Introduction to the Epistle to Philemon

Paul’s epistle to Philemon is the shortest of all his letters and is one of the most personal of all his letters, if not the most personal. Of all the literature in the New Testament, Philemon is unique since it is the only personal or person to person letter, even though the entire Christian community was also in view when Paul wrote it. The other epistles in the New Testament are to churches and contain exhortations, instructions or a dissertation or treatise in the form of a letter. Philemon on the other hand is correspondence between the apostle Paul and a Christian slave owner named Philemon.

This epistle is also valuable because it gives us great insight one of the great institutions in the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. namely slavery. It helps us understand the relationship between slave and slave owner. Dunn writes that it also gives us insight “into the way in which influence was brought to bear within the earliest churches between parties of differing social status.”1

Arthur Patzia comments on the importance of Philemon, he writes “First, it opens a window on the nature of Paul’s imprisonment and the personal relationship that he enjoyed with his friends and coworkers (Philem 23, 24; Col 4:12–14). It ends by showing the optimism that Paul had for his release and desire to visit his beloved friend Philemon. Second, it provides a small commentary on slavery in the ancient world. When read together with Colossians 3:22–4:1, we begin to appreciate how conversion to the Christian faith broke down all social, racial and economic barriers (Patzia, 91–93). Although Paul does not speak directly for the abolition of slavery, this letter exemplifies, as much as any other writing of his, the truth of Galatians 3:28: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (NIV). A new relationship and partnership has been formed in this situation where master, slave and apostle are all part of one family in Christ (Philem 16). The church as a whole should be characterized by such virtues as love, forgiveness, equality and fellowship. Third, it is a masterpiece of pastoral diplomacy. Paul’s request is not reinforced by expressions of compulsion, constraint or coercion. The reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus is based on the principles of Christian love and forgiveness and not Roman law or apostolic authority. The release of Onesimus for Paul’s ministry must be a voluntary action leading to the highest good for all parties concerned. Paul is confident that he will succeed in motivating Philemon ‘to do even more’ than he has requested (Philem 21). Finally, as W. Barclay so aptly wrote, ‘here is one of the great romances of grace in the early Church’

(Barclay, 316). Although we do not know how the story ended, there is enough reason to suspect that Paul’s confidence (Philem 21) in Philemon was honored and that the former slave Onesimus, now a brother in Christ, continued to serve Paul.”

Dan Wallace writes “Paul opens this, his most personal letter in the canon, with a greeting to Philemon, Apphia and Archippus (1-3). He then gives his customary thanks for the addressee and offers a prayer on his behalf (4-7). However, the opening prayer in Philemon is virtually unique among Paul’s letters: it is a prayer for Philemon to share his faith (6). Paul is setting Philemon up for the body of his letter: when Philemon shares his faith so as to have ‘a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ’ (6 [NIV]), he will begin to see the incongruity of slavery and Christianity. The body of the letter is an appeal that Philemon would take back Onesimus—but as a brother rather than as a slave (8-22). Paul prefices the appeal with a reminder of his apostolic authority (8), then alters the tone from strict obedience to love (9). It is only at this stage in the letter that the apostle mentions Onesimus (10) as the object of the appeal. With an allusion to Philemon’s conversion and hence changed character, the appeal’s persuasive force begins to gain momentum (10-11). At this stage Paul has not yet specified the content of the appeal, only that it was for Onesimus. In vv. 12-16 he plainly states, ‘I am sending him back to you.’ Then he boldly suggests that Philemon might consider freeing him for the sake of the gospel (13-16). Paul now plays his trump card both by reminding Philemon of his own (spiritual) debt to Paul and by volunteering to pay for any damages done by Onesimus (17-21). He concludes his appeal with the suggestion that he hopes to return to Philemon. From this Philemon should certainly read between the lines: it would be most prudent to heed Paul’s advice since Paul will follow up on the suggestion in person (22)! The letter concludes with greetings from those with Paul in Rome and a benediction (23-25).”

**Canonicity**

Paul’s epistle to Philemon was regarded by the early church as divinely inspired. It was universally accepted by the early church as a part of the canon of Scripture. Parts of Paul’s epistle to Philemon or the entire letter appear in the papyri, majuscule and minuscule codices as well as Old Syriac and Old Latin versions. Citations found in Greek, Latin and some Syrian church fathers also contain parts of this epistle or the entire letter. However, this tiny epistle is not contained in some of the best ancient MSS of the New Testament. There is a small

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number of fragmentary texts providing the letter’s wording or parts of it. The absence of this epistle from a codex, a canonical list or a version indicates that its authenticity was called into question or unresolved and thus not used in the public worship. But we must balance this because every absence of this letter does not always indicate that its canonicity was rejected.

Dan Wallace writes “F. C. Baur’s extreme Hegelianism as applied to the NT prevented him from seeing Philemon as authentic. Instead, he regarded it as a second-century document which was intended to show the church how to deal with slavery. Virtually no one today would follow in Baur’s train. Even though this letter is a brief, personal note to a friend, it shows up in the early canon lists (Marcion’s and the Muratorian). Further, the ancient church never doubted its authenticity. Internally, ‘it breathes the great-hearted tenderness of the apostle and its dealing with an intensely difficult situation points to an author of much experience in handling social problems.’ Typically, Philemon is regarded as ‘next in line’ after the Hauptbriefe in terms of its security as an authentic piece by Paul. There is certainly nothing linguistically, historically, or theologically against this supposition.”

Among the church fathers, Ignatius, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius give evidence of the canonicity of this brief book. It was also included in the canon of Marcion and in the Muratorian fragment. Three times in the epistle the author refers to himself as Paul (vv. 1, 9, 19). The style and language remind one of Paul (cf. v. 4 with Phil. 1:3-4). Paul in the introductions of his epistles commonly used the terms “love” and “faith.” And these are used here also, in Philemon 5. Too, there is a close association with Colossians, for both epistles mention Archippus, Epaphras, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke (cf. Col. 4:10, 12, 14, 17).

Today in the twenty-first century, the church has in its possession a sufficient number of manuscripts to provide a fair certainty about the text of Philemon. Sinaiticus, A (Alexandrinus), C (Ephraimi Rescriptus: only verses 1-2), D (Claromontanus), F (Augiensis), and G (Boernerianus) are some of the majuscule codices which contain the complete text of the epistle or parts of it. The codices 33, 81, 104, 323, 365, 629, 945, 1739, and 1881 along with P61 bear witness to the text of Philemon.

Philemon was recognized as part of the New Testament canon in Egypt in 367, in Rome 382, in Carthage and Hippo in 395 and 397 and in the Syrian church approximately 500. Marcion, Tertullian and the Muratorian Canon confirm

4 Guthrie, 664.
5 Longenecker (“Amanuenses”) regards Philemon as perhaps the only canonical letter by Paul which he actually penned himself, the others being written for him by an amanuensis. In the ancient world it was somewhat typical for an author to write for himself personal correspondence, leaving more general treatises to his secretary to pen.
Philemon’s canonicity. Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, Cyprian and Augustine as well as Ambrose quote from Philemon. Chrysostom and Jerome wrote some of the first commentaries on this epistle.

F.F. Bruce commenting as to why Paul’s epistle to Philemon was preserved, writes “Not only because it accomplished its purpose so far as Philemon was concerned, but also because Onesimus treasured it as his charter of liberty. And there is much to be said for the view that Onesimus did not remain a private Christian, but became in due course one of the most important figures in the life of the province of Asia bishop of Ephesus, no less. It was in his lifetime that the corpus of Pauline letters was first collected and published, and wherever and by whomsoever this work was carried out, Onesimus (if he was bishop of Ephesus) could scarcely fail to get to know about it, and he would make sure that his Pauline letter found a place in the collection.”

The earliest extant lists of the Pauline Corpus (Marcion’s ‘canon’ and the Muratorian Fragment) contain Philemon, even though they omit the Pastoral Epistles. In the 4th century complaints appear not so much against its authenticity as of its alleged triviality (cf. Jerome, Preface to Philemon): most generations, however, have better valued the grace, tact, affection and delicacy of feeling which mark this little letter. Tertullian remarked that it was the only Epistle which Marcion left uncontaminated by ‘editing’ (Adv. Marc. 5. 21), and its authenticity has never been responsibly questioned. In recent years it has become a bastion of the theory of the Pauline Corpus associated with E. J. Goodspeed and John Knox (*PAUL, III. d. ii); gratitude for the fresh interest they have stimulated in Philemon, and the adoption of some of their suggestions, does not, however, demand acceptance of this highly dubious reconstruction.

*Literary Genre*

This letter to Philemon is written according to the pattern of letter writing found in the ancient world during the first century called the “epistle.’ The epistle is among the oldest forms of communication. In fact, the epistle is among the oldest and most abundantly preserved types of texts that we have today from the ancient world. These extant documents are extremely important to us today for historical, literary and biblical research.

The Babylonian royalty employed epistolary communication as far back as 2275 B.C. The Egyptians used this form of written communication extensively as evidenced by remains from the 2nd Millennium B.C. Akkadian letters have been

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8 Bruce, F.F., St. Paul in Rome 2. The Epistle to Philemon; page 97.
found on potsherds and clay tablets. The greatest epistolary activity occurs during the Greco-Roman period.

The Greek language was diversified into various dialects such as Aeolic, Doric, Ionic, Attic, but yet mutually intelligible. Eventually, all of these dialects were joined into one “common” language, the Koine Greek, which Alexander the Great spread throughout the rest of the world which he had conquered.

The Romans spoke Latin but very much influenced by the Greeks and their culture. In fact, the Roman Empire at its height spoke primarily Koine Greek. The Romans wrote their Law in Latin but their literary prose was in Greek. Latin was not used by Roman historians until Cato in 160 B.C.

Latin is practical and economical like the Romans themselves, whereas, the Greeks were much more colorful in their speech and thought and therefore, produced a more complicated language. There are over 14,000 extant epistles from the Greco-Roman period. This was the result of the increase in scribal learning and influence as well as the growing demands for careful documentation in the areas of: (1) Commerce & travel (2) Official propaganda (3) The administrative concerns in government (4) Military (5) Law (6) Apologetic considerations (7) Philosophical speculations (8) Rhetorical practice (forensic, didactic, and epideictic).

The needs in these various areas produced various responses, which can be categorized as such: (1) Business letters (2) Official communiqués (3) Letters for public consumption (4) Letter essays (5) Letters of introduction and commendation (6) Poetic letters (7) Epistles of consolation (8) Encyclical documents (9) Rhetorical paradigms (10) Legal pleas.

Letters can also be classified according to the form of preservation and the writing materials employed. There were various materials used for writing during the Greco-Roman period.

The historian Will Durant in his work The Life of Greece sheds some light on what the Greeks employed for writing materials, he writes, “The materials used to receive writing were various: at first, if we may believe Pliny, leaves or the barks of trees; for inscriptions, stone, bronze, or lead; for ordinary writing, clay tablets as in Mesopotamia; then wooden tablets covered with wax, which were popular, in retrospect, with schoolboys; for more important purposes papyrus, which the Phoenicians brought from Egypt, and (in the Hellenistic and Roman periods) parchment, made from the skins or membranes of goats or sheep. A metal stylus was used on wax tablets; on papyrus or parchment a reed dipped in ink. Wax writing was erased with the flat butt of the stylus, ink with a sponge.”

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10 Will Durant, The Life of Greece, chapter 9, page 206

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In his work, Caesar and Christ, Durant comments on what the Roman’s used for writing materials, “The Romans wrote in ink with a slit metal reed (calamus, stilus), at first upon leaves (folia), whence our words folio and leaf (two pages); then upon strips of inners bark (liber; often upon white (album) tablets of waxed wood; later upon leather, linen paper, and parchment.”

The English word “epistle” is from the Greek verb epistello, which refers to the “act of sending or writing a military or an administrative order.”

In classical Greek, epistello meant, “to send, announce, order through the passing on of a message or commission either in writing or by verbal communication.” In the Septuagint, it meant only “to write,” rather than “to send a message orally.” In the New Testament, the verb meant “to send a communication, to inform, to instruct by letter.”

Epistello is used in an authoritative and official nature in the Greek New Testament and occurs 3 times (Acts 15:20; 21:25; Heb. 13:22). The noun epistle occurs 24 times and means “a letter,” or “epistle.” It originally meant in classical Greek a message of any kind, either written or verbal. Where the verb epistello meant the act of writing a message, the noun epistle meant “that which is transmitted or written,” the message or letter itself. The noun epistle in classical Greek referred to a wide range of written communication.

Gunter Finkenrath of Burscheid-Hilgen University commenting on the classical usage of the noun epistle writes, “With the spread of the Hellenic culture a whole range of letters was developed, from private letters of an intimate nature, open letters (e.g. the didactic letters of the Epicurean philosophers) to artistic epistles, which were aesthetic treatises in letter form. Traveling philosophers and their pupils were accustomed to carry letters of recommendation.”

By the Septuagint and the New Testament periods, epistle had lost its oral meaning and meant only the written message, hence, a letter, or epistle. Epistle was not only used in an informal sense in the New Testament as in secular writings, but more importantly it was employed in an authoritative and official sense.

The apostolic epistles in the New Testament were authoritative in nature. They were authoritative because they originated from the throne room of God. The apostolic epistles are unique from secular epistles in that sense alone. The Christian epistle claimed divine authorship. They claimed to be the very words of God. The Christian epistle is unique simply by the fact that they claim divine authorship. Pasa graphe theopneustos, “All Scripture, God-breathed!”

So we can see that Philemon is written according to the pattern of letter writing found in the ancient world during the first century. The general form of a first

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11 Will Durant, Caesar and Christ, Chapter 4, page 73
12 Colin Brown’s Dictionary of New Testament Theology, volume 1, page 246
The final signature of endorsement authenticated the letter’s contents and served as protection against fraudulent correspondence. The final signature was also important because frequently an amanuensis was employed to write the letter.

The great German scholar Adolf Deissman in his book Bible Studies gives several examples of first and second century letter writing from everyday life in the Roman world. He gives a translation of a letter of recommendation written in A.D. 25, “Theon to his esteemed Tyrannos, many greetings. Herakleides, the bearer of this letter, is my brother. I therefore entreat you with all my power to treat him a your protege. I have also written to your brother Hermias, asking him to communicate with you about him. You will confer upon me a very great favor if Herakleides gains your notice. Before all else you have my good wishes for unbroken health and prosperity. Good-bye.”

Deissman also translates a letter from a “Chaireas” to “Tyrannos” written in the same year, “Chaireas to his dearest Tyrannos, many greetings. Write out immediately the list of arrears both of corn and money for the twelfth year of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, as Severus has given me instructions for demanding their payment. I have already written to you to be firm and demand payment until I come in peace. Do not therefore neglect this, but prepare the statements of corn and money from the...year to the eleventh for the presentation of the demands. Good-bye.”

Today, we begin our letters by addressing the recipient first and identifying ourselves at the end of the contents of the letter which is the exact opposite to what the ancient letter writer would do. Paul’s letters in the New Testament generally followed the same pattern of letter writing found in the first and second centuries. His introduction found in Philemon follows exactly the formula of this period.

In Philemon, Paul follows the correct chronological order of a first century letter’s introduction: (1) The author identifies himself first (2) Then he identifies the recipient of the letter (3) Then he gives a greeting. It follows the usual Pauline letter structure (1) Opening (verses 1-3) (2) Thanksgiving (verses 4-7) (3) Body of letter (verses 8-20) (4) Closing (verses 21-25).

