on the spot: if He went, it would look like He wanted fame; if He did not go, His need to go would be frustrated. This is why Jesus told his brothers, "Your time is coming but Mine is not yet come." He sent everyone else on, but Himself had to go privately. Paul tells us that in resurrection Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). We don't know whether Jesus rebuked or encouraged His younger brother, but I don't think James changed. James was able to impress people with how he knew Jesus growing up. The Jesus he knew was circumcised and kept the Law. People are simple enough to be influenced by such things. It was very logical! "Since Jesus came up to Jerusalem to keep the feasts, everyone should come to Jerusalem! Jesus kept the Sabbath, so everyone should keep the Sabbath!" James may have told the "Spirit-filled" believers, "If you say you are His followers, you should show His deeds in your life!" Even if James really had received the Spirit, that was not his focus! His purpose was to convince all Christians that they needed to behave a certain way. Because of his kinship with Jesus, people thought James must have been a very spiritual man. (Don't think they were being foolish, for this could be exactly how ALL of us might have felt in his presence. People do many things in the name of Christ that have nothing to do with Christ!)

THE SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING PAUL'S ARREST

The second time Paul visited Jerusalem, James could not avoid seeing him. I believe James and those with him came up with a plan that would deal with the problem Paul presented. Paul was received by James, probably in a carefully arranged setting that was designed to subdue him. Perhaps James was seated in a way

that made him seem like a king. When Paul got into James' presence, he fell into their trap. He may have begun to say something about how the Lord had worked through him among the Gentiles; but James responded that many in the church in Jerusalem were troubled by Paul's message that went against their Jewish traditions, and persuaded Paul to help four men who were going to perform a vow (Acts 21:18-24). This, James said, would convince the people that Paul was really not against the keeping of the Law and circumcision. Perhaps Paul took the view that he could be all things to all men for the sake of the overall profit of the gospel! (1 Cor. 9:19-23). But before this errand could be accomplished, some people in the temple claimed Paul had brought a non-Jew into the temple with him. This is why the riot took place that brought in the Roman soldiers and caused him to be taken.

I think the Lord allowed him to be subdued, for otherwise he would not have been put in prison. He had been warned before he arrived (Acts 21:10-11). The whole matter of the four men taking a vow appears to have been a ruse.

PAUL'S COMPLIANCE WITH THE JERUSALEM REQUEST

Paul's compliance with James' wish is hard to understand. Even if he felt peaceful about it, how could we today look at him as we do now? If you know I was spending time in bars, even though I said it is for the gospel, could you respect me? We know Paul as the author of Galatians. He took a strong stand for the gospel of grace versus the keeping of the Law. Where would the credibility of that book of Scripture be today if Paul were allowed to go through with this matter? But God said, "Enough is enough," and came in to stop the whole thing. Those in Jerusalem may have set Paul up, and there may have been weakness in Paul, but God was still in control.

After some were manipulated by a certain ministry they said, "I have been cheated!" My word to them is that even if man should cheat us, the Lord never cheats us. Some people may feel that a servant of the Lord must be as God, and others feel that they must be as the devil. The fact is that those who serve the Lord are men, and since they are men, they make mistakes. If I never made any mistakes, I, like Enoch, would have been taken by the Lord already!

PAUL'S VIEW OF JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES BEFORE HIS CONVERSION AND THE EFFECT OF STEPHEN

I believe Saul (Paul) was born about the same time Jesus was born, that is, around 4 BC. But even if he were somewhat younger, he still would have probably seen Jesus and his "grubby" followers at some point. In his mind, he must have wondered how they would have had the gall to walk into the temple among all the other "high class" Jews. Jesus Himself was dressed in well-made clothing (John 19:23), but the rest were "bumpkins" from Galilee (Acts 2:7). But when he saw what was accomplished at Pentecost and afterwards, he determined he must stop them! He was involved in

Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 8:1). (Stephen, if he had not been martyred, might have been what Paul became!) Saul then enlarged his persecution, and at that point the Lord appeared (Acts 9). Paul's becoming who he was very much owed itself to the blood of Stephen. It was due to this that Paul considered himself chief among sinners (1 Tim. 1:15-16). He had persecuted the church (Acts 8:3; Gal. 1:13), and he could never forget Stephen's radiant face (Acts 6:15). All this contributed to his understanding and appreciation of the church.

THE FIVE PILLARS IN PHILEMON

With so much behind him, Paul wrote the book of Philemon. It is such a simple book. There are five pillars in the introduction that no church or Christian can get away from. He wrote, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy the brother, to Philemon, our dearly beloved and fellow-worker, and to Apphia the sister, and Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church in your house" (vv. 1-2). It is interesting that here at the beginning of these 25 verses, he mentions five persons.

These persons, or pillars, are the supporting elements of the church life. Three are from the local church, but for any local church to be healthy, they must be able to enjoy the other two pillars also: the apostle (Paul) and the brothers with him (Timothy). These are those who provide strength and protection to a healthy local church.

Churches seem to either say "We want to follow a worker," or they say "We want to be independent." But no local church can be independent, and no local church should be under any worker. To be neither under the work nor apart from the work seems difficult. The coworkers cannot control you, but you must have the coworkers.

When a child grows to be a teenager, he still needs his parents. But the parents cannot tell that child everything he must do. A wise parent tells his or her older children, "Do whatever you feel is best." If your dad tells you what to do at 22 or 23, it may not be that healthy! But if the young people begin to feel they don't need their parents any longer, that is not healthy either.

We should be able to boast in our church life. If you feel you must say, "We have nothing. Things are much better other places," that is not so good! But if you say, "We are doing fine! We know what we are doing!" then you may not be fine!

CARE AND OPERATION FROM THE SAINTS WITHIN AND THE WORK WITHOUT

A locality may feel like the workers only frustrate them. They may say, "We can go on fine. Our elders are the best! And we have a perfect family church life. We have the best serving sisters. We have the best young brothers. We have the best 'Philemon' and 'Apphia' and we have the best 'Archippus'. If you want to find the best church life on the whole earth, come to our locality! We don't need a Paul or a

Timothy. How bothersome! We don't need anyone else!" But in addition to Philemon, Apphia and Archippus, they need the Timothy pillar and they need the Paul pillar. All the local churches are before the Lord. They are not subordinate to any co-workers. Yet all the local churches must use the help from the work! All the local churches should be very open to those who can really help them to grow and be built up! If that part is not there, the church will stop. This is why I bother people about coming to this time, whether they are young or old. Let's advance a little!

THE FIRST TWO PILLARS: PAUL AND TIMOTHY, APOSTLES AND WORKERS

Paul, from the very beginning, in the picture portrayed in this book reveals that there is the necessity of these five pillars. You need Paul, not as "the apostle" but as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ." His prison was the local churches he served. He considered himself as someone who was not free to do whatever he pleased. Outwardly he was in jail, but inwardly his confinement came from his consideration for all the churches. As the first pillar, Paul experienced this confinement.

The second person Paul mentions is Timothy, "the brother." It seems he was a person who wept often (2 Tim. 1:4), and followed the apostle from his youth (2 Tim. 2:22). However, he did not develop that quickly. After he had been with Paul for 13 or 14 years he did eventually become a very useful brother before the Lord. He became someone who was able to work with the churches.

Paul's name means "small," and Timothy's name means "honor God." Coworkers are marked by these two things. The leading co-worker has to learn to be very small. As a manifested worker grows spiritually, he appears more and more common rather than awe-inspiring. What does the brother beside him do? He has to learn to be dignified and show honor. Timothy was one who honored God with high value and was honored by God with high value.

The leader shouldn't stand out that much, but those who are learning from the leader should be very bold. A brother may wish to carry out a great work when he becomes a worker, but the real need he has is to locate the man who is small. To serve with such a person is to honor God and an honor from God. The only thing these two together can say is, "Lord, we are trusting You. We are so little, trusting You, but we say we are honoring You."

Without Paul, Timothy could not be healthy, and the church without Paul and Timothy could never be a healthy local church. If Paul were only for himself, or if Timothy were only for himself, neither of them could be healthy coworkers. These five pillars stand together as one group. We need Paul, we need Timothy, we need Philemon, we need Apphia, and we need Archippus. All the local churches must live in the midst of five healthy pillars.

Vision Week

Message Four:

Becoming Paul by Being Saul

THE FUNCTION OF THE PILLARS: TO PROVIDE FOR THE SAINTS' GROWTH AND OPERATION

The five persons, or “pillars,” in Philemon’s first two verses provide the “space” in which all the saints in the church may grow and operate. The higher this space (i.e., the stronger and higher the pillars), the higher those within it may function and attain to. There are an endless number of Christian preachers, but few builders who can raise up such a “tent”! Become a builder! Don’t be a teacher; be a parent. Young people must learn to treasure the pillars who have labored and raised up what they benefit from today. The pillars have raised up the things that enable them to feel like *they can now do something*. As long as the pillars are healthy, everything is kept. Conversely, when any of these pillars are lacking or weak, things can fall apart quickly.

ARCHIPPUS: ONE WHO IS ABLE TO ASCERTAIN AND TRAIN

Who is Archippus? His name means “ruler of horses,” indicating an ability to evaluate and train horses, or, in short, having a “good eye” for horses and what they need to develop according to their unique make-up. An Archippus knows how to work with every type of horse based on their individual strengths and abilities. In the church life we need such trainers, for the church life is full of wild horses! (In the Song of Songs, the King compares His lover at one point to a horse drawing Pharaoh’s chariots.)

TREASURE YOUR YOUTH AND GUARD YOURSELF FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR POTENTIAL

Based on our natural ability, we are a certain way. American young people in particular tend to be wild and bold. In principle, the younger the age, the more precious you must hold its potential. Therefore if you are young, you must know how to treasure that! You may think you are more intelligent than Einstein or

stronger than Tarzan, but if you do not know to treasure your youth by avoiding certain pitfalls and things that are rightfully taboo, your chances of growing well are close to zero. If you become caught by a certain matter, that matter will be according to what kind of person you are. How you handle your youth is crucial. If you do not know how to treasure your youth and guard yourself, your future is not a hopeful one.

The apostle Paul, when he was young, handled himself well. Even though he killed Stephen, he did so according to his conscience under his understanding of God's interest. If there was anything wrong with him, it was that he was always demanding (which is one meaning of the name "Saul").

I used to challenge the young people much more when I was younger, but I have become much "smaller" today. This is actually why some young people may be disappointed with me in my old age, since I do not challenge them as I used to. People tend to admire those who challenge them! Whoever is demanding is attractive. In addition to "demanding," the name Saul also means "to be desired"!

HOW MUCH OF A PAUL YOU BECOME DEPENDS ON HOW MUCH OF A SAUL YOU ARE

If you are a nice person, it may be very difficult for you to develop into a Paul, for you do not know how to be a Saul! The name Saul points to a spirit of pursuing and uncompromising striving. The Saul character says, "Let's go on! Let's pursue! Let's go!" It is not a bad thing if a young person chooses to give one or two years to a something that will really challenge his ability.

Saul became Paul. If you have never been a Saul, it would be impossible for you to become a Paul. Therefore you should not be someone who wastes his time. Every moment, every hour, must be for Christ! Be in the Word, preach the gospel, or labor with the saints! A person with such determination becomes attractive. If you can only say, "I am weak, but, Hallelujah, God is still with me!" you will not be admired by anyone.