There was a constant exchange of letters in the early first century churches. This was by apostolic command. A good example of this procedure is found in the letter to the Colossians. The letter to the Colossians was meant not only to be read by the believers in Colosse but also in Laodicea and in turn the letter to the Laodiceans was meant not only for the believers in Laodicea but was also to be read by the Colossians (Col. 4:16).


Public or Private Letter?

Now, what would take place in the early first century churches is that a courier would arrive in a particular city with a letter from one of the apostles such as Paul. Someone who was a good public speaker, more than likely the Pastor himself, would read the letter publicly to the whole congregation. Paul commanded that his first letter to the Thessalonians be read publicly to the whole local assembly (1 Thess. 5:27).

Was Philemon simply a private letter or was it to be read publicly in the churches? In answer to this question, it appears that it was more than a private letter between Paul and Philemon and was in fact to be read publicly in the churches since Paul does not only address Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus but also the entire congregation meeting in Philemon’s house (see verses 1-2). They were encouraged to participate in Philemon’s decision.

The Colossians who met in Philemon’s home were to be eyewitnesses of the effects of Paul’s letter since they could testify to Onesimus’ worth. By addressing all of them together and not just Philemon alone, they are witnesses to all that Paul writes and Philemon will do. Philemon’s decision and the congregations’ are to be harmony with one another. However, Philemon chooses to go with this matter of Philemon, the congregation will follow. Lastly, in support of Philemon being a public letter is that it is included in the canon of Scripture and is to be read and studied in all the churches throughout church history.

Therefore, this letter to Philemon was read publicly to all of the churches located in Colossae and all the churches in the Roman Empire. The letter was then distributed to other churches in that geographical area. After being read in Philemon’s home, it was copied and then distributed to the churches in the area and read publicly several times in the various churches. The letter was sent to other geographical locations and read publicly in these places and then copied as well. Eventually the letter would be read by each of the churches in Asia and throughout the rest of the Roman Empire. And of course, copies of this same letter have come down to us today.

Arthur Patzia writes “Some scholars conclude that the brevity, personal appeal to one person and the delicate way Paul handles his request, confirm that this is a private letter. However, several factors favor its public nature: (1) the length exceeds that of most private letters; (2) the greetings are extended to more than one person and, in fact, include a house church; (3) it was customary to read Paul’s letters to the entire church in worship; (4) the legal and technical language are more characteristic of a public document than a private letter; (5) it has all the characteristics of Paul’s longer letters addressed to churches, such as the inclusion of Timothy as a cosender, salutation, thanksgiving, body and greetings; (6) the
designations “fellow worker” (synergos), “sister” (adelphē) and “fellow soldier” (systratiōtes) in Philemon 1–2 suggest church titles. Finally, one cannot help but feel that Paul’s request and the issue of social relationships involves the entire Christian community and not just one person. Lohse, quoting Wickert, notes that “in the Body of Christ personal affairs are no longer private” (Lohse 187 n. 9). “In short,” concludes Martin, “this brief epistle is to be seen not so much as a private letter of Paul as an individual … but as an apostolic letter about a personal matter” (Martin, 144). In other words, Paul is referring his case to the entire church. This public nature may also account for its value in the collection and canon of Paul’s letters (see Canon).”

Keener writes “This letter is a ‘letter of recommendation,’ the sort that a patron wrote to social peers or inferiors on behalf of a dependent client to ask a favor for him. It is also ‘deliberative rhetoric,’ the type of speech or writing educated persons in antiquity used to persuade others to change their behavior or attitudes. Paul’s exordium, or opening appeal (vv. 4–7), is followed by the main argument, consisting of proofs (vv. 8–16), which is followed by the peroratio, or summary of his case (vv. 17–22). Paul uses methods of argumentation common in his day to persuade well-to-do and well-educated Philemon, who would find such arguments persuasive. The preservation of the letter suggests that Paul succeeded in persuading Philemon, who would not have kept it and later allowed it to be circulated had he not freed Onesimus. The shortest of Paul’s extant letters, this letter to Philemon would have occupied only a single sheet of papyrus.”

Text

Barth and Blanke write “The textual transmission of Philemon is as much and as little stable and reliable as that of most Pauline epistles. Compared with the thousands of variant readings to the Lukan and Johannine writings, the state of Philemon text looks fairly good. Dramatic, exciting or disturbing alternatives to the Majority Text hardly exist. The variants offered by individual MSS-or some groups of them-do not really change the intention and substance of this one-page document.”

Paul’s epistle to Philemon contains only 335 words. This epistle has a richer vocabulary in proportion to the totality of words used than any New Testament letter with the exception of Jude. There are ten words in Philemon which do not appear anywhere else in the Pauline corpus. However, these words appear in pre-

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New Testament Greek texts. During our exegesis of Philemon, we will discuss a number of textual variants which appear in verses 5, 6, 7, 9, 12 and 25.

More than any other Pauline letter, Philemon intimate and family references appear in abundance. Paul does not employ his apostolic title. Throughout the epistle Paul utilizes legal and commercial vocabulary when discussing with Philemon the situation with Onesimus. Paul intervenes on behalf of Onesimus much like a priest at Delphi would for a runaway slave.

**Authorship**

The Pauline authorship of Philemon has never been denied except by the radical critics of the Tübingen School. Contemporary scholars unanimously accept the Pauline authorship of this epistle.

F.F. Bruce writes “Most critics have been content to leave the Pauline authorship intact. The epistle is too short for the most efficient computer to yield a significant analysis of its style and vocabulary.” If its authenticity is questioned, it is questioned mainly on account of the close association between this epistle and Colossians, which some find it difficult to accept as Pauline. For Colossians and Philemon were plainly written at the same time and place, sent to the same place, carried by the same messengers. Practically the same companions of Paul send their greetings in both; of the six who do so in Colossians, five do so in Philemon. Apart from these, Archippus is mentioned in both; and in both Onesimus arrives at the same time as the letters. Ernest Renan was so convinced of the genuineness of Philemon that for its sake he was willing to admit the genuineness of Colossians. ‘The Epistle to the Colossians’, he wrote, ‘though full of eccentricities, does not embrace any of those impossibilities which are to be found in the Epistles to Titus and to Timothy. It furnishes even many of those details which reject the hypothesis [of its pseudonymity] as false. Assuredly of this number is its connection with the note to Philemon. If the epistle is apocryphal, the note is apocryphal also; yet few of the pages have so pronounced a tone of sincerity; Paul alone, as it appears to us, could write that little masterpiece.’ But Renan was a romantic, and would have been reluctant on that ground to abandon the authenticity of Philemon; a real biblical critic must be made of sterner stuff. And such was Ferdinand Christian Baur. ‘What’, asks Baur, ‘has criticism to do with this short, attractive, graceful and friendly letter, inspired as it is by the noblest Christian feeling, and which has never yet been touched by the breath of suspicion?’ Yet, he goes on, apostolic authorship cannot be taken for granted even here; and since the other ‘captivity

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16 Cf. A. Q. Morton, *The Times*, 24 April 1963 (“there seems no reason to exclude it from the works of Paul”).
epistles’ to which Philemon is so clearly related are not Pauline, it follows that this epistle is not Pauline; it is, in fact (says Baur), a Christian romance in embryo, comparable in this respect to the Clementine Homilies. The Clementine Homilies show how ‘Christianity is the permanent reconciliation of those of who were formerly separated by one cause or another, but who by a special arrangement of affairs brought about by Divine Providence for that very purpose, are again brought together; through their conversion to Christianity they know each other again, the one sees in the other his own flesh and blood.’

So the Epistle to Philemon suggests that perhaps Onesimus and his master were separated for a short time in order that the latter might thenceforth have Onesimus to himself for ever, no longer as a slave, but as a dear brother. W. C. van Manen, who rejected the authenticity of all thirteen Pauline epistles (including even the four Hauptbriefe which Baur admitted), added to Baur's arguments against the genuineness of Philemon some considerations of his own. For one thing, the ambiguity of the direction speaks against Pauline authorship, since the epistle is addressed by Paul and Timothy to three individuals and a household church, while the bulk of it is a personal letter from Paul to Philemon. ‘This double form . . . is not a style that is natural to any one who is writing freely and untrammeled, whether to one person or to many.’

More probably the unknown author has modelled his composition on the letter of the younger Pliny to his friend Sabinianus, interceding on behalf of a freedman of the latter who has offended his patron and has sought Pliny's good offices to bring about a reconciliation.

The author of Philemon makes the freedman into a slave, and rewrites the letter so as to portray the ideal ‘relations which, in his judgment, that is according to the view of Pauline Christians, ought to subsist between Christian slaves and their masters, especially when the slaves have in some respect misconducted themselves, as for example by secretly quitting their master's service’.

Such a combination of hypercriticism and naivete is easily recognized for what it is. There is no need to propound such far-fetched explanations of a document which, in the judgement of most critics as of most general readers, bears a much more probable explanation on its face namely, that it is a genuine letter of Paul, concerning a slave called Onesimus, who somehow needs the apostle's help in restoring good personal relations between him and his master, and that Paul quite naturally takes the opportunity at the beginning and end of the letter to send greetings to other members of the household. Because of what they regard as the transparent genuineness of this epistle, several scholars who are

19 Ibid. P. 83.
unable to accept the whole of Colossians as Pauline feel constrained nevertheless to salvage some of it for the apostle enough, at least, to keep Philemon company.”

Barth and Blanke have the following comment regarding Pauline authorship of the letter to Philemon, they write “Philemon is accepted as authentically Pauline, whether or not a secretary has assisted the writer. At least the words ‘If he has done you any wrong…charge it to my account…I, Paul shall pay you back’ (vv. 18-19) had to be written by Paul’s own hand. These sentences are formulated in exact legal-economical terminology and are an obligation of payment (an IOU) that is enforceable before any court.”

**Recipients**

Paul’s epistle is addressed not only to Philemon but also Apphia, who is quite possibly Philemon’s wife and Archippus. Some scholars speculate that Archippus may be the son of Philemon and Apphia. However, we cannot be sure about this.

As we noted, this letter between Paul and Philemon and was in fact to be read publicly in the churches since Paul does not only address Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus but also the entire congregation meeting in Philemon’s house (see verses 1-2). They were encouraged to participate in Philemon’s decision.

From this epistle, we determine that Philemon was well off in that he had a house large enough to have the church meet in it (verse 2). This house also provided a guest room according to verse 22. Also, indicating that Philemon was wealthy is that he was a slave owner and can assume that he had more than one slave. We can infer that he lived in Colossae since the Onesimus mentioned in verse 10 who is Philemon’s slave is the same Onesimus who appears in Colossians 4:9. He converted to Christianity through Paul’s ministry (verse 19). He was also a close friend of Paul. Philemon is described as one of Paul’s “fellow-workers” (verse 1) and “partner” (verse 17). This indicates that Philemon was wealthy enough to join Paul when he was conducting his evangelistic work or when checking up on the churches he planted. So he was involved in Paul’s ministry.

**Colossae**

As we noted, we can infer that Philemon lived in Colossae since the Onesimus mentioned in verse 10 who is Philemon’s slave is the same Onesimus who appears in Colossians 4:9.

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23 F.F. Bruce, *St. Paul in Rome 2. The Epistle to Philemon*; pages 82-85
Colossae was “a city of Phrygia, on the Lycus, which is a tributary of the Maeander. It was about 12 miles above Laodicea, and near the great road from Ephesus to the Euphrates, and was consequently of some mercantile importance. It does not appear that Paul had visited this city when he wrote his letter to the church there (Col. 1:2). He expresses in his letter to Philemon (ver. 1:22) his hope to visit it on being delivered from his imprisonment. From Col. 1:7; 4:12 it has been concluded that Epaphras was the founder of the Colossian church. This town afterwards fell into decay, and the modern town of Chonas or Chonum occupies a site near its ruins.”

Robert Wild writes that Colossae was “a city in Asia Minor located in the upper Lycus River valley about 110 miles east of Ephesus, ten miles east of Laodicea, and twelve miles southeast of Hierapolis. In the fifth century B.C. and later, Colossae was an important center. Herodotus called it ‘a large city of Phrygia’ and Xenophon described it as ‘a populous city, large and well off.’ This prominence derived especially from its wool-working and cloth-dying industries; the dark red

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wool cloth known as *colossinum* was widely known. However, by the late first century B.C. Colossae had been outstripped by both Laodicea and Hierapolis, and Strabo lists it among a group of smaller towns. A severe earthquake in A.D. 60 or 61 may have further accelerated Colossae’s decline. A significant number of Jews probably resided at Colossae; a statement made by Cicero (*Pro Flacco* 68) permits the estimate that over ten thousand Jewish males lived in the Laodicea-Hierapolis-Colossae area. A Christian community, perhaps founded by Epaphras (Col. 1:7-8), existed here in the mid-first century A.D. and was the recipient of a Pauline letter. Colossae passed into oblivion in later Roman times—only a few coins survive from this period—and its site, rediscovered in 1835 and still unexcavated, became a quarry in the Byzantine era.26

E. M. B. Green and C. J. Hemer commenting on Colossae, write “A city in the Roman province of Asia, in the W of what is now Asiatic Turkey. It was situated about 15 km up the Lycus valley from *Laodicea*, on the main road to the E. It was

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originally the point at which the great routes from Sardis and Ephesus joined, and at a defensible place with an abundant water-supply. It was an important city in the Lydian and Persian periods, but later it declined when the road through Sardis to Pergamum was resited farther W at the prosperous new foundation of Laodicea. The site is now uninhabited; it lies near Honaz, 16 km E of the town of Denizli. The gospel probably reached the district while Paul was living at Ephesus (Acts 19:10), perhaps through Epaphras, who was a Colossian (Col. 1:7; 4:12–13). Paul had apparently not visited Colossae when he wrote his letter (Col. 2:1), though his desire to do so (Phm. 22) may have been met at a later date. Philemon (Phm. 1) and his slave Onesimus (Col. 4:9; Phm. 10) were members of the early Colossian church. The mixture of Jewish, Greek and Phrygian elements in the population of the city was probably found also in the church: it would have been fertile ground for the type of speculative heresy which Paul’s letter was designed to counter. The neighbourhood was devastated by an earthquake, dated by Tacitus (Ann. 14. 27) to AD 60. There is no hint of this in the Epistle, which we must suppose was written before news of the disaster had reached Rome.”

The Dictionary of New Testament Background has the following article on Colossae, they write “Colossae was a small town in the first century a.d. located on the southern bank of the Lycus River at the foot of Mt. Cadmus (elevation, 8,435 feet) 11 miles east of Laodicea and about 15 miles south southeast of Hierapolis (Pamukkale). It was located near a major highway running through the territory of Phrygia in the Roman province of Asia (see Asia Minor). The closest town is Honaz Dagi, which is on the slopes of Mt. Cadmus in western central Turkey. According to Herodotus (Hist. 7.30), the city was the largest in the Lycus Valley in the five centuries before the Christian era. Xenophon (Anab. 1.2.6) described it as a large and prosperous city in about 400 b.c., but by the first century b.c. it had declined considerably in size and importance and was overshadowed by its closest neighbor, Laodicea. Numerous coins have been found in the area that point to the worship of the Ephesian Artemis, the Laodicean Zeus, Men, Selene, Demeter, Hygieia, Helios, Athena, Tyche, Boule and the Egyptian deities Isis and Serapis (see Religion, Greco-Roman). The makeup of the population is not certain, but Cicero indicated that in the three cities of Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colossae there were some ten thousand Jewish males (Cicero Flac. 68). By the middle of the first century a.d., the Jews of this area were so plentiful that the Roman governor, in order to finance many projects in the region, would not allow them to send money outside of the province to pay their Jerusalem temple tax. The Jewish influence in this region can also be seen in the references in the letter to the Colossians to

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circumcision (Col 2:11), keeping the sabbath (Col 2:16) and the differences between Jews and Gentiles (Col 1:27; 3:11). By the first century a.d. Colossae was overshadowed by Laodicea and was described as a smaller city by Strabo (Geog. 12.8.13). The days of its former wealth were apparently over. After a major earthquake in the Lycus Valley that destroyed Colossae and Laodicea (c. a.d. 60–64; Tacitus Ann. 14.27), Colossae was never fully rebuilt, and by the eighth century it was abandoned. The site has not yet been excavated.”

The Lexham Bible Dictionary commenting on the city writes “A city of Phrygia on the Lycus River. The letter to the Colossians was addressed to the church located there. Colossae was a city in the province of Phrygia located in the Lycus Valley within Anatolia, or Asia Minor, about 120 miles east of the major port city of Ephesus (Arnold, ZIBBC, 73). Today this is part of southwestern Turkey. In the first century AD, Colossae was a small agrarian town. However, by the 5th century BC, Colossae was a thriving economy, known especially for its unique textiles and

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wool (Moo, Colossians, 26). The first known reference to Colossae can be found in the writings of the Greek historian Herodotus, who mentions that Xerxes stopped briefly at the great city of Colossae during the Persian wars (Herodotus, The Histories: Xerxes, 7.30). Yet, the eventual demise of Colossae was linked to the construction of a trade route in the third century that went west of Colossae to Laodicea (Wilson, Biblical Turkey, 194). Eventually Laodicea became a prominent city, and Colossae turned into a rural community. Thus, in the first century Colossae was a rather insignificant city in the Roman world (Arnold, The Colossian Syncretism, 4). Colossae remains an unexcavated “tell” or mound, although a few stone steps from a small theatre are visible on the eastern side (Wilson, Biblical Turkey, 195). Paul wrote a letter to the small community of Colossae, although it’s unlikely that he personally visited the town (Col 2:1). An errant “philosophy” (Col 2:18) had arisen in the midst of the church—one that likely denied the supremacy of Christ in all matters of life (Arnold, The Colossian Syncretism, 246–309; Dunne, “The Regal Status of Christ”). Dunn suggests that the tension arose from conflict with the Jewish synagogue (Dunn, Colossians, 23–35). Colossae was a small town overshadowed by two nearby cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis. Paul mentions Laodicea and Hierapolis at the end of his letter to the Colossians (Col 4:13), which suggests a connection between the Christian communities in these cities. Colossae was located 11 miles southeast from Laodicea, which explains why Paul could end his letter to the Colossians by asking them to greet brothers and sisters from Laodicea (Col 2:15). Paul also asks them to exchange the letter he had written to them for the letter he wrote to the Laodiceans (Col 2:16).”

Date and Place of Origin

It can be determined that Paul wrote Philemon from Rome in approximately 61 or 62 A.D. while awaiting his appeal before Caesar. The burden of proof rests with an Ephesus and Caesarea origin since church tradition holds to Paul writing Philemon while under house arrest in Rome. A critical factor in a Roman origin of this epistle is that Luke is with Paul during his imprisonment (see Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24). This is supported by Acts since it makes clear since Paul’s Ephesian ministry does not occur in a ‘we’ section of Acts. The traditional view, that Paul was in Rome when he wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, is still by far the best view.

Paul had two Roman imprisonments: (1) A.D. 60-62: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon (2) A.D. 68: 2 Timothy, Hebrews. The apostle Paul

wrote Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon during his first Roman imprisonment while he was awaiting his appeal before Caesar and he was actually permitted to have his own rented quarters in Rome with a Roman soldier guarding him (See Acts 28).

The city of Rome is favored by many expositors as the place of origin for Paul’s epistle to Philemon. However, there has been debate among scholars as to where Paul was imprisoned when he wrote Philemon. Three solutions have been typically advanced: (1) Rome (2) Ephesus (3) Caesarea. The traditional answer and one that this author holds to is that Paul wrote the letter from Rome during his imprisonment there (cf. Acts 28:30).

Philemon 1, 9, 10, and 23 record Paul as a prisoner. If one compares this epistle to Colossians 4:7-17 and in particular the names, it shows that Philemon was sent from the same place as Colossians. Tychicus was entrusted with delivering the Philemon epistle and Onesimus was his companion on the journey to Colossae. This was the same Onesimus mentioned in Philemon 12.

There is literary evidence that Philemon was written from Rome. In some ancient Greek manuscripts there are several forms of a postscript to Philemon which contain the words “written from Rome.” Though this postscript is not a part of the original text, this does not mean that this information is incorrect. If Colossians is Pauline, and most scholars believe so and the evidence points to a Pauline authorship, then Philemon also must have been written at the same place and time because nearly the same coworkers are with Paul when he wrote Colossians and Philemon. Also, in support of Rome as a place of origin is that Rome was a favorite place of refuge for runaway slaves like Onesimus. They could get lost in the throngs of people that inhabited the capital of the Roman Empire. They had a good chance in this city to find work and a benefactor. They even could find a job as a “emperor slave,” which was prestigious. Also, they could find refuge in the slums of the city.

Dan Wallace writes “The traditional view that this letter was written while Paul was in a Roman prison has been assailed from two corners: some claim Ephesus is a better starting point, others suggest Caesarea. Before deciding on this issue, it must first be recognized that, on the assumption of authenticity, where Paul was when he wrote Ephesians is where he was when he wrote Colossians and Philemon. This can be seen by several pieces of evidence: (1) the commendation of Tychicus, as the bearer of the letter, found in exactly the same form in both Eph 6:21-22 and Col 4:7-8, surely indicates that he was sent with both epistles at the same time; (2) the strong verbal overlap between Colossians and Ephesians must, if authentic, indicate that the two were written at the same time; (3) Colossians is
inseparable from Philemon—that is, they must both have been sent at the same time. Hence, all three letters were written and sent at the same time. Consequently, if there is anything in either Colossians or Philemon which helps to narrow down where Paul was imprisoned at the time of writing, such would equally apply to Ephesians. A Caesarean imprisonment is improbable for two reasons: (1) Onesimus, the runaway slave, would hardly have gone to Caesarea. Not only would he not have escaped notice as easily, but he would most likely not have had very good access to Paul. In Rome, however, Paul was under house arrest and had relatively free mobility.31 (2) In Phm 22 Paul requests Philemon to prepare lodging for him, in anticipation of his release. This would hardly be the case in Caesarea, however, for Paul appealed to Caesar, prolonging his imprisonment by more than two more years. On behalf of Ephesus are two arguments (both negative in character): (1) the great distance between Rome and Colossae (1200 miles each way) suggests that Onesimus would hardly have made the journey; it would be easier for him to travel to a nearby city; (2) in Phm 22 Paul asks Philemon to prepare him lodging, suggesting that he intended on returning to Asia Minor after his release. But he had written the Romans a few years earlier of his plan on going westward, even to Spain (cf. Rom 1:10ff; 15:19ff.). It should be noted that both of these arguments only help an Ephesian imprisonment, not a Caesarean (because Caesarea is far from Asia Minor and because Asia Minor would conceivably be en route to Rome and Spain from Caesarea). In response: (1) There is just as much likelihood that Onesimus would want to travel to Rome, because it was far away as Ephesus because it was close by—especially since he robbed Philemon, giving himself travel funds.32 Not only this, but he would surely have been detected in Ephesus by other Christians, perhaps even by some of Paul’s traveling companions. But whether he would have been able to visit Paul before being detected is doubtful. (2) Paul could easily have changed his mind about going to Spain, or he might have wished to visit his friends in Asia Minor before journeying westward—especially to gain emotional strength after having suffered imprisonment for several years. Not only this, but an Ephesian imprisonment is improbable: (1) We have no positive evidence that Paul was ever imprisoned in Ephesus. (2) If the “in Ephesus” in Eph 1:1 is original, then this view is almost impossible; even if not original, there is the strong possibility that Ephesians was sent to the churches in Asia Minor (with Ephesus being the port of entry, giving cause for the traditional view). And if so, then Paul most likely was elsewhere when all three letters were sent. Both because of Paul’s known imprisonment in

30See introduction to Colossians for arguments.
31Cf. Guthrie, 577.
32Cf. Guthrie, 578.
Rome, and because of the tradition of a Roman imprisonment for these letters, the burden of proof must rest with a non-Roman origin. As we have seen, the arguments against the Roman theory are not convincing. On behalf of Rome, however, is an important internal clue: Luke is with Paul during his imprisonment (Col 4:14; Phm 24). Luke’s presence with Paul is supported by Acts while Paul was in Rome, “whereas the Ephesian ministry of Paul does not occur in a ‘we’ section and it may reasonably be doubted whether Luke was with Paul during this period.” In conclusion, the traditional view that Paul was in Rome when he wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, is still the most reasonable view.

Date of Paul’s Epistles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galatians</td>
<td>Antioch of Syria</td>
<td>40-49 after Paul’s 1st Missionary journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Thessalonians</td>
<td>Corinth</td>
<td>50-54 in Paul’s 2nd Missionary journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Thessalonians</td>
<td>Corinth</td>
<td>50-54 in Paul’s 2nd Missionary journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians</td>
<td>Ephesus</td>
<td>56, in Paul’s 3rd Missionary journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Corinthians</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>56, in Paul’s 3rd Missionary journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romans</td>
<td>Corinth</td>
<td>57, in Paul’s 3rd Missionary journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>60, Paul’s 1st Roman imprisonment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippians</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>62, Paul’s 1st Roman imprisonment</td>
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<td>Colossians</td>
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<td>Philemon</td>
<td>Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Timothy</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>63-66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Titus</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>63-66</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Timothy</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>67, Paul’s 2nd Roman imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>68-69, Paul’s 2nd Roman imprisonment</td>
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Paul’s authorship has rarely been questioned in the past. The letter obviously breathes the genuine apostle as he tenderly deals with a difficult, personal and social situation.

The letter was sent from the same place as that to Colossians and of the three possibilities—Rome, Caesarea or Ephesus—the balance of probability lies in

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33Marcion’s Prologue places Paul in Ephesus for the writing of Colossians, but it places him in Rome for the writing of Philemon. Yet, since both of these must surely have been written at the same time, Marcion can only be half right. The rest of the external testimony puts Paul in Rome for the writing of these epistles.

34Guthrie, 579.

favour of the first. The most likely placing of the two letters is fairly early in Paul’s (first) Roman imprisonment, i.e. AD 60–61.  

Peter O’Brien writes “Paul writes as a prisoner (vv 1, 9, 10, 23), and a careful comparison of the names in the epistle with those of Colossians 4:7-17 shows that this letter was sent from the same place as Colossians. Tychicus who was entrusted with this epistle had Onesimus as his companion on the journey to the Lycus valley, the same Onesimus mentioned in the letter to Philemon (v 12)...The most likely placing of the two letters is fairly early in Paul’s (first) Roman imprisonment, i.e. A.D. 60-61.”  

Barth and Blanke write “Convincing proof cannot be delivered either for Rome, for Caesarea and for Ephesus. Rome may still be preferred to the other possibilities because, just as Ephesians and Colossians are twins, so also Colossians and Philemon bear signs of stemming from the same author, the same place and situation, at about the same time.”

Occasion and Purpose

The contents of the epistle to Philemon make clear that the primary objective of the letter was Paul interceding with Philemon on behalf of the latter’s runaway slave, Onesimus. The apostle Paul is writing to his “dear friend” Philemon (verse 1) regarding a very sensitive matter, namely a slave whose name is Onesimus. While under house arrest in Rome, awaiting his appeal trial before Caesar, Paul came into contact with Onesimus. Paul informs Philemon that he led Onesimus to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (verse 10). In conformity with Roman law is sending Onesimus back to Philemon. However because he has become a believer, Paul wants him to accept back as a fellow believer (verse 16) and even suggests that he might set his slave free (verse 21).

As we noted, this epistle is not simply a personal letter from Paul to Philemon since it is also addressed to Apphia and Archippus as well (verse 2). It appears that it was also intended to be read publicly before the body of Christ. Timothy accompanies Paul (verse 1).

The brief letter of Paul to Philemon, a letter of advocacy in which Paul mediates a solution “in Christ” for the return of Philemon’s slave Onesimus, is dominated with metaphors of social relationship. The world of these metaphors is a large household established as an alternative society. Within the Roman world, the hard facts are that Philemon is a master, Onesimus is his slave (probably of high

37 O’Brien, Peter T., Word Biblical Commentary, volume 44: Colossians, Philemon; page 269; Word Books, Publisher; Waco, Texas.
standing), and Paul is a prisoner of the state, most likely detained in Rome. Within the social relations of that world, Onesimus is a debtor to his master Philemon, for Onesimus is absent without leave from his master’s household. How this circumstance came about we cannot be certain, but recent interpretation favors the view that Onesimus has sought out Paul with the intention of having Paul, a person respected by Philemon, mediate a dispute with his master. In negotiating the safe return of Onesimus, Paul invokes the image of an alternative world of relationships and values “in Christ.”

The letter is addressed to Philemon who is described as Paul’s ‘dear friend and fellow-worker’ (1). Others mentioned in the greetings are Apphia, who was probably Philemon’s wife, Archippus, Paul’s ‘fellow-soldier’ (and possibly the son of Philemon and Apphia) and the church community (ekklēsia) that assembled in Philemon’s house (2). The occasion of the letter to Philemon can be worked out from its contents, though not all the details are clear. A slave named Onesimus had wronged his owner, Philemon, who was a Christian living at Colosse (vs 1–2; cf. Col. 4:9, 17). It is not certain how Onesimus had offended but it is usually assumed on the basis of v 18 that he had stolen his master’s money and then run away. It is possible, however, that the words, ‘if he has done you any wrong or owes you anything’, simply indicate that Onesimus had been sent to fulfil some commission and had overstayed his leave. In the Roman world of Paul’s day slaves sometimes ran away. They joined groups of robbers, attempted to disappear in the subculture of large cities, tried to flee abroad and be absorbed into the work-force, or sought refuge in a temple. Onesimus came into contact with Paul, perhaps as a fellow-prisoner, who took an interest in him and this led to Onesimus’s conversion (10). The apostle clearly grew to enjoy his company (cf. v 12) and benefited from his ministry (11, 13). He dearly wished to keep Onesimus with him so that he might take Philemon’s place at his side in the service of the gospel. He had no right, however, to retain Onesimus. This would not only have been illegal according to Roman law, it would also have involved a breach of Christian fellowship between himself and Philemon. So Paul sent Onesimus back to his master Philemon together with an accompanying letter. Using gentle language and carefully chosen words Paul requested that Philemon might welcome his slave just as he would receive Paul himself (17), that is, as a ‘dear brother’ (16). He did not want the reconciliation between master and slave to collapse because of any demand for compensation, so he asked that any outstanding debt arising from Onesimus’s action might be charged to his own account. After all, did not Philemon owe his very self to Paul, since the latter was responsible for his conversion (19)? The decision was to be Philemon’s entirely, so Paul refused to command or coerce him

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in any way (14). The apostle was confident that his friend would respond in a godly manner and believed that he ‘will do even more than I ask’ (21). These words are tantalizing but as we read between the lines we conclude that the ‘more’ of which Paul speaks is Philemon’s willingness to return Onesimus to Paul for the service of the gospel (21). An alternative interpretation is that of S. C. Winter (NTS, 33 (1987), pp. 1–15), who suggests that the letter was written to the church at Colosse, not to an individual, and that Onesimus was in prison with Paul because he had been sent there by Archippus on behalf of the congregation. Paul requested that Onesimus be ‘manumitted’ (his freedom purchased) and released from his obligations in Colosse so as to remain with Paul in the work of ministry (Winter). But there are considerable difficulties with this interpretation regarding the supposed public nature of the letter, the circumstances of its composition and the nature of Paul’s request (see the Commentary below).