A Saul is not someone who goes half-way. He does not compromise when it comes to his purpose of life. There are plenty of useless young men out there. Saul is not one of them. After ten years of pursuing Christ as such a Saul, he was qualified to be sent out as Paul. He could become "small" only after he had pursued, invested and demanded a lot from the Lord and himself. He determined he would live in the Lord's presence. He discovered that the Lord was living and real because He put his faith to the test. Without such a determination and exercise in your own life, you can never come to know Christ in the way Saul did, yet it was such an experience of Christ that enabled Saul to become Paul. If you want a Christian life that is healthy and strong, you need a certain number of years of being a Saul.

PAUL'S NAME IMPLIES RESTFULNESS AS WELL AS BEING SMALL

The word Paul actually means more than merely small. The root of the word is *pauo*, "to cease from all activities and states." Restfulness is what makes you small. People often fight basically for nothing. Instead of fighting over principle, or right, or self-justification, shouldn't we fight to see people saved, or to advance the Lord's interest on the earth? But Paul does not know how to fight. He only knows how to **be**. Paul, having ceased from what he is able to do, became very restful.

It is not always easy to be that small because we all secretly want to be somebody. If we are serving full-time, we wish to be among the full-timers who sit on the front row. We do not want to be "small shots," we want to be "big shots"! Very few are satisfied to be small and hidden among the saints.

Among sisters, there are many who are determined to marry a brother who seems to be on track to becoming a full-timer or an elder. Perhaps their thought is that by marrying such a brother, they will be able to serve the Lord more. Another possibility is that they just want to be somebody in the church life. Few sisters are willing to be a Paula or Paulina! We Christians are such funny animals, it is a wonder Christ can work with us.

To grow into a Paul means you become smaller and smaller. How do you thus know you have grown? It is when your ambition disappears. It may even seem that your usefulness has diminished rather than increased, but you are still able to tell the Lord, "I love You. I am content with who I am in You." When you enter into this state, you are in the reality of what Paul's name signifies.

This does not mean that Paul didn't do anything! He did much, but he did so in a state of restfulness in Christ. Who can approach Paul when it comes to spirituality? The Lord responded to his demanding exercise of faith. Paul's exercise of faith continually put the Lord on the spot, but the Lord answered it. It was by challenging the Lord that Paul found just how real his Lord was.

Today there are two hundred serving the Lord full-time among us. We do not have a fund for this. How can these brothers live month by month? The Lord provides. That is all we can say. It seems we demand, but the Lord answers. There is no way I could bear this responsibility, but the Lord never gave such a responsibility to me. It is His. It is the same with this property. I prayed that there might be a place for the churches to come to receive spiritual help. How dare we do this, since no one promised anything? There is just the rest. The Lord has provided up to today and He will continue to provide. We do not have some rich men who provide support. If it were so, where would Christ be? We simply look to the Lord for His mercy and continued provision. In this way the Lord has been so real to us all these years, and we worship Him.

To be a Paul, you must first learn to be a Saul. A sloppy Saul produces at best a minor Paul. Therefore be demanding to yourself. You should determine to read the Bible and use your time for the Lord. You should determine to follow the Lord, no matter what the cost. It is through such a fighting life that you are ushered into rest, for in the process you learn how trustworthy the Lord is. This is what is seen in Saul/Paul's name.

ON BEING AN APOSTLE: ANDRONICUS AND JUNIA

Some have asked me whether I am an apostle. To me, however, in light of Romans 16:7, I see this matter in another light! In this verse in Romans two persons are mentioned whom Paul calls "outstanding apostles," even though no one knows who they are today. Compared to Paul, could they really have been such great apostles? So for some of us today to be considered even as "regular" or "typical" apostles should not seem so improbable. In fact, if such as they can be "famous" apostles, then perhaps it is possible we might be notable apostles too!

THE VIRTUE OF HONORING THOSE AHEAD OF US IN GOD'S ARRANGEMENT

The second thing we must be impressed with in Romans 16:7 is Paul's recognition that these two saints were apostles "before" him. They were saved before Paul, or Christians before his time. In this we can see something of Paul's blessedness. He was someone who rendered respect to those who the Lord had placed ahead of him in His plan. We must take note of this aspect of his character.

American culture does not match this pattern at all, although Chinese culture does. American children do not even think about who their parents are. Their attitude is, "I didn't choose to be born. That is your doing. Therefore you have to take care of me." To Americans, family responsibility flows downhill, that is, the children can say to their parents, "Your parents took care of you, and now you must take care of us, just as we will take care of ours. Therefore you must do everything for me." Furthermore, American parents raise their children to believe they are outstanding and special, so that they are in for a rude awakening when it comes time for them to go out into the world and find out their real situation! Americans make you laugh, make you cry, and make you realize how rich this country is when you see all its bounty. But American young people seem to require a certain kind of help when it comes to knowing what is life and how to live profitably for Christ!

In China, the story is very different. Even the Chinese character for *honor* embodies the symbol for *son* under a cross. You honor your parents and bear them as your cross. Paul's word matches this kind of honoring. It reveals something of his ethical life. If someone is older, that means they are ahead of you and to be honored because of that. In this simple verse, Paul indicates that he knows ethical life. Since these two saints were ahead of him, he honored them. This is why God could use

Paul to such a degree, for he strongly honored God's arrangement. If Paul's humanity had not been that high, God could not have used him so.

There was a brother among us who served full-time. One day he realized he could not go on any longer in the church life way, because to him the whole thing just didn't work. To his thought the church should be more inclusive, to which I agree, but not in the sense he meant. In other words, we cannot just invite all the Amish, Free Grouper, Pentecostals, etc., to come in with their ministries. We are not narrow, but we really have something before the Lord which we have been given to keep. We should be very open, but that means being open to the brother now beside you, as well as those who are outside! This brother had to admit that the growth he had received had come from the ministry to the churches, but then someone else came in and said, "But isn't it normal for a Christian to grow in this way?" This statement indicated a lack of appreciation for those who have gone before whom God has placed you with. Since he could not receive from us any longer, I suggested he go out to do something, however he felt best. (I do not suggest that anyone go out and start another group and add to the division, but if someone wants to go to some group and minister, do not even those in the divisions need Christ? Anyone who has been among us for a period of time has gained what most other Christians have little experience of.) What was missing, however, was the honor Paul applied to those ahead of him.

Maybe these two saints helped Paul or maybe they did not. But even if they added nothing, when Paul saw someone who was older he had a kind of appreciation. He recognized that certain ones had been placed in Christ before him.

THERE WERE MANY SERVING AS APOSTLES

And since Paul said these two saints were "famous" among the apostles, does that not indicate that at the time there must have been many other apostles? It seems we have gotten ourselves into a strange state of mind, thinking there can only be one apostle as the "minister of the age." It may be that certain brothers have been granted something, but the Bible makes it clear that God has given us "apostles" (Eph. 4:11). There are many apostles.

Among the five "pillars" in Philemon, the first one is the apostle Paul. The second is the learner, Timothy. These two belong to the work and the other three pillars, Philemon, Apphia and Archippus, belong to the locality.

All servants who truly become useful are manifested, not declared. Everybody can brag about things. Anybody can criticize. But very few can produce something. We should not have to honor someone because they belong to some institution that claims they are apostles. Apostleship comes about by means of a certain kind of credibility.

THE MARKS OF AN APOSTLE

What are the marks of an apostle? The first are related to the Lord, the second are related to the church, and the third to themselves.

THE FIRST MARK OF AN APOSTLE: POSSESSING VISION AND REVELATION

First, an apostle receives visions and revelations. In other words, they are always being elevated and are advancing. What they have, they have from Christ.

One brother gave a message in which he continually referred to what other servants of the Lord had seen. Eventually an older brother said to him, "Brother, we have heard much from you about this person and that person. I really desire to hear what the Lord is saying!" It is not the doctrine you know or the books you have read; it is what you have seen of the Lord Himself!

What is the difference between vision and revelation? A vision is like a panorama, a picture. For instance, when a person is given a map of Cleveland that shows all the streets and the location of landmarks, that is like a vision of Cleveland. Having such a "vision" of Cleveland, however, does not mean that you really "have" Cleveland! You may see something of God, but that doesn't mean you "have" it. When you drive a car down the streets you have been shown in the vision, however, and observe everything from the ground, that is like receiving revelation upon revelation based on that vision. Things you experience in this way are no longer theoretical to you. They become yours by experience.

Therefore with every vision you receive, you must consecrate yourself and spend time before the Lord to substantiate that vision. A person who simply reads about a place cannot claim to really know it; only the person who has really "seen" that place can truly claim that. Thus even vision itself is not sufficient; you must have revelation as well.

When it comes to the church, we should not be satisfied to simply have experienced the vision. If that is the case, we might beat others over the head with our "vision." But at the same time, we know what is real. We cannot be peaceful somewhere else. A brother who serves the Lord, if he has this vision, will not raise up something else. We must have the revelation of what Christ is doing today! It was after he became so confirmed in this revelation, after he wrote Ephesians and Colossians, that Paul realized he had to go forward in that revelation, and that he would be released to do so.

Vision Week

Message Five:

The Crucialness of Having All Five Pillars

THE ADVANCE OF THE LEADING ONE IN THE WORK PROVIDES FOR THE ADVANCE OF THOSE WITH HIM AND THE CHURCHES HE CARES FOR

There are two ways to portray the five pillars in Philemon. The first is with five pillars spaced equally to form a pentagon. The form of a pentagon can produce a lot of area! The Pentagon in Washington is one of the largest buildings in the world. Another way to consider the five pillars, however, is with a center pole surrounded by the other four, as in a tent. In other words, it was the spirituality or height of Paul that decided how far the other pillars were able to grow. If Paul were just a “mini-”apostle, the building he “stood” for would not provide for as much to happen. You could crawl in and hide in there, such as on a Sunday morning, and then crawl out and go home. Such a place is not a place for much growth. How high and heavenly the apostle is determines how tall the building becomes. Among all the five pillars in Philemon, Paul is the most crucial.

The “taller” the brothers are who serve the churches, the more prevailing the “building” will be! Therefore if the servant of the Lord continues to grow, the testimony continues to enlarge, and all the saints with him are able to grow accordingly. Timothy’s growth is according to the apostle Paul’s growth, as is Philemon’s growth, Apphia’s growth, and Archippus’ growth. As long as Paul is growing, this picture is very beautiful.

As one who is serving the churches, how much I need the Lord’s mercy that I might continue receiving revelations and ever-higher vision. I must have more substantiating experiences that the Lord’s word might become even more alive to me. Why? Because my growth affects the height and comfortableness of the churches I serve. I trust the Lord for more years that the Lord might continue to take me higher for the sake of the churches. For others must be able to travel for the churches’ profit. If others are able to minister something more fresh and more heavenly that would be wonderful, but that would not mean I should stop traveling myself. But all this is not up to me; it is up to the Lord’s mercy.

ALL FIVE PILLARS ARE CRUCIAL

On the one hand, we can see the necessity of all five pillars. If a congregation feels self-sufficient, something is wrong! In the church life, we can never do without the workers. The workers support, establish and strengthen the Lord's testimony. On the other hand, the workers cannot replace the local saints. In the church life you need very sweet elders, good sweet sisters and very good sweet ministering brothers. If a church is short of any of these three, it lacks in that area of beauty.