The occasion for writing is almost identical with the story of the epistle itself. Onesimus, a slave of Philemon, had run away, having evidently robbed his master (Phile. 18). His travels somehow brought him to Rome where, in the providence of God, he came in contact with Paul. Through this contact Paul led Onesimus to know the Savior. Then Onesimus in some way became useful to Paul (vv. 12-13). But Paul realized that Onesimus had a responsibility to Philemon and should make restitution for his thievery. Thus Paul deemed it right to return Onesimus to Philemon. Tychicus was given the responsibility of carrying Paul’s letter from Rome to the Colossians, and Onesimus evidently traveled back with him (Col. 4:7-9). In this letter to Philemon Paul explained his situation and asked Philemon to treat Onesimus not as a runaway, thieving slave, but now as a beloved brother in Christ (Phile. 15-16; cf. Col. 4:9). In so doing, the apostle gave not only some insight into the institution of slavery in the Apostolic Age but also his Christian response to it. The reality of Galatians 3:28 becomes evident here in Philemon: “There is neither … slave nor free … in Christ Jesus.” Paul also gave a brilliant cameo of gospel truth in the words, ‘Charge that to my account’ (Phile. 18, NASB).

J. Knox argues for an alternative to the traditional understanding of the background of Paul’s epistle to Philemon. He promoted the idea that this epistle was sent to Laodicea rather than to Colossae. However, he was not the first person to promote this idea. In his first edition of his “Philemon among the Letters of Paul” (1935; pages 38-47), he mentions K. G. Wieseler (Chronologie des apostolischen Zeitalters; Göttingen; 1848; pages 431ff., 450ff.) and E. J. Goodspeed (New Solutions of New Testament Problems and The Meaning of

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Ephesians; pages 6ff.; cf. J. Knox, “Philemon and the Authenticity of Colossians” pages 144-160)

This alternative view of Philemon has the following essential features: (1) Philemon succeeded Epaphras as overseer of the Lycus Valley churches and probably lived at Laodicea rather than Colossae. (2) Archippus lived at Colossae and hosted the Colossian church (Philemon 2) and owned Onesimus but was unknown to Paul. (3) Paul’s epistle to Philemon was sent with Onesimus first to Philemon in Laodicea and then to Archippus in Colossae, who, as the Onesimus’ master, was the principal addressee of the letter. Philemon was first sent with Onesimus to Philemon in order that Paul’s appeal might gain Philemon’s support. (4) Paul’s epistle to Philemon is actually “the letter from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16) and the “service” that Paul, asked Archippus to fulfill through the Colossians (Colossians 4:17) was the release of Onesimus to serve in Christian ministry.

There are several problems with this interpretation. First of all, in Philemon 2, the singular “you” in the phrase “in your house” refers to the addressee named first as the main recipient of Paul’s letter to Philemon rather than to the nearest antecedent, viz., Archippus. If this is the case, Philemon was the owner of Onesimus. Both were Paul’s converts. Also, Colossians 4:16 views the exchange of letters between Colossae and Laodicea, namely Paul’s letter addressed to the Colossians was to be read in the church of the Laodiceans and his letter addressed to the Laodiceans was to be read to the Colossian church. Furthermore, Colossians 4:17 presents a ministry that had been ongoing which was fulfilled in the church and was received from Paul or by revelation rather than through an individual, one time act of surrendering Onesimus to serve in the church. Lastly, Paul makes a strident and passionate appeal for Onesimus in Philemon. If by public reading Colossians 4:17, Paul intended to put additional pressure on the owner of Onesimus, he would have been guilty of insensitivity whereas Knox argues the master is named and indirectly requested to release his runaway slave.

Social Background

Paul’s epistle to Philemon deals with one of the most notorious institutions in the Roman Empire of the first century, namely, slavery. There were by some accounts up to sixty million slaves in the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. Many of these slaves became Christians and fellowshipped in the local assemblies with their masters.

In Paul’s day, a slave could purchase his own freedom, if he could collect sufficient funds or his master could sell him to someone who would pay the price and set him free. Redemption was a precious thing in Paul’s day.
Slavery is holding a person in servitude by violence, natal alienation and personal dishonor as the chattel of another. Slavery is neither simply the loss of freedom, nor the same as coerced labor nor equatable with loss of civil rights. Classical slavery means slavery in at least two different contexts: Greece (specifically fifth- and fourth-century B.C. Athens) and Rome (mainly of the middle republic to the end of the Principate, 200 B.C. to A.D. 235).  

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines slavery as, “the voluntary or involuntary servitude to an individual, the state, or temple that entails reduction of legal status and social status to the level of property.”

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines a slave as a “species of property; thus, he belonged to someone else.”

Encyclopedia Britannica also states that slaves were considered “movable” or “immovable” property, like real estate.

In the ancient world, slaves were objects of the law, and not its subjects. The slave much like an animal was not ordinarily held responsible for what he did. He was not personally liable for contracts. In most ancient societies, slaves had rights and there were not many that did not have any rights for slaves. There were limits in most societies on how much a slave could be abused.

 Relatives could not stand up for their rights or get vengeance for them. Slaves were deprived of personal freedom and the right to move about geographically as they desired. There were limits on their choice of occupation and sexual partners.

 There were many ways in which one became a slave in the ancient world: (1) Capture in war (2) Kidnapping on slave raiding or piracy expeditions (3) One was an offspring of a slave (4) Punishment for crimes or debt (5) Sold into slavery by parents, relatives, or spouses (6) Sold into slavery to satisfy debts (7) To escape starvation (8) Self-sale to escape destitution or gain an elite position in society.


 Nearly every society in the ancient world that practiced slavery wrote laws concerning the treatment of slaves. The Roman law of slavery was extremely elaborate.

 The master-slave relationship was the cornerstone of the law of slavery. The subordination of the slave to his owner was supposed to be complete. Some societies allowed slaves to be killed but in others that was not the case. The

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43 The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, volume IV, pg. 539
44 Encyclopedia Britannica, volume 27, page 288
Israelites, Athenians and Romans restricted the rights of slave owners to kill their human chattel.

In every ancient society, there was absolutely no sympathy or mercy extended to the slave who killed his master. In fact, Roman law stated that all slaves who lived under the same roof were to be put to death along with the slave who had murdered his master. In some societies, there were sexual relationships between master and slaves and some slave owners married their slaves. Some societies gave the slaves the ability to purchase their freedom after a period of time.

The treatment of slaves varied from society to society. Some slaves as in the Roman Empire were treated as members of the family and were employed to bring up children and to teach them. All societies had provisions for runaways. Most societies impose sanctions upon slave owners who stole the slaves of other slave owners. This was a capital offense in some societies because it involved the stealing of someone’s “property.”

Laws of manumission varied widely from society to society. Some societies as in Israel freed their slaves after a prescribed number of years. Some legal systems prescribed manumission of the slave who adopted the religion of his owner. Also, birth could be a way to freedom. Although slavery has existed almost everywhere in the world, it was extremely important in the development of two of the world’s major civilizations, Greece and Rome.

Two Types of Slavery

There have been two basic types of slavery throughout recorded history: (1) Household (2) Productive. Household or domestic slavery was the most common form of slavery. The primary function was to perform menial tasks. They would at times when needed perform tasks outside of the home such as harvesting or military service. Household or domestic slaves were often merged with the families of their owner. Boys often became adopted sons such as in Rome and girls would become concubines or wives to their owners. Productive slavery was relatively infrequent and occurred primarily in classical Greece and Rome. Productive slavery pertained to plantations and mines.

Most societies that practiced slavery extensively in the ancient world devoted much of their energies to getting and keeping slaves. Slaves composed nearly 20-30% of the total population in a “slave” owning society. Slavery had a significant impact on the society’s institutions, such as: (1) Family (2) Law (3) Economy (4) Social thought. Occupations of slaves: (1) Temple or slaves who worked in the government (Babylon and Rome) (2) Soldiers (3) Estate managers (4) Merchants (5) Shopkeepers (6) Craftsman (7) Farmers (8) Household tasks (cooking, cleaning, waiting on tables, and child-care)
The first known major society where there were slaves was in Athens, Greece. This is ironic since the Athenians were known for their strident views on personal freedom. The wars with the Persians and other surrounding nations provided the Athenians with much slave labor.

Many slaves were acquired by the Athenians through trade with non-Greek peoples. They came to rely upon the slaves from outside of Attica. One third of the population in classical Greece during the 5th-3rd centuries B.C. was enslaved. Slavery was a profitable venture in ancient Greece, as it was in most ancient societies. Many of the slaves in Athens were used to work the Laurium silver mines. Slaves were responsible for the prosperity of Athens and the leisure of the aristocrats.

Historian Michael Grant comments on this point, he writes, “Slavery seems an appallingly inhumane institution, because its essential feature is that slaves have no independence or rights or legal personalities of their own, but are the property of their masters. Slavery was a feature of every advanced ancient civilization, not only those of the Greeks and Romans. And those Greeks and Romans who played a large part in public life or made important contributions to literature and art were enabled to do so by means of the spare time, or leisure, and financial surpluses, conferred upon them by their slaves (this was the only way in which such a surplus could be acquired.”

Slavery in Israel

The Bible does not condemn slavery, but in fact condones it (Lev. 25:44). Slavery was commonly practiced in the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel was commanded by the Lord God to make slaves of those whom they conquered in battle. Under Israelite law, the length and type of service depended upon nationality, the form of servitude, and gender. For instance, Israelites who became slaves to resolve a problem with debt were to be treated as “hired workers” under the Mosaic Law and not as slaves from pagan nations.

Barth and Blanke have the following excellent comment regarding slavery in Israel, they write “How could it happen that the possession of slaves was tolerated and endorsed, perhaps even sanctified in God’s name and by his law, within in a nation whose history and faith, ethics and self-understanding were founded on liberation by its gracious Lord from Egypt, that paradigm of a ‘house of bondage’? Indeed, exploitation of the poor is radically denounced by Amos and other prophets and the book of Deuteronomy contains several very humane laws but slavery as such is never designated and condemned as a sin against God and the

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45 Michael Grant, A Social History of Greece and Rome, Chapter 6, page 92
neighbor. Only centuries after the Reformation did Jewish and Christians abolitionists take up the struggle at that front and declarations such as ‘apartheid is sin’ and similar protests against oppression and exploitation have been made only in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century. What looks like, and might be called, a paradox in the ancient and medieval Jews’ attitude (and its analogue within the Christian churches) seems to be explicable as soon as a sharp distinction is made between state and private (or house) slavery. Forced labor was imposed by e.g. Ramses II (1290-1224 B.C.E.) upon the Hebrews living in Goshen, in the northeastern Nile Delta. Such a corvée was a temporary measure taken for the erection of the state building projects, and it might be called state slavery. The same expression can be used for the status of Canaanite nations defeated by Israel during the conquest of the Promised Land, or later, e.g., by David (2 Sam 12:31). In 1 Kings 5:13-18 Solomon compelled ‘all of Israel’ to bow their neck under this yoke. Jeroboam, first as spokesman for the house of Joseph, then in the name of all northern tribes, rebelled against the corvée laid upon Israelites. He and the people he represented resisted the practice that one member of a part of God’s people did to another what a pharaoh had done to Israelite tribes in Egypt, and what liberated tribes did not mind imposing upon defeated nations. But the existence of house slaves was accepted as a simple fact. Israel as a whole, as long as it was obedient and trusted its heavenly Lord, was a kind of slave of its God: it was redeemed and liberated in order to serve God, and for the construction of, e.g., God’s house, the temple, it repeatedly, voluntarily, and even enthusiastically offered money and labor. Perhaps this was one reason the keeping of house slaves did not appear contradictory to Israel’s own history experience, and why even a slave’s work was accepted and appreciated as standing under God’s protection. At any rate, the existing biblical laws regarding slavery, as also their learned interpretations, aim at regulating and within certain limits bettering the treatment of slaves, not at every dependent person’s immediate and total emancipation.”

There were five ways in which one could become a slave Israel: (1) Those who sold themselves into slavery because of debt. (2) Those who were prisoners of war. (3) Those who were born into slavery (Gen. 17:23; Lev. 22:11) (4) Those who were sold into slavery, i.e., Joseph (Gen. 37:28, 36) (5) Those who were caught committing the crime of breaking and entering (Ex. 22:2-3). Slaves were acquired through: (1) Trade (2) Purchase (3) Payment of debt (4) Gifts (5) Birth (6) Plunder in war (7) Self determination.

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An Israelite could sell himself or herself into slavery to a fellow countryman to pay off a debt. The Lord freed Israel from bondage in Egypt to serve Him, not to serve foreign nations as slaves (Lev. 25:35-42, 55; Deut. 15:15). Israelites who had to sell themselves into slavery because of debt were a great problem in ancient Israel. In fact, David’s army was composed of individuals who were oppressed and were debt ridden (1 Sam. 22:1). Amos 2:6, 8:4 point to this wide spread problem in Israel. Nehemiah 5 describes the problem of debt-slavery in post-exilic Israel. Nehemiah required the wealthy nobles to take a public oath that they would not take advantage of the poor exiles returning to Israel from Babylon.

Famine and the king of Persia’s tax on the poor had caused many returning exiles to give their sons and daughters over to be slaves. This should have never been a problem in Israel for the Lord had made provision and foresaw in His omniscience this abuse of the rich over the poor in Israel.

The Lord had commanded that there be no interest charged to a fellow Israelite (Ex. 22:25). All Jewish slaves were to be freed on the year of Jubilee. All Jewish slaves were to serve six years and then could go free, if they desired, on the seventh year and did not have to make payment to their master (Ex. 21:2). The rich nobles in Israel were not to make slaves of their fellow countryman.

Slaves carried out: (1) Household duties (2) Farming duties (3) Young women served as concubines (4) Building projects for the state. Slaves within Israelite society, as well as in other ancient Semitic societies, were dependent and subservient. The slave was not permitted to come and go as they pleased.

Price of a Slave in Israel

The price of a slave in Israel: The average price of a slave during the third century B.C. was between 10 and 20 shekels. Joseph was sold by his brothers for 20 silver shekels (Gen. 37:28). The Mosaic Law stipulated that 30 shekels of silver were to be the compensation for a slave who had been gored to death by an ox (Ex. 21:32). Our Lord was betrayed by Judas Iscariot for 30 pieces of silver, the price of slave (Matt. 26:15). This was according to the prophecy found in Zech. 11:13.

The word shekel comes from the Hebrew word *shaqal* and means “to weigh something in the balance to measure its amount,” and commonly, “to weigh out silver or gold as payment for something.” The shekel was the common unit of weight throughout Canaan and Mesopotamia. The weight of the shekel varied according to time and place.

The temple shekel weighed approximately 10 grams and the ordinary merchant’s shekel weighed 11 1/2 to 12 grams and the heavier or royal shekel weighed approximately 13 grams. In the New Testament, the shekel was the
standard wage for a day’s labor. The value of a male or female slave in Israel as
designated by the Lord was 30 shekels of silver (Ex. 21:32).

Rights of Slaves in Israel

The Rights of Slaves in Israel: (1) To redeem themselves and work for their
freedom (2) To good and fair treatment (Lev. 25:43) (3) To justice (Ex. 21:20; Job
31:13) (4) To marry and have children (Ex. 21:5) (5) To choose to remain a
permanent slave after being set free (Ex. 21:5; Deut. 15:16) (6) To own property
and have money (Lev. 25:29) (7) To promotion (Gen. 15:2) (8) To worship God
without interference from Master (Ex. 12:44; Deut. 12:12).

Hebrew slaves had more rights: (1) They could be held for only six years (Ex.
21:2; Deut. 15:12) (2) When freed, the master had to provide animals, grain and
wine (Deut. 15:13). (3) They could not be returned to foreign owners if they ran
away (Deut. 23:15).

The rights of slaves in Israel included the privilege of observing the Sabbath
(Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Slaves could also participate in the
Passover celebration (Exodus 12:4). Hebrew slaves were to be freed after six years
of service (Exodus 21:1-4; Deuteronomy 15:12-18). If their families were brought
into slavery with them, then the families were to be set free with them.

A slave could remain a perpetual slave if the slave chose to do so (Exodus 21:5-6;
Deuteronomy 15:16-18). Female slaves were to be set free if her master had
sexually abused her and did not wish to keep her (Exodus 21:7-11). If a master had
badly injured a slave and the slave died on the same day, then master was to suffer
the death penalty (Exodus 21:20-21). A slave was to be freed if their master had
caused the permanent loss of an eye or tooth (Exodus 21:26-27).

When a slave was released in the seventh year, then the master was to provide a
parting gift for the slave such as from the flock, the threshing floor or winepress
(Deuteronomy 15:12-15). Full protection was to be provided for asylum-seeking
fugitive foreign slaves (Deuteronomy 23:16-17). All Hebrew slaves were to be
manumitted every fiftieth year in the year of Jubilee regardless of the length of
their work as slaves. During the year of Jubilee all pawned or sold fields were to be
returned to their former owners and all dispersed family members were to be
allowed to go home.

Rights of Slave Owners

Slave owners had the right: (1) To hold slaves as possessions (Lev. 25:45) (2)
To leave slaves to his inheritance (Lev. 25:46) (3) To hold as property the wife and
children of all slaves who were unmarried at the time they became a slave (Ex.
Manumission of Slaves in Israel

Slaves in Israel could be manumitted in several different ways. Manumission is the “act or process of releasing someone from slavery.” Slaves could be manumitted by: (1) Redemption (2) Elapse of time (6 years) (3) The Year of Jubilee (4) Physical disability (Ex. 21:26-27) (5) Purchasing one’s freedom through the accumulation of personal assets (Lev. 25:49)

Slavery in Greece

Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, freed many slaves after the battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C. The Athenian government employed slaves as: (1) Clerks (2) Attendants (3) Minor officials (4) Policeman. Most of the slave population was in the cities and few in the countryside. Slaves in Greece were seldom allowed to bring up children for it was cheaper to buy a slave than to rear one. Slaves were whipped if they misbehaved. He could not defend himself if he is struck by a freeman. If a slave was treated very cruelly, he could run to a temple for safety and then the master would have to sell him. When the slave was ill or in old age, his master must take care of him. He was not put on welfare. If the slave was loyal he was treated like a faithful servant or member of the family.

The slave in Greece was often allowed to go into business for himself, provided he will give his owner a percentage of his earnings. He was free from taxation and from military service. Slaves did not have any particular dress that distinguished them from freemen. They acted ordinary citizens on the streets and acted in every detail as if they were the equal of a citizen. Athens was known for its mildness to its slaves.

Historian Michael Grant quotes the comic dramatist Aristophanes on the Athenian treatment of slaves, writing, “Unrestraint on the part of slaves and resident aliens is very prevalent with the Athenians, and it isn’t permitted to beat them there, nor will a slave stand aside for you. I’ll explain what’s behind the local practice: if it were lawful for a free person to beat a slave, resident alien, or
freedman, lots of Athenians mistaken for slaves would get beaten. For the populace there is no better in its clothing than slaves and resident aliens, and its appearance is no better. If someone is amazed at this too, that they let slaves live it up and in some cases to lead lives of great splendor: this too they would seem to do on considered opinion. For where there is naval power it is necessary for slaves to work for money...And where there are rich slaves there is no longer any advantage in my slave's being afraid of you.”

Attitude towards slavery among the Greek philosophers: The philosophers and liberals of Greece openly condemned slavery, yet slavery was an essential and important part of Athenian life. Plato condemned slavery among Greeks but accepted it for barbarians who he considered to have under-privileged minds. Aristotle looked at the slave as nothing more than a mere animate tool. The average Greek looked upon slavery as essential for the maintenance of Athens, so much so that it was felt that to abolish slavery was to abolish Athens. Slave markets were common in Greece.

At Athens there was a slave market where slaves stood ready naked for inspection and to be purchased at any time. Greek traders bought slaves, as they would merchandise. Slave dealing was a flourishing business in ancient Greece. In Delos it was not unusual for a 1000 slaves to be sold in a day. After the battle of Eurymedon, 20,000 prisoners were put on the slave market to be sold as slaves. Slaves in Greece were bought for direct use or investment. A person’s poverty was exemplified by the number of slaves they possessed. For instance, a poor person would have only up to 2 slaves and a rich person, up to as many as 50.

The cognate noun of agorazo is agora meaning “marketplace.” Slaves in the ancient world were sold in the agora. This word originates from the Greeks. The agora was the center of Greek economic, social and political life of the ancient Greek cities. The name is first found in the works of Homer. It was located either in the middle of the city or near the harbor. The agora was surrounded by public buildings and by temples. Colonnades containing shops enclosed the agora. Statues, altars, trees and fountains were used to make the agora aesthetically pleasing. The classical Greeks of the fifth century B.C. regarded the agora as the center of daily life. It was the center for all types of activities: (1) Religious (2) Political (3) Judicial (4) Social (5) Commercial.

The agora was the place that the ekklesia, “assembly of the people” met to render political and judicial decisions. It was extremely important to the life of the Greek city-state. It was the place where business was transacted daily. People would buy and sell in the shops and businesses of the agora. Private disputes were settled there. The Athenian democracy rendered their decisions in the agora on

47 Michael Grant, A Social History of Greece and Rome, Chapter 6, pages 96-97
whether or not to go to war with another nation. Later these decisions were moved to the Pnyx, which was a hill to the west of the Acropolis. Meetings devoted to ostracism were held in the agora. The agora in Athens was highly developed and provided each trade and profession with its own section. Many cities had officials called agoranomoi to police the area. It was employed for theater and gymnastic performances until special buildings were erected to house these events.

In Athens respectable women were seldom seen in the agora. Men accused of murder or other crimes were forbidden to enter it before their trials. Free men went there to transact business and to talk about the latest philosophy and gossip. Trade was the soul of the Athenian economy and the agora was the place of trade.

*Slavery in the Roman Empire*

Slavery was a major institution in the Roman Empire. There had been slaves at Rome from a very early date in the Empire. Rome was exceptional in utilizing slaves. Enslavement for debt was the primary means in which Rome acquired slaves in the early days of the Republic, but as the Empire expanded so did the influx of slaves into Rome.

From the third Century B.C. onward slaves flooded into Rome from all quarters as a result of their victories in wars. For example, there were 75,000 enslaved prisoners from the 1st Punic War who came from the city of Tarentum. In the Second Punic War, 150,000 were enslaved from Epirus in 167 B.C. Almost the same number arrived from Marius’s victory over the Germans in 102-101 B.C. Nearly, half a million slaves arrived into Rome from Caesar’s Gallic Wars. Great slave markets such as Capua and Delos were set up to handle the tremendous influx of slaves into the Roman Empire. It was not unusual for 10,000 slaves to be auctioned off at Delos in a single day. These markets were also provided with slaves by pirate kidnappers who infested the Mediterranean. Every week slave dealers brought their human “merchandise” in from areas such as Africa, Spain, Gaul, Germany, the Danube, Russia, and Asia and Greece to the ports of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

Only the best qualified slaves and their children were given civic or domestic jobs. Some slaves became professional men such as: (1) Philosophers (2) Teachers (3) Artists (4) Architects. Criminals and the unfortunate were employed in the gladiatorial schools and some worked the mines and quarries.

The last two centuries B.C. saw the economies of Sicily, North Africa and Italy totally dependent on slave labor. Italy was the chief slave center until the second century A.D., but by this time the influx of slaves was drying up.

The emperor Trajan’s Dacian Wars in the years 101-106 A.D. provided the last big arrival of slaves into the Empire. There was a great distinction in Roman
society between slaves and freeman. The Roman law of persons states that all men are either free or slaves.

The Roman historian Michael Grant in his book, The World of Rome, writes that “the slave was, in principle, a human chattel which could be owned and dealt with like any other piece of property. He was at the mercy of his owner, without rights.” Although the slave was considered a “thing” or a “piece of property” he was indispensable and essential to the economic life of the Empire much like Athens, Greece.

Capital punishment such as crucifixion was employed as punishment to deal with slave rebellions in both the days of the Republic and during the days of the Emperors.

The slave’s children were all classed as illegitimate and the children of a slave woman were classed as slaves even if the father was free.

Slaves, both male and female were frequently seduced by their masters. If a slave ran away from his master he could be branded or crucified. If a slave murdered his master he was to be put to death.

Under the law of the Republic, the slave owner could: (1) Beat his slaves (2) Imprison him (3) Condemn him to fight beasts in the arena (4) Expose him to die of starvation (5) Kill him with cause or without cause.

Roman law stated that the slave had no legal rights. The slave was considered as “property” under Roman law. The slave could not: (1) Inherit property or bequeath (2) Make a legal marriage (3) Could not bring action against those who injured him.

_Treatment of Slaves in the Roman Empire_

The cruelty towards slaves is very greatly exaggerated in our society today where slavery by and large is not practiced at all. Domestic slaves were often treated as members of the family. Family life was not denied the domestic slave and on many of their tombstones there was written the words of a master who was greatly indebted to them and loved them. Will Durant relates that some epitaphs show “the most affectionate relations between masters and slaves.”

It was not unusual for slaves to risk their lives to protect their masters and many voluntarily accompanied their masters into exile and several gave their lives for their masters. Many owners freed their slaves and proceeded to marry them. Some treated them as friends such as Seneca who ate with his.

Durant also writes, “Many slaves were respected as having high cultural abilities—stenographers, research aides, financial secretaries and managers, artists, physicians, grammarians, and philosophers. A slave could in many cases go into

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48 Will Durant, Caesar and Christ, Chapter 15, page 334
business for himself, given a share of his earnings to his owner and keeping the rest as his peculium, a ‘little money’ peculiarly his own. With such earnings, or by faithful or exceptional service, or by personal attractiveness, a slave could usually achieve freedom in six years.”

The largest slave owners in the Empire were the Emperors of Rome. The households of the Emperors were being continually replenished with slaves, as was the case with their bureaucracies.

The Romans treatment of slaves in the early days of the Republican was brutal. In the days after the Republic, this attitude towards slaves softened. Slaves were treated more humanely by the time of Augustus.

The liberal ideas of the upper classes during the days of Augustus and his successors were responsible for the increased protection of slaves. The maltreatment of slaves became less frequent during the days of the Antoinine Caesars as Roman society became more affluent. For instance, during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161 A.D.) laws were enacted to punish slave owners who killed or murdered slaves.

The Emperor Hadrian (117-138 A.D.) also enacted legislation for the protection of the slave population. Hadrian ended the right of the slave owner to kill a slave without magisterial sanction. Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.) encouraged owners to bring before the courts damages sustained from their slaves rather than punish the slaves themselves. He did this so that the law would take precedence over brutality and cruelty and private revenge.

Jerome Carcopino in his work Daily Life in Ancient Rome writes of the treatment of slaves who were employed by the very rich, “In the great houses where many slaves were able specialists and some, like the tutor, the doctor, and the reader, had enjoyed a liberal education, they were treated exactly like free men” (Chapter 3, page 58).

**Contribution of Slaves to the Roman Empire**

As in Greece, slavery helped free Romans to engage in various occupations such as politics. The slave contributed greatly to both the economic and social life of the Empire. It is impossible to estimate the number of slaves in Italy or Rome at any one time. There may have been as many as 2 million or more in the reign of Augustus. They may have formed nearly one-quarter to one-third of the total population estimates the historian Michael Grant. At Rome, a quarter of the inhabitants were slaves. Many of these slaves came from Europe, Asia Minor and Syria. Romans may have averaged four or five slaves apiece according to Grant.

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49 Ibid, page 335
50 Jerome Carcopino, Daily Life in Ancient Rome, chapter 3, page 58
Slaves were employed in industry and retail trade, and many were employed by the government and performed most of the manual and clerical work. They were called “public slaves” or *servi publici*.

The price of slaves varied from 330 sesterces for a farm slave to the 700,000 ($105,000) paid by Marcus Scaurus for Daphnis the grammarian according to Will Durant. The average price was $400.

Domestic slaves were employed as: (1) Personal servants (2) Handicraftsmen (3) Tutors (4) Cooks (5) Hairdressers (6) Musicians (7) Copyists (8) Librarians (9) Artists (10) Physicians (11) Philosophers (12) Eunuchs (13) Cupbearers (14) Cripples to provide amusement.

The dress of slaves in Rome was no different than the freeman and this was for public security. This was done because the percentage of slaves far exceeded freeman in the Empire.