APPHIA IS CRUCIAL AND YET DIFFICULT TO GAIN

While it is easy to find sweet Philemons, it seems less easy to find good Apphias. Asteenagers, girls become moody until they get married and have children. Then they experience the challenge of motherhood (1 Timothy 2:15). No man experiences such trial! And, once women reach a certain age, they confront menopause, which oppresses them psychologically. (In China during the Cultural Revolution you never heard of such a thing, for the women were too busy laboring for their survival. More attention is paid to it in more wealthy countries, where, like adolescence, it can be afforded.) Due to these reasons, it is much more difficult for the Lord to gain an Apphia than a Philemon. Yet how much a local church misses if Apphia is absent! The Apphias are those who know how to support the apostles and leading ones.

TIMOTHY IS CRUCIAL AND YET DIFFICULT TO GAIN

What a sad thing it would have been if Timothy had refused to grow and operate when Paul was unable to minister and travel. Then the whole structure might have collapsed and become unhealthy.

American young men are illogical, unreasonable, naïve and impossible to work with. Therefore I warn them to be careful. But I do see some who have grown and have some ministering ability and some insight. I see how they are raising up others. This grants me a certain kind of peace. They are the Timothys and the Archippuses who will be able to carry something of the Lord's testimony.

ONESIMUS IS THE REASON FOR THE FIVE PILLARS' LABOR

What occupies the center of this "circle" of the church life? Onesimus! Every saint is a slave who has been redeemed. We all were slaves to sinful human nature. We all were held in slavery, but we all have come home! Therefore anyone with spiritual insight will have no unrealistic expectations towards anyone in the church life, for we all are simply Onesimuses. Each is "profitable," and yet each has grown up a slave.

For instance, I thought musicians were a particular angelic breed because of their dedication to their instruments. I found out, however, that musicians also are human beings. Even the best and most disciplined and most faithful among us are Onesimus. I warn brothers about “making up” a show to impress girls, but I still see the pretense. All of a sudden, in the presence of sisters, they suddenly become taller! (Brothers, do not practice such a thing around a sister when you are dating. If you love each other, you should just love each other in purity.)

Some brothers in the church life are so good, but they are Onesimus. Some are terrible, yet they are also Onesimus. Actually, there is no “good” Onesimus and no “bad” Onesimus. Onesimus is Onesimus, which means “profitable” or “useful”! The church life is composed of Onesimus, so everyone in the church life is a problem, and yet everyone in the church life is very profitable! That is the book of Philemon. The center of this book is Onesimus. All the five pillars are for Onesimus.

PHILEMON IS CRUCIAL, YET HE NEEDS APPHIA

For all these Onesimus you need Philemon, who leads. How does he lead? He leads with affectionate love for the saints infused with the divine element. Philemon’s name is derived from the Greek word for affectionate love. Yet Paul referred to him as our “beloved” and fellow worker, using an adjective from the word for divine love (agape). Paul thus said, “You are filled with the human virtue of human love, but you also exercise towards me in the divine love. You are a godly person, not a fleshly person. You love the saints in the church life with human affection, yet also with the divine element.

Sometimes we overemphasize human affection. Other times we overemphasize the divine element. Philemon has both. He is a man of love that is human yet constituted with the divine element. May we appreciate that?

Who is it that stands with Philemon? It is Apphia, a sister. Paul says of Apphia that her love augments Philemon’s so that the love and faith they both have is fellowshiped among the local churches (v. 6)! Their faith is a faith of fellowship. It is neither their faith alone nor experienced in their local church alone; it is a faith and love fellowshiped among many local churches (v. 5). This strong faith is a faith of fellowship! It is a matter of the saints and the churches exercising faith together in love. This is possible because of the faith and love that both Philemon and Apphia have. Apphia is needed to be such a supporting element to Philemon’s exercise in the church life. One leads in love and rich affection, and one is so supportive and productive in practical matters and fruitful in matters of life. (Apphia means increasing or fruitful.) To be a good Apphia, labor! Do not be stumbled by those things that are common to all women.

APPHIA'S LABORS ARE OFTEN PRACTICAL

Such a sister knows how to help the saints grow, and she also knows how to coordinate. A good number of sisters coordinate together to make our dinner here possible, which frees us to enjoy the meetings. I don't know how they are able to handle it, for the number here is over one hundred. Yet they have that ability, and they also know how to work with others so that they might learn also. If you want the church life to be healthy, you must learn to be very practical. If there are such sisters in the church life, not only will practical things get done, but life will also be produced. There will be fruitfulness in the church life!

ARCHIPPUS IS CRUCIAL AND YET MUST BE TRAINED

In addition to Philemon and Apphia, the church life also needs the pillar, Archippus. There should be a group of brothers who are able to minister the divine Word to the saints. Through the development of their ministry they release the riches through their speaking and help the saints to grow.

It may be that Archippus and Philemon are found in the same person, for when you have a good Philemon, he will likely also be a good Archippus. But if that is all there is, that is not so healthy. There should be a number in the church life who function as Archippus. There should be a group of such brothers in the church life who have a ministry, something from God, which they want to share with the saints.

An Archippus doesn't just spring up out of nowhere, however. He needs to be developed. Therefore many need to be before the Lord, telling Him, "I want to be an Archippus!" It may require that you give up your time to be trained. There is nothing to be scared about in that! Many times people worry about something that they don't even know why they worry about it. Only by paying a price can your ministry develop. Paul exhorts Archippus to fulfill the ministry he has received from the Lord (Col. 4:17). The Lord has paid the price, so we should also be able to pay the price.

ALL THE PILLARS REQUIRE PERFECTING, BUT ONCE PERFECTED THEY BECOME A BLESSING WHEREVER THEY MEET IN THE BODY

For whatever reason, Jesus came and paid the highest price, but few follow Him. In the church life, there must be some, such as Philemon and Apphia and Archippus, who allow the Lord to perfect them so that what they have can be developed. May many more in the churches tell the Lord, "Perfect me that I might become a real blessing to the local church life where I am." The Lord needs so many more pillars in the churches!

After passing through the recent storm, some feel they can no longer take the way of the local church. I tell them, "Find a group, join them, and become a good brother. With your riches, before long you will find a place you can supply what you have received from us." I cannot do such a thing, for I am confined by what I have seen of the truth. I cannot leave Christ and the local churches. But if others do not feel as I do, they should feel free. I do not say they should begin a new division, but they might join some group that already exists and minister Christ there. I feel sympathetic to these brothers in light of all we have been through. If I had not been in the Lord all these many years, I might have reacted in a very fleshly manner. But I did not. To argue is to bite back at the religious dog that bites you. Does that not make me another dog? I have the assurance that those who have been in the church life properly for a number of years possess a certain amount of riches that they themselves may not fully appreciate.

Too many places lack a sufficient number who can minister as "Archippuses." The door is so open, and in so many places the Lord is doing so much, but we have not raised up enough Archippuses to meet the need. If a locality can raise up a number who are able to function as Archippus, these brothers might become a blessing to many localities.

THE APOSTLES AND THOSE WHO SERVE WITH THEM SERVE THE CHURCHES AND PROVIDE THEIR FOUNDATION

This is the church life. What lies at the bottom, underneath, as a base? It is the apostles. Some may think of Paul and Timothy as being over everything, but actually they are at the bottom. Servants are servants; they are always on the bottom. Anyone can abuse them or give them a hard time. They do not know what it is to call a day their own. At midnight, if a phone call comes, they have no choice but to respond. I once received a call: "Brother, please come with your wife and pick me up. I am leaving my husband." When we arrived, I realized that I had to continue knocking even though I knew the husband was blocking the door, trying to wait me out. Eventually I told him he had to come as well, which he gladly agreed to do. The wife then realized it would be just as well for them to remain at home.

No other life is as meaningful as this life, even though it means that others take advantage of you continually. The servants of the Lord pay a great price, even in the time they spend with their own families. They live very simply. In some places, due to the devilish movement, the number of saints dropped drastically. How was the brother who served them cared for? Yet he survived.

If you have in the church life a very good Philemon and Apphia and Archippus, along with all the Onesimus, and nothing else, then something is lacking. You need a strong base. The firmer the base, the healthier the church life. Some places

do not even have a Philemon, Apphia or Archippus, but only a bunch of Onesimus arguing together, and they call that the church! Every local church must answer to Christ, and every local church must respond to the leading of Christ. Yet the stronger and higher the upholding pillar is, that is, the higher and more heavenly the visions the apostle possesses, the more the church will be blessed, even though they who serve are at the bottom.

THOSE WHO SERVE WITH APOSTLES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

And at the bottom, we see more full-timers added in with Paul and Timothy at the conclusion of Philemon. There is Epaphras and Mark and Aristarchus and Demas and Luke. (There is always one who goes astray. In this case it is Demas. Therefore we should not expect the work to be perfect.) The names of all these servants of the Lord are significant. Epaphras means "I give you love and life." Mark means "I build a fence around you for your protection." Aristarchus' name has to do with being a guide to lead. Demas means "popular" (so brothers, if you as a full-timer become too popular, you become a Demas. Those who serve should accept the fact that in their service they will not gain popularity) and Luke means "shining luminary" as one shining forth the glory of Christ. The order is meaningful, as we shall see later. These all, together with Paul and Timothy, form the base.

Do you see the picture now? If you want to be healthy and grow properly, you must have a place to practice your church life. No Christian, however, grows well away from those who are pillars. As you practice your local church life, there should be Philemon(s), Apphia(s) (though it is difficult to gain such "fruitful, productive" sisters), and Archippus(es). But such a place has upgirding it many who have labored, such as Mark, who few know how to appreciate. I appreciate Mark in particular for his genuineness, writing about how he ran away naked when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:52). He failed in the face of the rigors of the first journey of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37-39) yet he never gave up. Eventually Paul said he was profitable to him in his work (2 Tim. 4:11) and Peter called him his son (1 Pet. 5:13). He was Barnabas' nephew (Col. 4:10), so Mark ended up being close to all three.

When we study all these people "on the bottom" in Philemon, we will be surprised. They are not as great as we want them to be. They all have limitations, yet they all say, "Let us uphold the testimony; let us uphold the churches." Do you see the preciousness of this? I believe this picture of the church in Colossae and all those serving to uphold it, has become more clear to us. May the Lord have mercy.

Vision Week

Message Six:

The Signs of Apostleship

THE NECESSITY OF THE FIVE PILLARS

I hope we all might recognize the importance of the five “pillars” represented by Paul, Timothy, Philemon, Apphia and Archippus for a healthy church life! Even so, it is hard to find a church that possesses all five.

THOSE IN THE WORK ARE OFTEN UNDERUSED BY THE CHURCHES

Of all these “pillars,” probably those that are most misapplied or underused are the workers, represented by Paul and Timothy. Many churches feel as though they need no help from the work, while others feel the work should do everything for them. The coworkers provide support for the churches as a base underneath. Therefore the going on the churches does have so much to do with the work that supports them. And every worker has a particular portion that all the churches should endeavor to benefit from.

I am so concerned for the places where the elders labor so much, and yet ignore the benefit the workers are able to provide. For a church to be most healthy, it must have the presence of all five pillars, of which only three are within while two are without.

FEW LOCALITIES EXPERIENCE THE BENEFIT OF ALL THE PILLARS

A church may have very good leading ones, but no serving sisters. Or it may have a number of strong sisters, but their strength dominates the brothers. Or there may be a group of young ones who do a lot, yet the sisters or leading brothers are not able to match them. Or it may be that the serving sisters, young ministering brothers and older leading ones are present, and yet the church is not in fellowship with the workers. Or it may be that the presence of workers in a locality replaces the proper function of the leading ones and others. None of these situations are healthy. We need to see the crucialness of divine enrichment!