S.S. Bartchy provides some important information about slavery in the ancient world, he writes “Throughout history a large number of societies have chosen not to kill their vanquished enemies but to force them to serve as slaves, subjecting them to a ‘social death,’ separated from blood kin, from homeland and from legal protections enjoyed by free persons (see Patterson). The Greeks and Romans, however, independently transformed such enslavement into something original, ‘namely, an institutionalized system of large-scale employment of slave labor in both the countryside and the cities’ (Finley, 67). Scholars have identified these societies as two of only five in world history rooted in ‘slave economies,’ that is, as having developed an economy and high culture made possible by extensive use of involuntary labor (see Ste. Croix). The other three were created later in Brazil, the Caribbean and the southern United States of America. It is natural then to think that knowledge of New World slavery can provide the modern interpreter with insight into the social, economic and legal context of the early Christians. Yet such information has frequently created serious misunderstandings. Modern readers must overcome their temptation to read into any ancient Jewish, Greek or Roman text their knowledge of modern slavery. The meanings of any familiar-sounding terms can be determined only by a close investigation of the particular social systems and cultural values the early Christian writers took for granted (see Malina). Among the distinctive and often surprising features of slavery as practiced around the Mediterranean in the early centuries of our era are these: 1. An enslaved person generally could not be identified by appearance or clothing; racial or ethnic origins were not reliable indicators of social or legal status. 2. The cultural and religious traditions of slaves were usually those of their owners and other free persons. 3. Education of slaves was encouraged, enhancing their value;

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51 Ibid, page 334
some slaves were better educated than their owners. Rome’s cultural leadership in the empire largely depended on educated, foreign-born slaves who had been taken there. 4. Partially as a result, many slaves functioned in highly responsible and sensitive positions such as workshop and household managers, accountants, tutors, personal secretaries, sea captains and physicians (see Martin, 1–49). An important minority of slaves had considerable influence and social power, even over freeborn persons of lesser status than the slaves’ owners. 5. By no means were the enslaved regularly to be found at the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid. Rather those free and impoverished persons who had to seek work each day without any certainty of employment occupied the lowest level. Some of them sold themselves into slavery in order to obtain job security, food, clothing and shelter. 6. Slaves could own property, including their own slaves. They could accumulate funds that they might use to purchase their own freedom. 7. Because slaves were owned by persons across the range of economic levels, they developed no consciousness of being a social class or of suffering a common plight (see Garnsey and Saller, 109–25). Thus no laws were needed to hinder public assembly of slaves. 8. In contrast to New World slavery, ancient owners did not regard their adult slaves paternalistically; they clearly distinguished the roles of parents and of owners and felt no need to justify the institution of slavery. 9. Persons not infrequently sold themselves to pay debts, to escape poverty, to climb socially or to obtain special governmental positions (see Dio Chrysostom 15.23). 10. A large number of domestic and urban slaves, perhaps the majority, could anticipate being set free (manumitted) by age thirty, becoming a freedman or a freedwoman (see Acts 6:9, “the synagogue of the freedmen”). At any moment innumerable ex-slaves throughout the empire were proof that slavery need not be a permanent condition (see Bradley 1987, 81–112). And even ancient Greek commentators expressed astonishment that slaves freed by Roman citizens usually became Roman citizens themselves at their manumission. Notable in Acts 23–25 is the Roman governor Marcus Antonius Felix, who had been a slave until Antonia, the emperor Claudius’s mother, manumitted him. Slavery then was a fundamental aspect of daily life in the early Roman Empire, and virtually no one questioned its morality. Roman jurists and philosophers, some of whom noted that holding human beings as slaves was contra naturam, seemed never to have doubted the practical necessity or moral appropriateness of this practice. Not even the Stoic-Cynic philosopher Epictetus, who was raised and educated in slavery, regarded release from legal slavery as a desirable goal in itself. For him, as for the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, a person’s achieving inner freedom from
domination by social conventions, life’s circumstances and one’s passions was far more important than any change in one’s social-legal status.”

Runaway Slaves

In the ancient world, runaway or fugitive slaves were outlaws. With the exception of great slave revolts, runaway slaves did not band together. However, fugitive slaves on occasion came into contact with a fellow runaway but in general fugitive slaves were shunned by people out of fear of the consequences of harboring them. Harbor ing fugitive slaves was prohibited by Roman law in both the East and West.

Runaways did have options in that they could join bandits or they could attempt to disappear or mixing in with the people of great seaport cities or large cities such as Rome, Corinth and Ephesus.

There were many reasons why a slave would flee his master. He or she might have been cruelly treated by their master. They could have been victims of torture or were maimed by their owner. They also could have desired to return to their homeland.

The fugitive slave would make every attempt to distance himself from his master. Even if they did depart the province in which their master lived, the fugitive had no assurance that they would not be caught and severely punished. The runaway’s name, accent, language and conduct could betray them and cause them not to be accepted by the local population. The risk of being identified was great for the fugitive. They were often hungry and exposed to the elements. Furthermore, the fugitive’s wages if he could find a job would be below the minimum wage because of the many unemployed free persons and freedmen who lived in poverty in the Empire. A fugitive would always feel hunted either by his master, the state or local police or professional slave catchers. The runaway would always be worried about capture.

However, despite these precarious circumstances, there were a couple of ways in which the fugitive’s flight could be successful. First of all, they could seek asylum in the house of a free person who had an outstanding reputation in the local community. Or, they could find asylum in the environs of a temple. These two options are related to the situation with Onesimus in Paul’s epistle to Philemon;

Barth and Blanke write “A calculating fugitive who had met friends of his master in a personal way was well advised to appeal for temporary asylum at the door of an acquaintance of his patron. If possible, the slave would turn to a person of relatively high social standing. Roman law conceded that in this case the slave

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was not guilty of flight (fuga) in the full legal sense—if only the private asylum giver carefully examined the complaints of this slave and sent him back to his master, usually with a written request or recommendation how the prodigal should be received and treated. The role of the asylum giver as an intercessor on behalf of a fugitive slave is beautifully exemplified not only by Paul’s Epistle to Philemon but also by two letters, written about 110 C.E. from Rome, by Pliny the Younger. This high state official wrote letters in favor of a freedman who had run away from his patron. If both the fugitive and his protector wanted to stay together, the latter could offer compensation and the owner’s agreement provided, keep the slave for himself for lifelong service. Under given circumstances the asylum giver also was entitled to sell the slave on the market. For this reason, a slave’s flight to the house of a free person did not mean certain freedom; rather it was an act of voluntarily seeking a new and better master. Philo warmly recommends offering asylum but he aware that a ‘change of masters’ rather than freedom is actually gained by fleeing slaves. When however, the fugitive sought refuge at the home of a free person not befriended with his or her master or of a friend who proved unable or unwilling to intercede, a bad situation ensued: neither the sacred duties and rights of hospitality at one’s hearth nor the ancestor lares of the house protected the slave from forcible seizure by the owner, his delegates or the city police; in addition, the host had to suffer grave legal and financial repercussions. Only Jewish law formed an exception to this general rule: according to Deut 23:15-16, an Israelite was forbidden by God to turn away or to extradite a runaway slave; the fugitive was entitled to choose a place and settle down near the residence of the asylum giver, and was not to be oppressed.”

If a fugitive slave decided to return to his master voluntarily because of the hardship they endured while on the run or as a result of capture, their fate was up entirely to their master. They could be whipped, or beaten until they were crippled. They might be branded on their arms or head. Or, the skin under their feet might be burned off by glowing iron plates. A metal collar with their name and address might fixed around their neck like a dog here in the twenty-first century. They even could be killed by the owner as an example to the rest of the slaves in his household. If the slave owner decided to sell the fugitive slave, they would have to guarantee the buyer for a particular period of time, that the slave would not runaway. However, if the fugitive slave had in fact found in refuge with a benevolent and wealthy or high standing friend of their master’s house and was voluntarily returned carrying an intercessory letter, there was a distinct possibility of a gracious and kind reception by the owner. This example is found in Paul’s

epistle to Philemon where he interceded on behalf of Philemon’s runaway slave Onesimus.

Laws of Manumission

In the Roman Empire the only legal avenue available to a slave to pursue his freedom was manumission. Legal manumission could come about when the existence of a city or state was threatened by a foreign army. So in order to defeat the enemy, slaves would be given their freedom for fighting in the army. The legal emancipation of a slave took place in the master’s home according to family and private rights. However, state and corporation laws required official ceremonies. During both these periods, there was the sacral manumission, which was protected by the *ius sacrum* or religious law.

As the treatment of slaves became more relaxed so did the laws of manumission. The manumission of slaves occurred frequently during the days of the Emperors though Augustus did enact legislation to curb the liberality of many slave owners. He fixed eighteen as the minimum age at which a master could exercise his right to free a slave, and thirty as the minimum age at which a slave could be manumitted.

Jerome Carcopino writing on the topic of manumission, states, “Rome, alone of all cities of antiquity, has the honor of having redeemed her outcasts by opening her doors to them. It is true that the freed slave remained bound to his former master, now his *patronus*, sometimes by services due or by pecuniary indebtedness, and always by the duties implied by an almost filial respect (*obsequium*). But once his emancipation or *manumissio* had been duly pronounced, whether by a fictitious statement of claim before the *praetor* (*per vindicate*) or by the inscription of his name on the censor’s register (*censu*) at the solemn sacrifice of the *lustrum*, or more commonly in virtue of a testamentary clause (*testamento*), the slave obtained by the grace of his master, living or dead, the name and status of a Roman citizen. His descendants of the third generation were entitled to exercise the full political rights of citizenship and nothing further distinguished them from *ingenui*. In the course of time the formalities of manumission were relaxed, and custom, superseding law, substituted simpler and speedier methods of procedure for the manumission rites: a mere letter from the patron or a verbal declaration made, for instance, in the course of some festivity where the guests were requested to serve as witnesses. The caprice of fashion began to take hand, and it seemed as if some masters took a pride in multiplying the number of manumitted slaves round them.”

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54 Jerome Carcopino, Daily Life in Ancient Rome, chapter 3, pages 59-60
Barth and Blanke state that there were “four ways of protest against the institution of slavery and the daily sufferings of a slave can be distinguished: (1) the frequently dearly paid-for escapist way, that is, flight from the master; (2) the violent alternative of murder, revolt and open warfare; (3) the intellectual, spiritual and moral way of philosophical consolation to which an increasing aversion of public opinion against slavery corresponds; (4) the formation of slave-free communities and the way of prayer-if by prayer is meant more than wishful thinking or turning away from faithful and courageous activity. Each of these methods in its own way can throw light on the content of the Letter to Philemon in some detail.”

There are several reasons that could motivate a slave owner to give up a living part of his private property. First of all, At times it was cheaper and less risky to employ free labor than to give, especially in a bad economy, shelter, food, clothing, medical care to slaves. If there were problems with discipline and flight, this could drive up a slave owner’s costs as well. Debt slaves had to be released by the slave owner when the debt and expenses incurred for maintenance had been repaid. Sometimes slave owners released out of spite in order to get back a relatives or creditors. Slaves were released as a reward for outstanding service. If a slave fell ill or was very old, the slave owner would often release that slave. If a female slave increased her master’s estate by bearing many children, she was often rewarded with her freedom. Interestingly, at the death of the master, a female slave could be classified as a wife or a concubine. She and her children could be declared by the state as legal heirs and set free. A master would often give freedom to a slave who had become a dear friend to him or was an extremely important and productive member of the household during his lifetime. Slave owners would often times release slaves in order to receive recognition and applause from their community for magnanimity. If a slave was lazy and unproductive, slave owners would release the slave.

During the first century, Greek and Roman as well as Eastern traditions were still alive or were maintained secretly in Greece, the West and Asia Minor despite the fact that Roman laws passed under the emperors were to determine everything that was considered legal throughout the Empire.

Manumission occurred more frequently in Italy than in Greece where the difference between a slave and freedman was not as noticeable. Those freed were still called slaves and there was no citizenship for those manumitted. However, in Rome, the Twelve Table Law of the fifth century B.C.E. the patron originally retained some rights over the slave who had been manumitted. In subsequent

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centuries, manumission could even be revoked. However, a freedman had the right of appeal with the prefect if was unjustified.

An informal manumission was performed either by testament or by inviting the slave to share in table or festival community or in a circle of friends whose role was to be witnesses to the manumission. This act was tax-free and did not make a freedman a Roman citizen.

There was also the *manumissio censu* which existed until 50 C.E. and was valid during eighteenth months within each five-year period. In this situation, a slave could become free and had the right of a Roman citizen, if he could justify his claim to have been born a free citizen, and that he was supported by his master in his desire to be free, and was accepted by the civil authorities for inscription in the voter’s register.

During the days of the apostle Paul in the first century, the safest way to grant and receive freedom was either by testament or by a letter written to the slave, who lived at another place than his owner. This letter had to have a proper formula meaning that the wording could not be “I wish to be free” but rather “so and so is free” or “I order that he be free.”

*Manumissio vindicta* occurred when a high Roman state official gave his consent to the master’s wish and would have to touch the slave with a staff and declare him free in the presence of the master. There had to be a contract with a patron, which required specific payments as well as the listed the works of the slave being manumitted. This contract had to be signed of course and required a tax to be paid. The freedman would receive Roman citizenship in this instance but in a limited sense. However, the patron would still remain the manumitted slave’s protector and representative during major litigation but did not possess power of the freedman’s life. The manumitted slave would often adopt the name of his former master in order to not call attention to his former status of a slave.

In Asia Minor, the features of manumission were based upon Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian as well as Jewish legal traditions and customs. For instance, a slave could be freed along with his wife and children when he offered to his owner another slave, a house, cattle or land as his substitute. This transaction would take place at the city gate. The master would say to the slave being manumitted “You are cleansed.” The freedom of the manumitted slave would be guaranteed by the protection of a deity or they were declared a gift to a god or a goddess, thus preventing any revocation taking place. Temples played a major role in the manumission of slaves in both the East and West portions of the Roman Empire.

Inscriptions reveal that the emancipation of a slave in a temple was in fact a business transaction entrusted to the temple. The slave could not legally or commercially act on his or her own behalf. They were encouraged to flee to a temple, which offered asylum. The priests could not be arbiters or intercede for the
runaway slave. However, they mediated many times by negotiating between the two parties. The transaction was worked out by the priests and/or businessmen whose area expertise was working out agreements between the runaway and the owner. There was a contract between the three parties: Apollo, the slave’s legitimate owner and of course the slave. This contract was validated and published by engravings on stone. This was called an “intrustment sale” in business and legal terminology. The temple served as the bank. They would of course ask for payment of a fee by the slave and/or the patron. This served as a substitute for a tax payment to the city treasury. This type of arrangement was much better for the manumitted slave in that he or she would enjoy greater freedom than if their freedom was procured through informal, formal or state manumission. They had access to courts and could represent themselves. Both manumitted female and male slaves could possess private property without fear of it ever being seized when employing the services of the Apollo temple. They could choose their own occupations and were free to move about wherever they liked.

A slave’s friends, or relatives or associations would have to put up the money for the cost of manumission unless it was defrayed out of the slave’s savings. This of course meant that the manumitted slave was indebted to those who put up the money for them. Services were to be rendered by the manumitted slaves on behalf of the benefactor.

Barth and Blanke write “In summary, usually manumission meant access to a liberty fettered by so many strings and having its wings so drastically clipped that its effect was highly ambiguous, if not thoroughly undesirable, unpleasant, and miserable. This may have been one of the reasons why in the antique world slavery was neither seriously limited nor brought to an end by individual or mass manumissions. In fact, enfranchisement could at best turn out to be a slightly milder form of slavery, in the East and the West. The actual end of the ancient forms of institutional slavery was ushered in by economic and political, juridical and ideological changes.”

Theological Foundation of Manumission

The apostle Paul is in essence asking Philemon to model redemption in a social context (15-16). Put briefly, “Forgive one another even as God in Christ has forgiven you.”

The apostle Paul’s appeal in his epistle to Philemon with regards to freeing his slave Onesimus is based upon his understanding of the doctrine of redemption and revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures as well as the revelation he received from the Holy Spirit regarding the redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit reminds Israel in the Old Testament that they were slaves in Egypt and yet God delivered them from this cruel bondage. The purpose of this freedom was so that Israel could serve God rather than Pharaoh or the gods they worshipped in Egypt.

“Redemption” refers to that aspect of Christ’s finished work on the Cross—that “purchased” all of humanity out of the slave market of sin. It is appropriated through the non-meritorious decision to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. Redemption is one of the three major doctrines of Soteriology: (1) Redemption: inward (2) Reconciliation: manward (3) Propitiation: Godward.

The doctrine of redemption refers to the fact that Jesus Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths on the cross were a substitutionary ransom for the benefit of each and every member of the human race. These unique substitutionary deaths redeemed the entire human race out from the slave market of sin in which each and every member of the human race was born physically alive but spiritually dead.

There are many references in the New Testament to the Lord Jesus Christ “purchasing” the entire human race out of the slave market of sin by means of His voluntary, substitutionary spiritual and physical deaths on the Cross (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28; Acts 20:28-29; Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:20; 7:23; Galatians 3:13-14; 4:4-6; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 Timothy 2:1-6; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 9:11-15; 1 Peter 1:17-19; 2 Peter 2:1; Revelation 5:9; 14:1-5).

The New Testament teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ is the promised redeemer of the entire human race. He is mankind’s kinsman-redeemer. The Lord is the redeemer of Israel (Ps. 78:35; Isa. 43:14; 44:24; 49:7; 54:5, 8; 60:16). He is redeemer of the Church (1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7, 14; Col. 1:14; Titus 2:14).

A kinsman-redeemer must be related to the one who is being redeemed and must be able to afford the ransom price and thus fulfill its righteous demands. Our Lord fulfilled this in His incarnation by becoming true humanity. As our kinsman-redeemer, our Lord had to be like us. The second person of the Trinity became a man (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 1:1).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only redeemer of mankind and the only sacrifice that God will accept (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6). He is the only one qualified to be mankind’s redeemer due to the fact that He is impeccable (1 Pet. 1:19).
The doctrine of the kinsman-redeemer originates in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word in the Old Testament for Redeemer is *goel*. Kinsman redemption was of persons, estates, and inheritance (Lev. 25:25, 48; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:7, 11, 14). The Lord Jesus Christ is a type of kinsman-redeemer in that He became like one of us-human. He was able to afford and pay the ransom price which was His substitutionary spiritual and physical deaths, and was also willing to pay the ransom price.

Christ as the kinsman-redeemer fulfills the type of being willing to redeem. The kinsman-redeemer type states that the redeemer: (1) Must be a kinsman or related by blood (Lev. 25:48-49; Ruth 3:12-13; Heb. 2:14-15) (2) Must be able to pay the redemption price (Ruth 4:4-6; cf. Jer. 50:34; John 10:11, 18) (3) Must be able to pay the righteous demands (Lev. 25:27; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:18-19) (4) Must be “willing” to pay the redemption price (John 10:18).

Romans 3:24 teaches that justification is a gift of God’s grace and is made possible by the work of redemption that Jesus Christ accomplished with His voluntary, substitutionary spiritual death on the Cross.

**Romans 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (NASB95)**

“Through the redemption” is composed of the preposition *dia*, “through” and the articular genitive feminine singular form of the noun *apolutrosis*, “the redemption.”

The noun *apolutrosis*, which means, “to buy back a slave thus making him free by payment of a ransom, the act of release or state of being resulting in release or redemption” (Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7; 1:14; 4:30; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15; 11:35).


In Romans 3:24, the preposition *dia*, “through” is employed with the genitive form of the noun *apolutrosis*, “redemption” as a marker of the means by which makes another event possible. Therefore, it indicates that redemption is the means which makes possible the justification of the sinner who exercises faith in Jesus Christ.

The noun *apolutrosis* functions as a “genitive of means” indicating the “instrumentality” or “means” by which God declares a sinner justified. Therefore, as a “genitive of means” the noun *apolutrosis* indicates that the redemption is “the means, which makes possible for God to declare the sinner justified.
Where the instrumental of means *charis*, “*grace*” answers the question as to “why” or on “what basis” God can declare the sinner justified, the genitive of means *apolutrosis*, “*redemption*” answers the question as to “how” God can justify the sinner.

Where the instrumental of means *charis*, “*grace*” indicates that God’s grace is the “basis” in which He can declare the sinner justified, the genitive of means *apolutrosis*, “*redemption*” indicates the “means” by which He can do so. This is not a “genitive of agency” even though *apolutrosis* is the object of the preposition *dia*, which ordinarily indicates “intermediate agency” with the genitive case. The reason for this is that the noun *apolutrosis* does not signify a personal agent by whom the action in view is accomplished.

The definite article preceding the noun *apolutrosis* is “*kataphoric*” meaning that it is pointing to something in the text that immediately follows. The “*kataphoric*” article before the noun *apolutrosis* is anticipatory and is followed by a phrase that qualifies for the reader who accomplished this redemption for the sinner so that he might be declared justified by God.

“In *Christ Jesus*” is composed of the preposition *en*, “*in*” and the dative masculine singular form of the proper name *Christos*, “*Christ,*” which is followed by the dative masculine singular form of the proper name *Iesous*, “*Jesus.*”

The proper name *Christos* is a technical word designating the humanity of our Lord as the promised Savior for all mankind who is unique as the incarnate Son of God and totally and completely guided and empowered by the Spirit as the Servant of the Father.

The word denotes the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth, thus He is the Deliverer of the human race in 3 areas through His death, resurrection, ascension and session: (1) Satan (2) Cosmic System (3) Old Sin Nature.

The word *Christos* also signifies the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth who is the God-Man and signifies His 3-fold office: (1) Prophet (2) Priest (3) King.

The Lord’s Messiahship has a 4-fold significance: (1) Separation unto God. (2) Authorization from God. (3) Divine enablement. (4) The coming Deliverer.

*Christos* signifies that Jesus of Nazareth served God the Father exclusively and this was manifested by His execution of the Father’s salvation plan which was accomplished by His voluntary substitutionary spiritual death on the Cross. The word signifies that Jesus of Nazareth has been given authority by God the Father to forgive sins, give eternal life, and authority over all creation and every creature as a result of His execution of the Father’s salvation plan. It signifies that Jesus of Nazareth was perpetually guided and empowered by God the Holy Spirit during His 1st Advent. Lastly, *Christos* signifies that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised deliverer of the human race from the bondage of Satan, his cosmic system and the old Adamic sin nature.

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This word contains the figure of “metonymy of the cause” where the Person of Jesus Christ is put for His substitutionary spiritual death on the Cross, which redeemed mankind out of the slave market of sin.

The preposition *en* is a marker of means indicating that the Lord Jesus Christ and His substitutionary spiritual death on the Cross was the “instrument” or “means” that God the Father employed to redeem mankind out of the slave market of sin. Therefore, the proper name *Christos* functions as a “dative instrumental of means” indicating that substitutionary spiritual death of Jesus Christ on the Cross was the “instrument” or “the means” that God the Father used to redeem mankind out of the slave market of sin. Thus, we will translate the preposition *en*, “by means of” and the proper name *Christos*, “spiritual death of Christ.”

“Jesus” is the dative masculine singular form of the proper name *Iesous*, which refers to the impeccable human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. This word functions as a “dative of simple apposition” meaning that it stands next a noun in the same case and clarifies who is mentioned. Therefore, the proper name *Iesous*, “Jesus” stands in apposition to the proper noun *Christos*, “Christ” and clarifies for the reader that Jesus is the Christ.

Since there were many in the first century who claimed to be the Messiah, the Christ, Paul clarifies for us who He is, namely, Jesus of Nazareth.

*Christos*, “Christ” precedes *Iesous*, “Jesus” emphasizing that redemption was accomplished by the Lord Jesus functioning in His role as the Savior of all men as denoted by the former.

The impeccable human nature of the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ accomplished the work of redeeming mankind out of the slave market of sin since deity can never die a spiritual death, only a human being can. The spiritual death of the impeccable human nature of Jesus Christ redeemed the entire human race out of the slave market of sin in which they were born physically alive but spiritually dead and yet qualified for God’s grace, which is for the undeserving.

1 Timothy 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. (NASB95)

“Who gave Himself as a ransom for all” is composed of the articular nominative masculine singular aorist active participle form of the verb *didomi* (δίδωµι) (thee-though-me), “given” and the dative third person masculine singular form of the reflexive pronoun *heautou* (ἑαυτοῦ) (owf-too), “Himself” and the
The accusative neuter singular form of the noun *antilutron* (ἀντίλυτρον) (ahn-dee-lee-trone), “as a ransom” and the preposition *huper* (ὑπέρ) (ee-perr), “on behalf of” and the genitive masculine plural form of the adjective *pas* (πᾶς), “of all.”

The verb *didomi* means “to give” in the sense of dedicating oneself for a specific purpose of canceling a debt on someone’s behalf. Here it is used of the Lord Jesus Christ dedicating Himself to the specific purpose of canceling the sin debt of the entire human race.

The aorist tense of the verb is a “constative” aorist describing in summary fashion the period of time when Jesus Christ was on the cross and suffered both a spiritual and physical death. The former cancelled the debt of mankind with respect to personal sins whereas the latter cancelled the debt of mankind with respect to the sin nature, which resides in the genetic structure of mankind (cf. Genesis 3:19; Romans 6:6). The active voice of the verb indicates that the Lord Jesus Christ as the subject performed the action of giving Himself for the specific purpose of canceling the sin debt of the entire human race. The verb functions as a substantive participle as indicated by the definite article preceding it, which functions as a substantiver meaning that it converts the participle into a substantive. Therefore, this can be reflected by translating the article with a relative pronoun “who.” The word also functions as a nominative subject.

The reflexive pronoun *heautou* refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is used to highlight the participation of the subject, in the verbal action, as indirect object. Its force is frequently to indicate that the subject is also the object of the action of the verb or in other words, it reflects back on the subject. Therefore, the reflexive personal pronoun *heautou* means “Himself” and emphasizes the action of Jesus Christ giving Himself in the sense of dedicating Himself for the specific purpose of solving the human race’s problem of the sin nature and personal sins. The word denotes that the Lord dedicated Himself to the Father’s will in order to provide the offer of salvation for the entire human race. It also indicates that the Lord dedicated Himself to deliver the human race from the sin nature, personal sins, spiritual and physical death, condemnation from the Law, Satan and his cosmic system and eternal condemnation.

The word emphasizes the voluntary nature of Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths on the cross. Our Lord’s spiritual and physical deaths on the cross were “voluntary” in that He “chose” to suffer these deaths in order to solve the human race’s problem with sin. He also chose to suffer in order to accomplish the Father’s will and provide salvation for the entire human race. These deaths were also self-sacrificial in nature in that the Lord was willing to deny self in order to serve the Father and the human race and come to the aid of the human race to deal with their sin problem.
Heautou functions as the “object” in an object-complement double accusative construction. The accusative form of the noun antilutron, “as a ransom” functions as the “complement” in this object-complement double accusative construction. This means that the noun antilutron, “as a ransom” is complementing the accusative form of the pronoun heautou, “Himself” in that it predicates or affirms something about it, namely that Jesus Christ gave Himself as a ransom.

The word antilutron does not appear in classical Greek or the Septuagint and only once in the Greek New Testament, namely here in 1 Timothy 2:6. However, the combination of the anti and lutron does appear in other literature (Josephus, Antiquities 14.7.1). It also occurs in Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:28. The combination of anti and lutron in these two passage describes Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths as a substitutionary ransom on behalf of the entire human race.

In 1 Timothy 2:6, the noun antilutron means “substitute-ransom” and like Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:28, it describes Jesus Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths on the cross as a substitutionary ransom for the benefit of each and every member of the human race. These unique substitutionary deaths redeemed the entire human race out from the slave market of sin in which they were born physically alive but spiritually dead.

The noun antilutron functions as the “complement” in a object-complement double accusative construction. This means that it is complementing the accusative form of the pronoun heautou, “Himself” in that that it predicates or affirms something about it, namely that Jesus Christ gave Himself as a ransom.

The Human Race is Enslaved to Sin

The Bible teaches that each and every member of the human race is a sinner by nature as well as by practice.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins. (NASB95)

Galatians 3:22 But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. (NASB95)

The Bible teaches that every person born into the world without exception received the imputation of Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden and the nature of Adam.

This nature is always disobedient to God and making them all physically alive but spiritually dead, having no capacity whatsoever to have a relationship with God.
The first man, Adam, brought sin and death into the human race resulting in a curse whereas the “Last Adam,” Jesus Christ, brought life and blessing to the human race and so therefore, the entire human race boils down to these two men.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (NASB95)

Romans 5:12 Therefore, based on this (principle), just as, through one man, the sin nature entered into the human race so that spiritual death entered through this sin nature. Thus, in this manner, spiritual death spread to each and every member of the human race without exception because each and every member of the human race sinned (the moment Adam sinned). 13 For you see, prior to the giving of the Law, personal sin was habitually taking place among the individual members of the human race however personal sin is never, as an eternal spiritual truth, charged to one’s account while the Law does not exist. 14 Yet, in spite of this, spiritual death reigned as king from the fall of Adam to the giving of the Law to Moses, specifically, over those who had not sinned according to the same exact transgression committed by Adam, who is, as an eternal spiritual truth, an illustration of the One destined to come. 15 However, on the other hand, absolutely not like this transgression is, as an eternal spiritual truth, also, in the same way, the gracious act. For if and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument that by means of this transgression committed by the one, the entire human race died. Of course, we know this is true. How much more then has the grace originating from God and the gracious gift on the basis of grace, which is specifically, on the basis of the obedience of the one Man, who is Jesus, who is the Christ been generously and graciously offered to the entire human race. 16 In fact, the condemnation through the one who sinned is absolutely not, as an eternal spiritual truth, like the gift itself. On the one hand the verdict arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation while on the other hand, the gracious act arose from innumerable transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if, and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument that by means of the transgression committed by the one, spiritual death reigned as king through this one. Of course, we know this is true. Then, how much more those who do receive His transcendent grace, specifically, the gracious gift, which is His righteousness, will, as a certainty, reign as kings by means of life through the One, who is Jesus, who is the Christ. 18 Therefore, as previously stated, just as through the one who committed the transgression resulted in condemnation affecting each and every member of the human race without exception in the same way also through the One who committed the righteous act resulted in the basis for the offer of justification, which produces (eternal) life, affecting each and every member of the human race without exception. 19 For you see,
just as through the one man’s disobedience, the entire human race has been rendered sinners in the same way also through the One’s obedience, many will, as a certainty, be rendered righteous. 20 Now, the Law was an addendum in order that the transgression might increase but where personal sin increased, grace infinitely abounded. 21 In order that just as, the sin nature reigned as king in the realm of spiritual death in the same way, also grace would reign as king through righteousness resulting in eternal life through Jesus, who is the Christ, who is our Lord. (Author’s translation)

Because of the imputation of Adam’s original sin to the genetically formed old sin nature, every member of the human race is born physically alive but spiritually dead. Adam’s original sin plus Adam’s sin nature equals “spiritual death,” which means that every member of the human race is separated from God and has absolutely no capacity to have a relationship with God who is holy. This is what we call in theology “real spiritual death” meaning that Adam’s original sin is imputed to the genetically formed old sin nature, thus, the need for everyone to become born-again by believing on the Lord Jesus. The Lord taught in John 8:34 that the human race is enslaved to sin and that only He could set them free.