ONESIMUS, REPRESENTING ALL THE SAINTS, IS THE FOCUS OF ALL THE PILLARS

Yet out of all of the people mentioned in the book of Philemon, the one who is the highest is Onesimus, for he represents all the chosen saints whom the Lord has redeemed. Therefore every saint has the right to make mistakes, give headaches, and upend our schedules.

THE SIGNS OF APOSTLESHIP

How does one know whether someone is an apostle? It has to do with how he is related to the Lord, how he is related to the church, and how he handles himself.

TO THE LORD: HE ACKNOWLEDGES THE LORD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN ALL THINGS

In his relationship with the Lord, he should be experiencing more and more visions and revelations. He needs to know the Lord's sovereignty. And he needs to acknowledge that he is the Lord's servant, and that his entire life is committed to the Lord's service. The Lord's service must imprison him. To serve the Lord is to surrender your freedom. You will no longer be able to develop what you want. Of course, the Lord is not stingy. You can still pursue certain things, but only as allowed by the Lord. Whenever He requires it, we must be ready to spend our time and whatever resources we have in His service. We must be ready to go where He asks us to go and do what He asks us to do. When there is a need, we are the ones who must respond. This is what it means to be the Lord's prisoner and His servant.

A prisoner has no right to choose his food or lodging. He cannot declare he will eat nothing but chicken. What he is given, he takes. Whatever room is chosen for him, he abides in. In a prison, they do usually allow some time to get out and walk around the yard a little bit, to read, and to play some instrument, perhaps. No one can claim that they need Christ for every breath they take. If that were true, we all would have passed away by now! The Lord is very gracious. He allows us to live comfortably and joyfully, and even grants us things that bring us much satisfaction. We need to be reminded, however, that we are not entitled to such things, but they are granted to us while we live under His strong confinement.

Many times as I have traveled to places I have had to eat food I was not accustomed to and sleep in ways that did not always provide me the best rest. Even when there was no way I could sleep adequately, I could not just ask those who invited me for another bed! Why? You are a prisoner. If you are asked to go many miles to visit someone, you go, even if the way is rough and you are tired. You have no right to decline. Of course, you are an honored prisoner, and everyone does their best according to their means to honor you as you serve.

In writing Philemon, Paul referred to himself as a prisoner. He chose to surrender all his rights so that he might fully serve the Lord. He set himself to be bound to however the Lord led him. This may sound glorious, but it means that there will be days when nothing seems to happen at all. No one may invite you, or even notice you. Watchman Nee wrote in his hymn, "Live Thyself Lord Jesus Through Me," that he was "waiting Thy command; underneath the yoke to labor or be laid aside as planned" (Hymns #403). During all those years in prison, Paul was lonely. He had been forsaken by many he had raised up, even by entire localities. Many who were dear to him abandoned him. Yet even in these circumstances he could say, "As one who is Your prisoner, I bow to Your sovereignty."

TO THE CHURCH:
His LABOR IS TO PRESENT EVERY SAINT FULL-GROWN IN CHRIST

Paul's goal was to present every man full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:28). It was not to give a message in every place, but to minister in every congregation. In every church the center is "every person." It was in this context that Paul wrote that he fulfilled, or completed, the word of God (1:25). What he wrote was exactly what he experienced. Initially, he studied the word and labored upon it, but eventually it became him. In principle, this is true for every minister of the word.

Paul was also raising up other apostles through his labor. He was able to call Timothy "my true child in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). He also was able to refer to Onesimus, saved while he was in prison, as "my child" (Philm. 10).

It means much more to be someone's child than to merely be endorsed by someone. But some groups will accept someone based on a certain person's endorsement; it opens the door to congregations that are particularly aligned. That is why some seek the endorsement of certain people. Some congregations even ask that you recognize them before they agree to allow you to share something. It seems that Christ is not the one they are after, but themselves.

Paul's feeling was that whoever he had helped to love the Lord, wherever they were, was his child. Therefore he struggled to raise them all up. And this is the hardest job, to raise up a child.

Whether a physical child or a spiritual child, the principle is the same when it comes to raising them up. (In the United States, this is "mission impossible" and if it turns out well, you can only claim that it was God's mercy! You have to make sure your child is saved, loves the Lord, pursues in a healthy way, is with proper companions, and becomes someone who is accomplished and yet not proud. To do this as a parent, you have to win the trust of the child. In the United States this is more difficult because young ones here are taught to despise older ones. That means they will somewhat always be thinking you don't know what you are talking about!)

Therefore if you want to know who is a true servant of the Lord, ask whether or not he has, or is, raising up spiritual children! Because of his labor, certain ones should have benefited and been raised up.

TO HIMSELF:
ABLE TO COMMEND HIMSELF TO THE CONSCiences OF OTHERS

As regards to themselves, they have to be able to commend themselves to the consciences of those they seek to serve (2 Cor. 4:2). An apostle cannot simply command people and expect them to respond because he claims to have God's authority! To the Corinthians Paul gave a long list of things that should have commended him to them. Besides being beaten and undergoing shipwreck, he had been "in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils of the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brothers" (2 Cor. 11:26). To the Thessalonians he could write, "We worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you" (2 Thes. 3:8; see also 1 Thes. 2:9; 1 Cor. 4:12; Acts 20:34). Paul and those with him commended themselves to the consciences of the saints in every way. In 2 Corinthians 6 he wrote:

We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things (vv. 3-10).

Are you ready? If you wish to truly serve the Lord, you will experience tribulation. A useful servant of the Lord will display himself by commanding himself to the consciences of others in this way.

The servants of the Lord live the most "romantic" lives. Anyone who reads Paul's account of his apostleship in 2 Corinthians will see that this is true. After I read these verses, I desired this life. I wanted to experience such glory and dishonor. All who serve the Lord as His servants will experience such things as Paul did. They will experience having good and evil said of them, even when neither is true! They will be seen as being false, even though they are true. They will be held in honor and they will be reviled. But God is our employer. He is the One we must please. Sometimes we will feel as though we are dying, yet we will live. There will be times when we feel we are finished. We will confront impossible situations and impossible people. And

yet we will find we are upheld by God, and that we still live! We will be made sorrowful, yet still be able to rejoice. We will experience poverty, and yet through our poverty many will be made rich, spiritually speaking. We will seem to have nothing, yet we will have everything in God. Is this the life you want? I told the Lord, "I want this kind of life. I do not want to live a life of going to a 9 to 5 job. I don't want to do something that doesn't produce anything eternal. I don't want to waste my life or the lives of others. I want to live this kind of life that Paul experienced!"

TIMOTHY,
WHO CLOSELY FOLLOWED PAUL'S TEACHING AND MANNER OF LIFE

Then how about Timothy? Timothy was Paul's intimate coworker. Paul referred to him as "the brother," as though he was a particular Timothy among others known to them. He was someone who faithfully followed Paul's teaching and manner of life (2 Tim. 3:10). Paul had a special relationship with Timothy. He learned from Paul and also became an apostle who ministered among the churches.

Some may ask, "How could he have been an apostle if he didn't write anything in the Bible?" (In fact, you cannot find one word of his in the Bible!) Only a few apostles actually wrote anything that came to be included in the Bible. This does not mean Timothy was not a great apostle. God used him in his relationship with the apostle John to develop something very great! The apostle John was at Ephesus when he wrote the final books of the Bible, and Timothy must have been there as well. Thus that relationship concluded the Bible with life and revelation. As one who followed Paul in his teaching and manner of life, surely Timothy became a man of life himself.

Every servant of the Lord needs to pay attention to the aspects of teaching and manner of life. If you claim to have received revelation, your life should match it. You shouldn't think you can just spend some time googling a topic and then have a message.

ON RECEIVING MINISTRIES

I caution everyone in handling the computer, for so much evil comes from that devilish box. Besides the things that are clearly of Satan, there is also the lure of Christian ministries. Some may think we need to open up to certain ministries, but we must be clear of what is profitable for our local church and what is not. We are not narrow, but we are responsible for what will be of profit to the saints and the Lord's testimony! We cannot allow the church to become a garbage can. There are many things out there that may not be compatible with other things we already possess, while they may seem fine in themselves. I am offered many different things to drink for my health in the morning, but sometimes some of them "fight" with what I have already taken. Yet if I do not take a certain drink, the saint who offered it out of a good heart and expected me to drink it might be offended! Still, I have to take care of my

own situation, as I know it best. It is the same in the church life. The job of the elders is not easy!

TIMOTHY'S SIGNIFICANCE: HONORING GOD AND WHAT GOD HAD WROUGHT IN PAUL

Timothy faithfully followed Paul in his teaching and manner of living, and he himself functioned as an apostle. His name literally means "honor God," and he was someone who honored God as he honored Paul. We have no record of anything Timothy said, but he appears in the Bible as someone very close to Paul. As such a one who honored Paul, however, he did not follow blindly. His name means he honored God, and the fact that we do not see his voice stand out over Paul's points to the fact that he stood with Paul and that they honored God together. Everything Paul did, God honored; and Timothy honored God and what God had done in Paul.

Therefore, young ones, do not ask whether something is right or wrong. Ask instead, "Is this honoring God?" Otherwise, you become opinionated.

TRUST THOSE AHEAD OF YOU AND HONOR THEM AS THOSE GOD HAS PLACED

As one who knew how to honor what God was doing, Timothy became a very good pattern to all those who serve the Lord. His relationship to Paul provides us a valuable example. It indicates that, first of all, we should trust those we serve with. This does not mean we must trust every decision, but we should trust their being. Those ahead of us may do some things that bother us, but that should not cause us to no longer honor them. (On the other hand, if we are able to stay with someone that we have lost our trust in, that probably means we have become political, like Demas.) When you are really following the Lord together with the others in the work, you learn to trust those ahead of you mainly because of their commitment, labor, consecration and spiritual exercise—not because they are always right.

When a brother who is leading in the work makes a mistake, that is for the learning of those who serve with him. I followed Brother Lee's lead for 43 years, perhaps longer than anyone else in this country. He did make some decisions that I knew were "wrong," but I was there. A "wrong" decision can have a context that may not be understood by anyone else. There are so many other things, however, that I learned from Brother Lee, such as how to care for the profit of the saints above all else. I allowed nothing to lessen my trust towards him, for the Lord had gained much in this man.

We may want a perfect man to follow, but the only such person is Jesus. If you look close enough, you will find flaws with every human being, no matter how spiritual they may seem. Learn to trust, and realize that with those God has placed ahead of you, there are riches. Then accept their lead. Accept their help. Accept their

arrangement and dispatching, realizing what they do is for the sake of God's testimony.

One very experienced brother who was a leader in the work in Taiwan once said, "When I play chess, the pieces refuse to move, and when they do finally agree to move, the board resists!" In other words, if I were to ask a brother to move to a certain city he might reply, "No, I can't." This is "the piece" refusing to move. But if he finally agrees to move, the elders in that place may say, "We don't want him!" The "board" speaks out against my attempt to move the piece! There is no way the Lord can work in such a situation.

THE CHURCHES SHOULD STAND WITH THE WORK AS THE WORKERS STAND WITH THEM

A coworker has to learn to be in the work, and a church has to learn to stand with the work just as the coworkers stand with the church. The workers only concern is the profit of the church. The workers must trust that the leaders have an overall view as to who should be where and which situation is best for what and whom.

TIMOTHY WAS ALSO HONORED BY GOD AS ONE WHO HONORED HIM

Timothy's following after God and seeking to honor Him meant he became someone honored *by* God. His spirit was clear and radiant in the process of following the Lord. He exercised much boldness in following the Lord, for his name was "honor God."

TO HONOR GOD AS TIMOTHY DID IS NOT AN EASY THING FOR AMERICANS

It is very difficult for an American to be a Timothy. The entire matter goes against American culture. It is, however, biblical culture. (Biblical culture actually has two sides. One is being free and equal in Christ, which has really infused Western culture. All human beings are precious to God, and all have rights before God. God loves the entire world! But on the other side is something quite strict, and that is the matter of honoring God's arrangement in who He has placed ahead of us. This aspect more closely matches Eastern culture.) Americans typically are short of real, genuine vision and live instead in a spiritual fantasy world. They get stirred up easily, but they typically are unable to make what is real theirs. Why? Because they do not know how to pay a price to dive under the surface at what lies underneath. In the church life, young people may enjoy a conference and get stirred up, but they do not know how to appreciate or investigate what lies underneath it all. They are content with what is on the surface.

Secondly, Americans are unable to accept whatever circumstances are measured to them by the Lord in His effort to help them grow. Instead, they cry and moan, "Why me?" My response is, "Why not you?" "Bad" things happen to every-

one, so what qualifies you to be exempt? Everything that happens to us is measured to us by God. This includes the older ones that care for us. Do you know how to honor them? Those you know how to honor are those that will be held accountable for you by God. (How can they help someone that doesn't even honor them? If a person doesn't know how to honor those God has given to him to be his covering and help, those given to be his help will not be held accountable for his lack of growth!)

THOSE GOD GIVES YOU TO HONOR MAY NOT APPEAR SO MANIFEST

To honor someone means to entrust your being to that person. My labor, operation, growth and development are all tied to those I have entrusted myself to. They hold me, and God holds them responsible. Over the years, I have not had many brothers in my life to whom I could say, "I hold you responsible." However, I believe many among us are willing to work with you intimately for your going on. If they are so with you, you must learn to trust them. Their riches may not stand out at first glance, but the Lord has given you a brother with some riches, regardless! Trust them in their riches. Disposition divides people, so appreciate the riches they possess rather than their disposition. Many times I have been with brothers of a very different disposition, and I would not be honest if I said their disposition did not bother me, but I loved them regardless, and trusted them for the riches the Lord had given to them.

HONORING THOSE GOD GIVES US KEEPS US IN HIS WAY

When people focus on who is right or who is wrong, they become divided. But when we are in the way of honoring the leading of those God has placed ahead of us, we are kept. The ways they operate may be different. One may say, "Go to a certain place," another may ask, "Would you please consider before the Lord and pray about going to a certain place?" and yet another may say, "Could you fellowship with the brothers whether you should go to a certain place?" Different people do things in different ways. As an old man, I now beg, "Would you please consider going to a certain place?" That is my current disposition; when I was younger my manner might have been quite different!

BEING IMPURE CAUSES US TO BECOME GUARDED RATHER THAN RECEIVING

We are short of simplicity and purity towards the Lord, and our hearts are easily corrupted. Firstly, our hearts are not pure, so we do not desire the Lord as the unique One in our lives. We desire the Lord plus something else. We do not live solely for the benefit of the Lord and His church. Then, our hearts go astray and become zealous, ambitious, narrow, selfish and guarded. Eventually we come to a place where we seek only to protect ourselves! Human beings are very interesting. In the world, they are ambitious to make a fortune. In the church life, they are ambitious to become famous. The Lord may allow you to use some gift for Him, but if you insist upon it, that means you are ambitious.

The Bible says we should be ambitious to please the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9), but sometimes we become narrow and selfish. A servant of the Lord can become guarded and very protective of himself, which is to be selfish. We may become only concerned with ourselves: what we have gained, what our spiritual future looks like, or how useful we have become. Brothers, if you want to serve the Lord full-time, you will gain nothing but Christ. You will have no future other than Christ. You will never be able to claim a measure of usefulness that seems to merit your abilities when compared to what is seen in other Christian groups. If you were in a "mega-church" you might preach to tens of thousands, but here there are only a few "chickens." So many spiritual riches have been placed in our hands, yet the Lord says, "It is preferable to Me that you suffer limitations."

Some will take what the Lord has given them and with the perfecting and training they have received try to develop some work. They may gain a congregation and some followers, but spiritually their growth becomes halted. You do not know how much sorrow I have when I see a coworker caught by ambition, trying to use the riches he has received from us to some other end. I hope that will not happen to any of us. I hope you would always be able to say, "Lord, what you give to me must be used to the best of Your interest and not for my attainment."

MAY THE LORD GAIN TIMOTHYS AMONG EVEN WE AMERICANS

Generally speaking, Americans cannot bear hardship or discipline, and this life is hard. It is a life under discipline. Even so, may we ask the Lord to make us Timothys? While you are still young, learn to work with others as a team to advance the Lord's interest!

Vision Week

Message Seven:

Philemon, A Loving and Beloved Leader

EVERY GATHERING OF SAINTS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE BODY'S GROWTH

The idea that the apostle and those with him and the saints are in some kind of hierarchical arrangement is not a proper one, but if anyone has anything from Christ, we must learn to honor that. On the other hand, whenever **any** two or three gather into the Lord's name, the Lord is in their midst (Matt. 18:20). T. A-Sparks said that every such gathering becomes the increase of Christ's Body. How crucial, then, is it whenever Christians gather together! Since this is the case, how significant it is when any believers are gathered together into Christ's name! Perhaps outside our gathering there may be two brothers gathered to read the Bible in some home nearby. That is causing the increase of the Body of Christ! How crucial that is! Even every small gathering produces more growth of the Body. Can't they say, "Hallelujah, we have found it!"? They might if they enjoy being together, find themselves seeing something together, and seek to bear the testimony of Christ where they live. Our coming together should produce the testimony of Christ in the localities in which we live.

The more we see, the more we go on. This does not mean other Christians who have not seen as much as we have are irrelevant. We honor them as fellow believers. If there appears to be no Christ in their midst, you must sigh inwardly and hope that perhaps someone might soon gain an ounce of Christ, at least!

I visited a denomination once and did not hear one mention of Christ during the entire sermon! I wish, however, that I had stayed for the church dinner afterward. Perhaps I could have met someone who was just as burdened as I was, that in our fellowship there may have been an increase in the Body.

We have seen something further, so we gather to bear the Lord's testimony in our localities, but that does not mean those who are not meeting with us are irrelevant or of no value! If there is absolutely no Christ when Christians gather together, then you trust that some might sense the need for Christ and gather to pray and fellowship, for whenever such a thing happens, Christ is increased.

PUT YOURSELF UNDER A PAUL

Although Paul was indeed a very great apostle, we all can still benefit from brothers who may function as Paul (even though perhaps a hundred of them could not add up to him). We all have our Pauls. There are also "Paulas" and "Paulines" we can go to and fellowship with in the church life.

When you are young, if you know how to put yourself under someone until the Lord arranges something different for you, that will be to your blessing. You will learn a lot by being with "Mr. Nobody"! The brother who helped me so much when I was young was not a brother who could give a message. Even so, I benefited so much from being with him. If I had thought, "You are poor and do not know the Bible as well as you should," I would have been finished. It was the Lord's mercy I was with that brother, and I honored that as the Lord's arrangement. There was not one bit of despising in me towards him. We honored each other and operated quite well together and eventually I became a leading brother in a certain place. I still honored that brother and remained under him as the one ahead of me who took care of me. To this day I feel I owe him so much and honor him.

Learn to put yourself under someone. If you can do that, that becomes your blessing. No matter how much you think you now have, for your continued growth you should always ask, "Where is my Paul?" You must have someone who can work with you who is beyond you.

American society says, "Be yourself!" This is also the Bible's teaching, but the Bible teaches us to be who we are in coordination with who others are. If you are a finger, be a finger! But don't be an isolated, dead finger! That is ugly, and such a finger is of no value. Be who you are and be willing to have someone who you can fully commit yourself to. You young ones should be able to say someone is your Paul. No one should be isolated, no one should be independent. The one who shepherds you may be very common, but you should trust him and be with him. As long as he stands for Christ, you should stand with him.

THE THIRD PILLAR: PHILEMON

Philemon is the third pillar. He was called a co-worker by Paul. Being a coworker is not a matter that gives a person some kind of status. He may live a very simple life. Appreciate the life of a full-timer, for such a person is possessed with Christ's interests. Due to this, he should be able to grow spiritually more quickly.

Philemon was a wealthy man, but even in the midst of his responsibilities, his heart was for the Lord and he cared for the interest of the Lord. Thus blessing came to Colossae through him. Paul called him beloved, indicating he was full of the divine element of love. Philemon's love radiated the divine element. In our love in the church life there should be a **radiancy** of something divine. The intimate love Philemon radiated in the midst of the church was full of the divine element.

This is the significance of Philemon's name and Paul's word concerning him. Our relationship in the church life with the apostles should be so much in love, but that love should be of the divine element and not just human affection. Younger saints should respect and love the older ones, and older ones should love the young ones, but in the midst of our human affection there must be something divine. You should sense that the love in the church life is in Christ. Remember, gangsters love each other too! We, however, are bound together by Christ. No matter how affectionate we are to each other, the divine element must always be present. We may have common interests, but they should not be the basis of our relationship in the church life. We should be together for Christ, not something social! The basis of our love must be something divine, pure and heavenly.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH IN PHILEMON'S HOME

Philemon's house was the meeting place of the church in Colossae and in verse 2 Paul greeted the church "in your home." The word "in" is *kata*, which points to a close connection, that is, the church "corresponding to your home." In other words, he and his wife and son were so spiritual, and the church was likewise. This implies that the term "house" may mean something beyond the physical place. F.B. Meyer has it as, "I write this only to those who are knowing you in your house." I believe Meyer is wrong, unless it meant the entire church in Colossae, who happened to meet in their house, was that spiritual!

The four references to the church meeting in a house in the New Testament (Philm. 1:2; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15), and they all use *kata* instead of *en*, the more common word translated *in* and the word used for church-city references such as "the church *in* Ephesus." Thus there must be a difference. This matter is important because it relates directly to our stand. If it means the church only refers to those in that house rather than those in the city, that is one thing. If it means all the saints in the church correspond to that household, that would be compatible with our understanding that the locality is the unique ground for the testimony of the oneness of the church as the Body of Christ. In one locality there is only one church, one testimony, regardless of where or how they meet, whether in a home or a hall or wherever. That is the local testimony of the Lord in that locality.

PHILEMON RAISED UP HIS FAMILY TO LIVE FOR CHRIST AND HIS TESTIMONY

If you do not know how to take care of your home, you cannot take care of the church well as an elder. We cannot say every one of your children must love the Lord as you do. If anyone loves the Lord, it is the Lord's mercy. But your children should appreciate your service to the Lord. I never understood Paul's word that if you cannot take care of your house, you cannot be a good elder until I saw a brother who labored so much yet never talked to his wife. He was able to raise up the church, but not able to take care of his wife. (Taking care of your wife does not mean necessarily that your wife behaves well! The husband is not God!) It means you have a way to work. Later I found that that congregation could go one way and then quickly go

another direction. If you do not know how to take care of your family, it is hard for you to be healthy.

Philemon took care of his son, and eventually could take care of the church so well. If you want to serve the Lord, serve your kids, serve your spouse. As a young person, if you want to serve the Lord, serve your parents. Honor them with your affection and in your attitude. If you don't know how to honor your parents, you will never really know how to honor the Lord.

PHILEMON ALLOWED THE CHURCH TO COOPERATE WITH PAUL'S WORK

Philemon also had a broad heart. Not only did he accept Paul's ministry, but he willingly allowed the church to cooperate with Paul's work. In this way he became Paul's beloved coworker. His love also gave Paul encouragement and refreshed the saints. Whoever contacted Philemon contacted rest and became revitalized. This is especially a matter for leaders. The fact that many leaders have not become mental cases is all because of God's grace. Philemon says, "Whoever contacts me comes to rest and can be refreshed and revitalized." Working too hard has become a common sickness among us. Philemon knew the secret. He didn't react to situations by trying to fight back. He became instead very restful and remained in the Lord's anointing. We need to be charged and fight for the Lord's interest, but that shouldn't result in our being pressured! Who can survive such pressure? Paul fought to present every man full-grown. Outwardly that appears very difficult, for you are doing something as God!

PHILEMON WORKED WITH THE SAINTS ACCORDING TO WHO THEY WERE AND BROUGHT IN RESTFULNESS

Some go to Buffalo to learn, some go to bless the church. The elders are granted all kinds of headaches. But Philemon found the secret. He looked upon the saints' hearts and saw what was positive of the Lord in them to develop. When considering the situation of the saints, the elders may lose their restfulness. The elders *should* care about the saints and their situation, but Philemon found the secret: in the church life, everyone should be REFRESHED! The church life should be filled with restfulness.

I have served the young people since I was young, generation after generation. I always wonder when I see them, "Will they last?" But we trust in the Lord for each one. Everyone can love the Lord, follow Christ and continue the journey of their life with Christ because He is merciful. A good church fights and zealously raises up the saints, but at the same time it is restful.

PHILEMON RECOGNIZED HIS INDEBTEDNESS TO PAUL

Philemon also gladly ministered to Paul when he was in his bonds and received Paul without reservation. He felt indebted to Paul because Paul had ministered to him richly. Most of those who have helped me have gone on to be with the Lord. One brother, however, is still alive. Because of what I owe him, I still visit him and receive from him. To be indebted to someone and to recognize that fact is a great thing. First of all, you should recognize your indebtedness to your parents! Then, you should acknowledge your debt to those who are helping you or have helped you to grow, and to those who give you truth and elevate your existence. Don't say, "I only owe Jesus Christ!" Where is your humanity if this is your attitude? Honor those who have been your source for knowing and loving the Lord.

Americans are not an appreciative people. They say of their teachers, "That is what they are paid for." If someone does them a favor, they dismissively say, "He just did that because that's the way he is." No. You should sense there exists a burden of indebtedness that you can never really repay. You owe those who help you with revelation, but you really owe the most to those who shepherd you. For your entire life, never cease recognizing and acknowledging that you are a debtor. In verse 19 Paul could say to Philemon "you are indebted to me for your very soul" and Philemon acknowledged that. That is why he was happy to prepare a place for Paul to stay. He had the deep sensation that he owed those who ministered life and salvation to him. If you are this kind of person, your living will be different from others. If you have received anything from anyone, you should sense your indebtedness to that one.

PHILEMON WAS EXCEEDINGLY GENUINE WITH PAUL

Philemon was exceedingly genuine with Paul, not merely polite. That is a secret to working with your coworkers. You should be willing to open up your situation and the situation of those you need help with. Paul also wrote, "I am confident of your obedience...knowing you will do even above what I ask" (v. 21). Paul could say this because he had such a straightforward and sweet fellowship with Philemon over many years.

PAUL'S COMING WAS THE COMING OF GRACE TO PHILEMON

Paul could say that when he came, grace would come. Consider the weight of that. When he would come, grace would come. How bold was Paul! We should always be happy when such a brother is able and willing to come to us. Philemon should have had this feeling when he received this letter. He would have known Paul's coming was as one graciously given to him. (I don't know how many servants of the Lord could write in this way to a place or person.) A local church could be in trouble if an apostle does not feel so free with them to invite himself in this way. Your local health has much to do with this relationship. I love this kind of relationship. Be in restfulness, realize you are a debtor (knowing you have nothing and your dependence on the Lord's mercy), and hold your arms wide to those who are able to bless you.

Vision Week

Message Eight:

The Necessity of Apphia & Archippus

CONCERNING ELDERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Someone asked, "According to Titus 1:6, an elder should have believing and well-behaved children. If the children of an elder do not turn out well, how can we trust him with *our* development?" American young people face such intense peer pressure and the negative influence of popular culture regarding relationships, so if any worker's or elder's children are able to resist these things, they have done well, whether or not they end up pursuing Christ! Especially those who have seen how much the leading brothers have gone through, and how abused they have been, it becomes difficult for them to see through that. We are not God. We cannot say how anyone will eventually turn out. The Lord may indeed yet draw them in His mercy. Haven't we seen this with so many in the church life, and cannot many among us testify of this?

A servant of the Lord might have naughty kids. God is all-wise. You must trust the elders even if their children haven't turned out as desired, or if they are experiencing some issues with their wives. It is only because of the Lord's mercy that any of us can follow the Lord, for we all know how many times we would have stumbled or felt hopelessly disqualified, were it not for the Lord's mercy! Besides, God sees not as we see. What is intrinsic is much more crucial than what we can see outwardly. This is what Paul stresses in Philemon. Thus what a "good" result is differs from family to family, who all exist in different situations and in different times. One child easily gets A's in school, but another may find that difficult based on his make-up. Based on what shall we judge such things? If in America a father can raise up a child who possesses some decency, that should be seen as a success! As long as the elder's wife loves the Lord and loves her husband, we should be peaceful. If a child is struggling with something, love him more and grow more in his presence. A church life filled with divinity alone is not truly so divine, for divinity is expressed through humanity.

APPHIA:
SUPPORTING PHILEMON WITHOUT RESERVE

Apphia had extensive fellowship with Paul but she was hidden. This is the only place she is mentioned in the Bible. She supported Philemon without reserve, which itself is a marvel, for every woman sees a very different man after she marries him! It is better to see how flawed the man you marry is before you marry him, than afterwards! To be supportive of a husband is a great virtue for any sister. Sisters can lead and can even be apostles, but their basic role is to support. Even those who travel among the churches should be under the covering of more mature brothers.

All that Philemon developed could only be developed with Apphia. Behind every successful man is a woman! This proverb is popular, but how many realize what that means? Behind every operative brother there is a supporting sister. If the sister is not supportive, it doesn't matter how able the brother may be, he will not be able to do much. The traveling brothers absolutely need the support of their wives. If you can stand with your husband in his function and operations, that will really bring forth blessing.

As a leading brother, I would rather no sister would stand with me if they cannot fully operate. If a sister possesses a lot of seniority and yet is short of truth or light, her standing with me can really cause problems! Apphia knew how to stand with the brothers so that they were productive. How many churches have such households that can take in people and feed them and help them? Sisters shouldn't be concerned about how good or bad the food is that they prepare, for people respond more to the warmth of the setting than to the food. If you are warm and loving enough, they won't care!

THE OPERATION OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH LIFE IS CRUCIAL

Many mothers in the church life have the ability to help people turn to the Lord, bring others into the presence of God and help produce clarity of faith. But more than that, they can help other sisters serve together with them! We need sisters to form serving teams so that homes might be open every week for new ones to eat dinner and fellowship.

How many such households do we have in the church life? A sister may not even know at first how to cook what most people like to eat, but she can practice! If a church life possesses such households, it will be very fruitful. Only a church full of loving service produces the reality of the household of God.

Even young sisters can support in this way. They can make refreshments, stand with those who preach the gospel and help others grow in life. Some can help a person turn to the Lord. Apphias are also capable in leading others to serve in the church life.

Only a church full of loving service produces the reality of the house of God. We don't have many of such sisters; that is a real problem. Too often the brothers rule over the sisters to the point that they become almost zero in the church life. If in any local church some sisters rise up and begin to operate like Apphia, that church will become so blessed!

ENCOURAGING OUR CHILDREN TO FOLLOW THE LORD

Apphia was someone totally consecrated to the Lord in the church life. This is seen even in how her son, Archippus, served the Lord. Who would allow and even encourage their children to live such a life and truly give themselves to the Lord? We would, if we realized how vain even the greatest attainments in the world are when compared to the enterprises of the Lord. The world may not see it so, but their eyes have not been opened. So when those who have loved the Lord for years tell their kids not to give themselves to the Lord, it shows they have not seen what Apphia saw. (Only those who the world can use are qualified to be full-time, so strive to excel in your area of study!) Apphia encouraged her son to serve the Lord. Her stand was very precious. What is seen in Archippus reveals something of the absoluteness of Apphia's consecration, the extent of her child-rearing ability, and the riches or life supply shining in love.

ARCHIPPUS: LABORING TO RAISE UP THE SAINTS AS "WILD HORSES"

The centerpiece of the church life in Colossae to many is Philemon, but it was Archippus who Paul referred to as "my fellow soldier." Archippus lived to wage the heavenly warfare. He labored with Paul and Timothy to bring in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, which is the church life. (He referred to Philemon rather as his fellow laborer.) Who is the commanding officer in this army? It is Jesus. Archippus lived to please Christ, His commanding officer. Thus, as a good soldier, he could not afford to be entangled in the matters of the world (2 Tim. 2:4).

Archippus means "horse trainer." For this a person needs a good eye to see who is the leader among the horses. He also must have the skill to train these horses. After the seeker in the Song of Songs says, "Draw me," the Lord responds, "I liken you to a mare in Pharaoh's chariots" (Song of Songs 1:9). As soon as you determine to follow the Lord, you bring the world right in with you like a wild horse! If you do not decide to follow the Lord you produce no headaches, but once you follow Jesus, you perceive things from your worldly perspective and challenge the elders. How wild that is! The elders suffer so much, especially in America due to the wild American character. All the saints thus need to be tamed and trained.

This does not mean you force others to be who they can never be. Archippus is crucial because he understands the "horses." He knows their strengths and capabil-

ity. The saints' growth has so much to do with an Archippus who can perceive who they are and what they possess. The saints don't need someone to whip them and try to push them to be someone they are not, but to spend time with them to work with them according to who they are.

Archippus is not a young brother, but a brother with a ministry. He has the ability to train saints. As long as a "horse" is beside him, that horse will be trained. There are many kinds of horses. Some are very large and strong. Some possess great endurance. They are not all equal. All the saints are different. When the church is right, there will be brothers who can see you and know how to walk with you so that you become fully developed. We should desire that our talent be developed through a good Archippus. We may not know what our talent is, but we should desire that it be developed. The talents developed in the saints are all different; no two saints are the same. Yet the development of each has so much to do with someone seeing who they are!

Archippus was able to see the need of the church and the saints and develop things according to that. If the meeting is dead, for instance, he knows who to charge with making a difference. All the young people should ask the Lord to help them to develop by bringing them in contact with a good Archippus!

In the process, no two saints will turn out the same. All those who are perfected are unique.

ARCHIPPUS WAS CHARGED BY PAUL TO FULFILL HIS MINISTRY

Paul charged Archippus to fulfill, or complete, the ministry he had received in the Lord (Col 4:17). Archippus didn't despise himself. He had Christ, the Bible, the saints with him, and the church life. That was rich enough for him to operate to fulfill his ministry. He was someone who had the ability to work with the Holy Spirit to strengthen the testimony of the Lord. He did not despise what he had. Instead, he fought along with Paul and others to bring out what was in every saint. When Archippus is present, the church life is not dead!

Finally, Archippus was one heart with his parents. This produced something so healthy that made it possible for the entire church life to be healthy. This is seen in some localities, where the young people are so one with their parents in standing with their parents for the testimony of the local church. Can we bring this virtue back to our locality? All the local churches will be so blessed when this becomes true, when the children stand with their parents for the church life to be healthy and the Lord's testimony to be uplifted!

Vision Week

Message Nine:

A Beautiful Local Church Life

THE BALANCE IN THE FIVE PILLARS BETWEEN THE WORK AND THE LOCALITY

Many local churches are like Ephraim, the “unturned cake” (Hosea 7:8). They are either very local or they like to be run by someone *outside* their locality. I have never seen a local congregation in an isolated situation raised up well just as I have never seen a church do well that declares it has nothing and only relies upon the work. Both sides are required, and this is what makes the scene of the five pillars in Philemon so beautiful. Since this book is the conclusion of Paul’s writings to the saints in the churches it stands upon all of them; whatever is found in all his previous writings provides the backdrop to what is found in its twenty-five verses. Everything found in his previous writings should be found in this book. This is why what is seen in Philemon is so profound.

When I was young, I did not understand this book. I didn’t care so much about it because to me at that time it was just a “side book” about Paul wanting to send back a slave to a brother who happened to be his master. As an older brother who is more experienced, I now appreciate the beauty of this book. It is so warm and full of affection. A spiritual man speaks out his heart in Philemon. Now I can see so much of Christ and of the church in this book.

PAUL “THE AGED”

In verse 9, Paul refers to himself as “the aged.” We don’t know exactly how old he was. Personally I believe he was born around the time Jesus was born and saved around 38 AD. That should give many of you encouragement, for you have been saved at a much younger age! He began to minister and go out around 48 AD and was imprisoned in 58 AD and finally he was martyred in the year 68 AD. The first ten years after he was saved he gained all the basic things concerning Christ and the church. Thus around 54 AD he was able to write Galatians and his epistles to the Thessalonians. He fully knew the Old Testament and spent a long time reconsidering everything he knew in view of Christ. He was wealthy and well-educated, from Tarsus, which was a “college town” like Boston. He was trained in the Old Testament by a Bible teacher named Gamaliel whose name is still respected today among the Jewish people. (Gamaliel was the one who told the Jewish

leaders, "Don't try to destroy faith in Jesus. If it is not of God, it will fade; if it is of God, you should not be found fighting against God!" [Acts 5:38-39]. As we ourselves have recently experienced, however, religion breeds not only exclusivity but also persecution. Gamaliel's word reveals how liberal he was for that era.)

After he was saved, Paul brought all he knew of the Word to what he had now seen and experienced, and the Scriptures became totally new to him. When he returned from this time, wherever he went his gospel was so effective that the Jews were trying to kill him! Then around 46 or 47 AD a very good man named Barnabas (Acts 11:23-24, I hope more God-men might become good men!) brought him to Antioch, where he learned to preach the gospel in the meetings and to lead with both Jews and Gentiles! In all this Paul learned also to be a lonely man, (He had returned to Tarsus to get away from the situation in Jerusalem, Acts 11:25), to be invited (to Antioch), to work with a brother a bit older (Barnabas) and then to give a 365-day conference (Acts 11:26)!

Spiritual things can go very high, but once you attain to such a height, what can you do but go down? Therefore to go to the top is a dangerous thing. For us individually to "go up" is to arrive in the heavenlies. As a group, however, this is not so sustainable! (My fear as an old man is that I might gain more revelation and become more popular; then there is a peak and I must go down. Anything "up," besides the heavenlies with Christ as the riches, will be followed by a "going down." This is true for any revival, but if in the revival there is a lot of individual repentance, that brings in true blessing. For the group, however, as it goes down, the "vacuum" that it leaves behind may draw in unhealthy things unless the focus remains upon Christ alone. In Chefoo in 1942 Brother Lee witnessed a revival of 100 days until he was arrested by the Japanese, and then Pentecostalism came in.) After Paul and Barnabas taught a whole year together God called them to go out on their first journey, but in the ten years prior so much was already accomplished in and through Paul!

Today, to reach even the remotest part of the earth takes no more than 30 hours by air. In Paul's day, however, travel was a slow and arduous process, and yet look at how many churches he raised up! We should realize that a great portion of Paul's time was spent simply walking from place to place. In the little bit of time he had left to actually labor, he accomplished so much! In light of his labors, I feel ashamed. Who dares to hold up their effectiveness in comparison to his? If you are young, can you give ten years to learn from the Word, the church life, the brothers, and such labors? Furthermore, are you willing to suffer persecution and such difficulties as he was? Although it is not even possible today in most of the world to suffer as many early believers did, you can still suffer for Christ's sake. In America, at least, people are not always polite when they reject the gospel. In this we should rejoice that we are counted worthy to experience such things (Rom. 8:18)!

The Lord directed Paul to Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece to raise up churches. You cannot believe a man could do that much in ten years! And then a dear brother, James, set him up, attempting to stop his work. Thus Paul first experienced ten years of learning and pursuing, another ten years of travel and labor, and then ten years of

confinement. Shall we not seek to follow him in such a pattern? We may not need the last phase of imprisonment, but we should follow his way of continually struggling for the Lord's interest. We should never take the way of merely maintaining!

With his imprisonment, Paul came to the maturity of his ministry. Some years later he was re-arrested, probably due to Nero's persecution, and was martyred. With all his life-long riches, he desired to write a will. What is his will? Philemon. Everything he attained and experienced and was constituted with, and every burden he operated with is found in these 25 verses.

PAUL PRAYED FOR THE SAINTS, HEARING OF THEIR LOVE AND FAITH

In verse 4, Paul wrote that he was always praying for them. Paul surely prayed for all the churches, and from this verse we see that much of what he prayed for were things that surely bothered him, since in their case he could say he prayed *with joy*. This reveals that the situation in Colossae was very good, which is a marvel, since every situation involving saints manifests troublesome problems sooner or later. This was not a political greeting; the church there really made Paul happy. They were not a burdensome trial to him.

Why was Paul so thankful to God for these saints? Because he always heard of their love and faith (v.5). (Here hope is not mentioned because when love and faith are present, hope is not so much an issue, for hope does not come to the fore unless there are trials. Regardless, no one can impose hope on anyone! When you are with the Lord, you have assurance of hope (Heb. 6:11). A brother engaged to a sister does not have to talk about hope, for the assurance of hope is there. When you have the Lord, you have the assurance that your hope will not put you to shame (Rom. 5:5), for the presence of love and faith grant you this assurance.) Love and faith are in proportion to each other (1 Thes. 5:8). They are very much one. (When engaged, your faith is that your fiancé is the best one for you. If there is no faith, there is no love.) To Christ there is love and faith, and as much as you love Him, you trust Him. If you do not love Him, to say that you trust Him is an empty claim. Therefore learn to say, "I love the Lord" instead of "I trust the Lord," for faith comes from love.

In verse 5, the faith the saints had toward the Lord brought about so much faith to the saints. My faith to the Lord thus turns to be my faith in the saints. If you cannot trust the Lord, you cannot trust the saints. My faith in the Lord enables me to have faith in you "naughty" ones. When I am in the Lord's presence, I realize that all the saints have something profitable, and any criticism disappears. When I do not have that experience of faith, every saint is a problem and we become so picky. We may claim one saint is too old, while another is too worldly. It is only because we are so short of love toward Christ, and thus short of faith toward Christ, that we are unable to be of profit to the saints. Without this faith, we can only love ourselves and no one else. When we have faith towards Christ, we have faith for all the saints. When we do not have faith toward Christ, we lack faith to the saints, and only see what is objectionable.

A LOCAL CHURCH SHOULD SHARE ITS FAITH WITH THE OTHER CHURCHES

Paul mentions the faith of the saints as something toward Christ, to the saints, and thirdly, related to fellowship ("the fellowship of your faith might become effective" (v.6). We want spiritual success rather than spiritual fellowship! Some may say, "Our church is the best church!" Colossae must have been about the same. Paul called the Galatians "foolish" for desiring the Law (Gal. 3:1). The Ephesians could have claimed that they learned that the church is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). Colossae could have responded, "Paul told us Christ is the Head over ALL things (Col. 1:18). Only WE are qualified to receive a letter telling us that!" Christians are funny; they even compete over things such as this. But Paul said, "If you want to have faith, you must have the *fellowship* of your faith." If you have a prevailing faith, fellowship your faith with other localities! Faith is not for you to enjoy for yourself. If you do have something toward Christ that is so unique and powerful and advantageous, it should be fellowshipped!

It seems Paul was saying, "Local churches, please don't just be to yourselves! All the churches must learn that the faith we receive from the Lord is for us to fellowship with other churches as well." In this way, the fellowship of our faith becomes operative unto the acknowledgment (*epiginosko*, full knowledge) of every good thing which is in us in Christ Jesus (v. 6). What is good is Christ and the things pertaining to Christ. Any church that is isolated is a shame to Christ. There must be a life circulation among the churches that becomes a fellowship, strengthening all the churches.

FULLY ACKNOWLEDGING THE MYSTERY OF GOD, CHRIST

The full knowledge/acknowledging in verse 6 relates to the full riches of complete understanding that they might fully know the mystery of God, Christ (Col. 2:2). The "good" is Christ, God, and all the things related to God's economy. These are the things which we need full knowledge of.

THE SAINTS' INWARD PARTS BEING REFRESHED

Paul's confidence was in that the saints' inward parts had been refreshed by Philemon. Thus Paul had much joy and encouragement based on Philemon's love because many saints had been refreshed. When you have fellowship like this, most saints will experience this inward refreshing. When elders try so hard to lead the church, however, the saints get more and more pressured instead. If you can stop and trust in the Lord a little bit in the declaration that He would build His church upon the rock of this revelation, then let us all love the Lord. In this way, faith is generated. Practice to fellowship concerning the faith you have. The saints' tender inward parts will then be refreshed.

Don't care for a message; care for the fellowship of faith. How profitable such fellowship becomes to the saints! After such fellowship, the saints find themselves loving the Lord more, having more faith towards the Lord, and more faith to the saints. Thus, the fellowship of the faith should be the focus of our exercise. Visit others with this in view. Don't isolate your local church. The elders should travel and the saints with you should also be brought into this kind of practice. Then the Christ you know becomes much more realistic and enlarged. This is how Paul concludes his writings. This is his will to us. To have this kind of fellowship. Paul seems to purposely by-pass all the teachings and doctrines to say, "It is just this simple."

PAUL'S BESEECHING ON BEHALF OF ONESIMUS

"Accordingly," Paul wrote, "though I have much boldness in Christ to charge you what is proper, but for the sake of love I rather entreat..." (vv. 8-9). You see a great man here in his maturity writing to a close associate who labored with him for years: "I have the boldness to write to you about what you should do, but I would rather plead, being such a one as Paul the aged and prisoner of Christ Jesus." This is really a servant of the Lord. He does not have to prove it, he flows something out that only the divine God could have produced. As a prisoner, there was nothing he could boast in anymore. He was an imprisoned old man. How sweet is this state he has attained to! He is one hundred percent one with the Christ who said "Abide in Me and I in you... He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit" (John 15:4-5).

Paul then pleads on behalf of Onesimus, whom Paul had begotten in his bonds. Paul could do nothing and felt as nothing, yet for some reason he still got someone saved! We like to go out on gospel campaigns, but Paul couldn't do that. He was old and besides that, he was imprisoned. Yet he did get one saved! And, after he got saved, Paul found out he was from Colossae, knew Philemon, and was a slave of Philemon's named "profitable"! Now Paul was pleading on his behalf, for Onesimus must have taken something from Philemon. But, Paul said, he was of profit to both him and Philemon. What gave joy to Paul now was Onesimus. It wouldn't have been easy for Onesimus to go back. Possibly he was bound before Philemon got to read the letter, and then afterwards embraced by him! That would have made it seem to the other slaves like it was a good thing to run away! This must have seemed impossible! Philemon might have considered sending him back to Paul to make things simpler, but Paul would not have been for that. Onesimus must have been a great comfort to Paul at his age, but he still sent him back, for both the sake of Philemon as well as for the sake of Onesimus.

Vision Week

Message Ten:

Those Serving With Paul for the Churches

It is so interesting that every name in this book has its particular meaning, and how the names fit into the book. Onesimus' name means "providing benefit" which also has to do with providing comfort. His presence surely was a comfort to Paul! Every name in Philemon is so meaningful. The meaning of the names helps us to really get into the richness of this book. (This is true throughout the Bible. For example, how meaningful are the names of all the stations the Israelites passed through in Exodus!)

Onesimus was a slave who ran away, having stolen something of great value from his master, Philemon. He met Paul in Rome, was saved, and became profitable to Paul. Paul sent him back to Philemon to fulfill all righteousness, pleading with Philemon to receive him back in forgiveness as a brother.

ONESIMUS SENT BACK FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul sent him back for the sake of righteousness, to testify all-sufficient love. Onesimus represents all the saints in the church life. Who are you? A sinner. You owe your Master. You have obtained help from the Lord's servants. You are protected in love by them, and you are being perfected in righteousness to produce true holiness. Real holiness is an exhibit of the divine attributes. If a person is not righteous, there is no real holiness. No matter how much you want to be holy, if within your conscience there is a little hole, in other words, if the righteousness is not fulfilled, you can never be one who displays holiness. To be perfected in righteousness is to produce true holiness and become truly useful to Christ and the church. Do you all know you are sinners? Perhaps you didn't steal anything, but everyone has sinned (Rom. 3:23).

We all owe God, and we all need to return to Him. Therefore we need the help of the Lord's servants to be perfected in righteousness. Thus Paul told Onesimus, "You need to go back." Onesimus would have likely resisted this idea! But for the sake of the conscience of both Onesimus and Paul and for the profit of Philemon, it had to be so. Paul's intention was to perfect Onesimus rather than to just let things go. This was to perfect righteousness.

FELLOWSHIPPING IN LIFE RATHER THAN STANDING UPON INDEBTEDNESS

The apostle and responsible brothers experienced the fellowship of life for the benefit of the saints. The apostle had the right to charge the responsible brothers what was fitting, yet he would rather entreat them in love. I often have to ask the brothers regarding something, and they often do whatever they want to do. Yet they tell me, "Brother Titus, we love you." In the past, I would set them straight. Today, I entreat, asking, "Brother, please don't do this."

Usually they inform me of something only after they have made a mess and are in trouble. It is then they come and say, "Titus we would like to have good fellowship with you." They try to dress it up in their talk to make it look better, but if something is not marvelous, there is no shame. If you misrepresent things, how can the Lord bless you? You are not even able to acknowledge the real situation. But Colossae wasn't like that. The relationship between Paul and Colossae was really genuine. This is why Paul says, "I could charge you Philemon, but I'd rather entreat you." He was focused on the saints, he was not standing on his apostleship.

Paul's testimony was that the saints were his very heart (v. 12). The reason we should care for the church, is not because they provide a place to preach or to visit, or that they equal extending our work, but because there are some very sweet saints. Saints must occupy the center of any full-timers work. Saints are first. Paul could testify that the saints were his very heart.

The principle of the fellowship between the apostles and the leading ones is in the principle of willingness. The apostle Paul's view on this matter was very high. He wrote, "Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever" (v. 15). In other words, if Onesimus had never run away, Philemon could have never known him as a brother! The apostles hope was that the church could accept a brother just as the apostles had accepted him, in order to testify the reality of the body of Christ in love. If it were just Paul that accepted him, that would not have been sufficient to testify the reality of the Body.

THE FACT OF INDEBTEDNESS AND THE COMING OF A GROUP OF GRACE

Paul recognized that Philemon had refreshed the saints' inward parts, but Paul's inward parts were with Onesimus, so Paul wrote, "I hope you might refresh my inward parts". Why? Paul's argument was simple. "You owe me your very self." Personally, rather than feeling others owe me, I always feel I am in debt to others. (Paul did say, "If I preach the gospel, do I not have the right to live off the gospel? Do not muzzle the laboring ox!" [1 Cor. 9:9]). I hope that, rather than focusing on whether anyone owes you anything or not, you would focus instead on how much you owe others. The sense of indebtedness is one of the greatest virtues you can have. Without it, you feel free to do as you please. Do not become an unappreciative person who lacks the awareness of how much others have paid for your blessedness. I realize I owe Brother Lee so much, as the brother ahead of me. If I had grown up as a believer elsewhere, would I have all the riches I have today? Yet even though it might be fitting for those who have labored for the Lord on our behalf to demand something from us, they also realize their reward lies elsewhere. Even so, we should have a great feeling of honor towards those who have helped us. Those who minister realize something spiritual has taken place, and this ties the saints to them through indebtedness. If not, they are merely preachers speaking for a fee! Those who receive spiritually should feel they owe those who have helped them. Yet how the servant reaps from his spiritual sowing takes many forms. It may take the form of one brother deciding to stand with the servant wherever he goes. Another may pray for that brother. Another may fight to produce the kind of church life that brother is laboring for. Some make sure he eats something healthy. Some offer a few dollars in an envelope. Such a humble sum offered in love is to be more appreciated than a large sum offered simply because the offerer has the ability.

When we realize we are debtors, something very sweet is produced among us, and we should treasure that sweetness. In the church life, we should always feel that we are debtors, for once we lose that, the church life is over. My kids owe me, but as a father I often realize that I owe them as well. Not everything I have done has always turned out as I hoped. Something else may have been more to their profit. Therefore I cannot tell my children, "You owe me everything!" I also owe them. The feeling of being indebted or owing others is a great thing. If a servant of the Lord has no sense of indebtedness, his service is only a business transaction. No one feels indebted, as though something of Christ has been imparted. In the church life there is sometimes arguing rather than peace because the sense of indebtedness is absent.

The apostle was glad to be given to the church as grace and requested lodging. It wasn't just a visit; it was a matter of coming with burden and staying until his burden was discharged.

Paul was full of assurance that Philemon would do as he asked, that he might be given to them, saying, "*Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.*" Few realize what a blessing it is when a servant of the Lord comes to stay for a period of time! Many only think of how their schedule and priorities will be disrupted. Instead, we should realize that such a visit is the coming of grace!

One problem may be that the various servants come as "miscellaneous grace" rather than a "group of grace." In a short period of time a group of serving ones could provide so much more if they were laboring together rather than separately! Suppose among us we form a group of grace and this group of grace goes from place to place to place.

The testimony of the local church is focused upon the healthiness of the saints, not merely the elders! It is when all the saints operate with what belongs uniquely to them that the blessing really comes out! We need spiritual dads and moms, but we especially need those who have ministry.

THE NEED OF ARCHIPPUSES AS WELL AS PHILEMONS

Young men honor and love Philemon, but if he wanted to hang out with them, they would not feel as though he were really one of them. On the other hand, they would feel comfortable with Archippus. You may feel you are indebted to me as a servant of the Lord, but no matter how indebted you feel, you will not feel comfortable sitting down with me to eat. Instead, you would rather eat with Archippus who can do such things as fish and play basketball with you! Yet he is very clear that he is with you with his ministry. What a blessing that would become! You need the ministry of Archippus as someone who leads and fights for you.

THE COMING OF GRACE FROM THOSE WHO SERVE TOGETHER

That may seem good enough. But, as we said, Philemon indicates that this "grace" is collective! It wasn't just Paul. Paul said, "I am coming to you," but he also added, "Epaphras

greets you; and Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke" (vv. 23-24). The order is significant. It begins with love and consecration, as seen in Epaphras' name. After consecrating in love, you need a good defense, indicated by Mark. Then, you need a proper lead that can set a proper direction, as Aristarchus' names portrays. As you are led, the light shines and others see a testimony, which is signified by Luke.

In the eyes of God all the churches are equally lampstands, regardless of how many saints happen to be meeting together. I would rather that the number NOT be large, since what you *are* is the testimony, not *how many*. (Demas represents the political person who will be drawn to you when you become somewhat prevailing.) Compared to Paul we may be inadequate workers, but I can testify not one is impure. We may seem to be struggling and not too effective for the Lord's interest, but we all love the saints, the Lord and His testimony in such a pure way. This our conscience attests to.

THE PROBLEM OF DEMAS

Paul and Timothy alone were not adequate. There is also the need of Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus and Luke. (At the same time a Demas might be produced. I am thankful we are not THAT successful. Thus, if Demas wants a future, there is not much chance he would hang around here!)

Be alert for those who give messages to please the saints or who are factious. The saints should love those who serve, but no one should end up using the saints for their own ministry or to form their own army. If anyone tries to use a brother's ministry and make it something they alone own, they damage that brother's legacy. No ministry is "proprietary." If they try to make themselves the center of the work of the Lord by declaring, "We are the Body," then they should consider that Rome is more qualified! Such a stand only declares them to be a faction. The elders who lead a church can lead a division also! It is only by having a vision of the entire Body of Christ that we can be protected. Otherwise what we do will form sects.

EVERY PORTION NEEDED TO MINISTER THE TRUTH

The truth is something very high. It is hard to apprehend yet enjoyable to talk about. There is something to Lao Tze's comment, "If you can describe it, that is not it." Anyone who feels he can describe something so completely may not be speaking the truth! When everyone knows what the next word will be, even though none of us really understand what we are talking about, that is the truth becoming philosophy. The Bible is simple. Enjoy it as the Bible. Don't turn it into philosophy! People sometimes do this to carry others away as their spoil (Col. 2:8).

The apostles (don't think of this as such a select group) provide the base. With them are Epaphras ("Love the Lord!"), Mark ("Don't love the world!"), Aristarchus ("Let's go on!") and Luke ("Be a luminary!"). Demas never made it and thus he left. Can we live such a church life, not isolated or self-sufficient, but with a strong desire that we would be close to the servants of the Lord, and with the servants responding by being **grace** to them? In this way, as the churches are open to the servants without selectivity and as the churches are open to each other, we will go on!