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 35 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (NASB95)

The book of Genesis and the book of Romans both teach that the sin nature entered the human race through Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden when he disobeyed the divine prohibition to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The apostle Paul in Romans 5:12-21 gives us an extensive treatment of the origins of the sin nature and its consequences and how God has dealt with it.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. (NASB95)

The prepositional phrase “through one man” is composed of the preposition dia, “through” and the genitive masculine singular form of the cardinal number heis, “one,” which is followed by the genitive masculine singular form of the noun anthropos, “man.”

This prepositional phrase parallels the prepositional phrase that appears at the end of Romans 5:11, “through whom we have now received this reconciliation.”

The noun anthropos signifies a member of the human race without reference to sex or racial background and is equivalent to “a person.”

The cardinal number heis functions as an adjective modifying the noun anthropos, thus the word is describing a particular human being.
The genitive expression *henos anthropou*, “one man” is an obvious reference to the first man, Adam, as indicated in that Paul states in Romans 5:12 that sin entered the world through this one man, which Genesis 3:1-14 identifies as Adam.

The preposition *dia* is used with the genitive form of these two words as a marker of personal intermediate agency. This indicates that the first man, Adam, was the personal intermediate agency by whom the first act of sin entered the world. Although, Adam’s wife actually committed the first sin, Adam is mentioned here since he was in authority over his wife and thus responsible for his wife.

“Sin” is the articular nominative feminine singular form of the noun *hamartia*, which refers to the sin nature that through the function of human volition produces personal sins.

The noun *hamartia* is not in the plural but rather in the singular and is articular indicating the sin nature is in view rather than personal sins. In other words, the word in the singular emphasizes sin as an entity and not sins in general. The noun refers to the inherent propensity in mankind to commit acts of mental, verbal and overt acts of sin.

In fact, the sin nature is being personified as indicated by the fact that Paul teaches that sin “reigns” (5:20; cf. 6:13-14), it can be “obeyed” (6:16-17), it pays wages (6:23), it seizes opportunities (7:8, 11), it “deceives” and “kills” (7:11, 13).

“Personification” is the ascribing of human characteristics or actions to inanimate objects or ideas or to animals. Paul is ascribing the human actions of reigning, obeying, paying wages, seizing opportunities, deceiving and killing to the sin nature.

In Romans 3:9 and 20, the noun *hamartia* is also used with reference to the sin nature.

**Romans 3:9** What shall we conclude then? Are we (Christians) as an eternal spiritual truth, superior? By no means, absolutely not! Since, we have already previously indicted both Jew and Greek, with the result that each and every one is under the power of the sin nature. (Author’s translation)

**Romans 3:20** Because each and every member of sinful humanity will never be justified in His judgment by means of actions produced by obedience to the Law for through the Law there does come about an awareness of the sin nature. (Author’s translation)

Now, Romans 1:18-3:20 teaches that the each and every member of the human race without exception, both Jew and Gentile are sinners by practice. In Romans 5:12-21, Paul teaches that they are also sinners by nature due to the fact that they are under both the “federal” and “seminal” headship of Adam.

Romans 5:12-21 and other passages of Scripture teach that every person born into the world without exception received the imputation of Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden and the nature of Adam. This nature of Adam is always
disobedient to God and making them all physically alive but spiritually dead, having no capacity whatsoever to have a relationship with God.

Romans 8:8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (NASB95)

The first man, Adam, brought sin and death into the human race resulting in a curse whereas the “Last Adam,” Jesus Christ, brought life and blessing to the human race and so therefore, the entire human boils down to these two men.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 15:45 So also it is written, “The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.” The last Adam {became} a life-giving spirit. (NASB95)

Romans 5:12 teaches that because of the imputation of Adam’s original sin to the genetically formed old sin nature, every member of the human race is born physically alive but spiritually dead. This is why David writes that he was brought forth in iniquity and sin his mother conceived him.

Psalm 51:1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. (NASB95)

Adam’s original sin plus Adam’s sin nature equals “spiritual death,” which means that every member of the human race is separated from God and has absolutely no capacity to have a relationship with God who is holy.

Therefore, in Romans 5:12, the noun *hamartia* is in the singular referring to the old Adamic sin nature.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. (NASB95)

“Entered” is the third person singular aorist active indicative form of the verb *eiserchomai*, which is used in relation to the sin nature and means, “to enter” indicating that the sin nature “entered” into the human race through Adam’s act of disobedience. The fact that the sin nature is said to have “entered” the human race implies that sin was in existence prior to Adam’s act of disobedience. Of course, Satan is the first of God’s creatures to sin against Him (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-18).

“Into the world” is composed of the preposition *eis*, “into” and the articular accusative masculine singular form of the noun *kosmos*, “the world.”

In Romans 5:12, the noun *kosmos* refers to the inhabitants of the earth arranged in tribes and nations or peoples or in other words, the human race (Acts 17:26;
John 3:16; 1 Cor. 4:9; 1 John 2:2; 2 Pet. 2:5). Therefore, Paul is saying that the sin nature entered the human race through the personal intermediate agency of Adam.

*Genesis 3*

Genesis 3 records the account of Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden when he disobeyed the Lord’s prohibition to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Consequently, he entered into “real spiritual death” and acquired a sin nature, which resided in the genetic structure of his physical body. This sin nature he passed down to his progeny through sex.

The introduction of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil appears in Genesis 2:9.

*Genesis 2:9* Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (NASB95)

The “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” was the only tree in the garden that had a prohibition attached to it in order that God would test the obedience of Adam and the Woman and Satan could have an opportunity to prove God unjust for sentencing him to the lake of fire for his disobedience. If Adam and the Woman ate the fruit from the “tree of life” it would continue to perpetuate their life of their physical bodies. If Adam and the Woman ate the fruit from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” they would separate themselves from God, which is called spiritual death. Not only did God tell Adam to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but He told him why, which is that he would die spiritually meaning he would be separated from God for his disobedience.

Genesis 2:16-17 records the Lord issuing this prohibition to Adam.

*Genesis 2:16* The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” (NASB95)

The fact that the Lord told Adam why he cannot eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil demonstrates God’s love and concern for Adam and that He had his best interests in mind.

“You may eat freely”: (1) Qal infinitive absolute complement form of the verb `akhal (pronounced: aw-kal) (2) 2nd person masculine singular qal imperfect form of the verb `akhal.

The infinitive absolute stands before the finite verb of the same root in Genesis 2:16 in order to intensify the certainty or force of the verbal idea, thus indicating that the Lord commanded Adam that he could eat from “absolutely” any tree in the garden.
The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a literal tree. There was nothing inherently evil about the tree since the Lord created it but rather it was Adam and the Woman’s attitude towards the Lord’s prohibition attached to the tree, which was evil. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the only tree in the garden that had a prohibition attached to it, which indicates that the Lord wanted to test the obedience of Adam.

The fact that the tree was named the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” indicates that evil was already in God’s creation and that there was a rival kingdom in God’s creation, namely, Satan. Evil is independence from God as a result of disobedience to His commands.

“Good” refers to obedience to God’s will whereas “evil” refers to that which is disobedience to God’s will and is independent of Him. According to Genesis 3:22, as a result of disobeying the Lord and eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and his wife, like God, were able to “distinguish” between that which is according to God’s will and that which was not.

**Genesis 3:22a Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil.” (NASB95)**

Therefore, if Adam and his wife never ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would have never experienced evil and the distinction between what is according to God’s will and what is not. By eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and his wife and their children were brought into bondage to Satan and his kingdom whereas if they obeyed the Lord and did not eat from this tree, they would have been free in the truest sense meaning they would be free to serve God exclusively. Eating from the tree of life would not have given Adam eternal life, which is the very life of God but rather would have perpetuated the life of his physical body since the soul is created to live forever and according to Genesis 3:22, eating from this tree results in living forever.

**Genesis 3:22b “and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.” (NASB95)**

Eternal life is received as a gift of God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone (Jn. 3:16-18; Eph. 2:8-9). Therefore, eating from the tree of life would not give Adam eternal life.

According to Revelation 22, the tree of life will be present in the New Jerusalem providing believers greater capacity to enjoy the blessings of the eternal state in their resurrection bodies. Adam and his wife never did eat from the tree of life since their physical bodies experienced decay after disobeying the Lord and did not live forever. But, it appears that Adam and his wife were totally occupied with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it was the only tree in the garden with a prohibition attached to it.
Genesis 2:17 “but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” (NASB95)

“You will surely die”: (1) Qal infinitive absolute complement form of the verb muth (pronounced: mooth) (2) 2nd person masculine singular qal imperfect form of the verb muth.

The infinitive absolute stands before the finite verb of the same root in Genesis 2:17 in order to intensify the certainty or force of the verbal idea, thus indicating that the Lord warned Adam that if he disobeyed the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would “surely” die spiritually. So to the English speaking person this construction literally means, “dying, you shall die” but to the Hebrew mind, it simply means, “you shall surely die.”

When the Lord said to Adam that he would “surely die” if he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Lord meant that he would enter into “real spiritual death,” which is separation from God and does “not” mean he would die physically since Adam lived to be 930 years old according to Genesis 5:5. Not only did God tell Adam to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but also He told him why, which is that he would die spiritually meaning he would be separated from God for his disobedience. The fact that the Lord told Adam why he cannot eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil demonstrates God’s love and concern for Adam and that He had his best interests in mind.

In Genesis 3:1, Moses records that Satan indwelt a snake in order to disguise himself so that he might deceive Eve in the garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’”? 2 The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” 4 The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (NASB95)

“Serpent” is the noun nachash (vj*n*), which refers to a literal snake.

According to Genesis 3:14, this snake had legs but after the Fall of Adam, the Lord cursed this snake saying it would go on its belly and will eat dust all the days
of its life, thus implying that it was not created to go about on its belly and therefore had legs.

Genesis 3:14 The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life.” (NASB95)

According to 2 Corinthians 11:3 and Revelation 20:2, Satan indwelt this serpent and through this serpent disguised himself to deceive Eve.

2 Corinthians 11:3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (NASB95)

Revelation 20:2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. (NASB95)

Satan indwelt this literal snake in order to disguise himself and deceive Eve.

2 Corinthians 11:15 Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (NASB95)

“The eyes of both of them were opened” means that Adam and his wife had a knowledge of sin and evil through personal experience and did not make them like God as Satan claimed it would but rather produced guilt in their souls.

They became a aware of their guilt and had nothing to hide their guilt so they attempted to hide themselves from God and cover their genitalia with loin coverings sewed from fig leaves.

The loin coverings not only were a manifestation of their alienation from God but also from each other. The sewing of fig leaves together in order to make loin coverings for themselves to cover and ease their guilt was an act of self-righteous arrogance since only God can solve the problem of guilt through the forgiveness of sins, which is available through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Instead of seeking out God and confessing their guilt, they attempted to conceal their guilt from both God and themselves (1 John 1:8-10).

It is interesting that the only tree that our Lord cursed was the fig tree recorded in Matthew 21:18-19 and He did this not only to teach that Israel had rejected Him as Messiah but to relate God’s attitude towards the self-righteous actions of Adam and his wife.

Adam’s sin in the garden brought a curse not only on the entire human race of which he is the “federal” head but it also brought a curse on the earth itself.

Romans 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope. (NASB95)

Genesis 3:8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (NASB95)
Adam and his wife hid in fear since according to Genesis 2:17, the Lord had warned Adam that if he disobeyed His command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then he would surely die.

When the Lord said to Adam that he would “surely die” if he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Lord meant that he would enter into “real spiritual death,” which is separation from God. When the Lord says you shall surely die He does “not” mean he would die physically since Adam lived to be 930 years old according to Genesis 5:5.

The fact that Adam and his wife died spiritually and lost fellowship with the Lord is illustrated in Genesis 3:6-8. The fact that Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden demonstrates that sin not only results in loss of fellowship with the Lord but also guilt and fear. Adam and his wife’s actions after disobeying the Lord are an implicit admission of guilt.

Genesis 3:9 Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” (NASB95)

The Lord knew that Adam and his wife had disobeyed Him since He is omniscient meaning He knows perfectly, eternally and simultaneously all that is knowable, both the actual and the possible and thus has all knowledge of every event in human and angel history. The Lord asked Adam where He was because He wanted Adam to confess his guilt and to make Adam aware of his need for forgiveness and a Savior.

The fact that the Lord asked Adam where he was even though He knew what Adam had done and could have thrown him into the lake of fire demonstrates that the Lord is manifesting His love and mercy and grace. God permitted Adam to rebel and disobey Him, like He did with Satan in order that He might manifest His great grace and love for both men and angels. Notice that the Lord initiated a reconciliation by seeking out Adam and his wife and not vice versa, which is a demonstration of God’s love.

The Lord not only sought out the first two sinners in the human race but He seeks out the entire human race without exception and distinction since He desires all men to be saved (John 3:16-18; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Genesis 3:10 He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” (NASB95)

Adam, like all sinners, is fearful being in the presence of God since he stands guilty and condemned before an infinitely holy God. Adam, like all sinners, is estranged from God and seeks to avoid contact with Him. This is the natural result of spiritual death.

Genesis 3:11 And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (NASB95)
The divine interrogation continues in order to bring Adam to an admission of guilt so that he might be restored to fellowship. The Lord’s first question is designed to draw attention to the fact that something must have happened to make Adam aware of his nakedness and that he must have done something to make him aware of his nakedness.

As soon as Adam’s thoughts have been led to see that this admission is inevitable, the Lord’s next question is a direct one designed to drive Adam to still a more inescapable admission of his guilt. The Lord’s is convicting Adam of his guilt in order that he might see his need of a Savior and forgiveness.

**Genesis 3:12** The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” (NASB95)

Adam’s fallen state due to his sin and disobedience further manifests itself in his making excuses and blaming the Lord for giving him his wife. By blaming the Lord for giving him his wife, Adam is accusing the Lord of tempting him to sin, which is impossible since God cannot be tempted by evil because He is holy (cf. James 1:13-15).

By blaming the Lord for giving him his wife, Adam is not taking responsibility for his actions. Adam cannot justify his sin by blaming the Lord for giving him his wife since Adam made the decision to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He could have said no to his wife but instead he went along with her in her sin.

Once Adam recognized his wife as a great blessing but now, after disobeying the Lord, he considers her a curse. Adam’s excuse is so lame that the Lord doesn’t even dignified it with a response.

**Genesis 3:13** Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” (NASB95)

Just like Adam, his wife failed to take responsibility for her actions and instead blamed the serpent for deceiving her. Just like Adam, his wife could have rejected eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but instead she chose to disobey. Unlike Adam though, his wife did not attempt to deny that she had sinned but in fact admitted her guilt to the Lord.

The Lord does not question the devil who used the serpent to disguise himself since according to Matthew 25:41, the devil has already been convicted of his rebellion. Furthermore, the Lord does not question Satan since this temptation of Adam and his wife was a part of his appeal trial where Satan was attempting to justify his rebellion and independence from God. In his appeal trial, Satan is attempting to demonstrate that God does not love His creatures and that he is justified in living independently of God and that disobedience to God is a viable and justified alternative to being obedient to God.
By getting Adam and his wife to sin against God, then Satan would have witnesses that support his argument. Satan does not believe that God loves His creatures since God sentenced him to the lake of fire forever for his rebellion and by getting Adam and his wife to sin against God, Satan presumptuously and erroneously believes that he will have demonstrated this to be the case. But, Satan’s plan has backfired on him since the fall of Adam and his wife provided God an opportunity to demonstrate a side of Himself that would never be revealed if Satan and Adam had never sinned, namely, His love, which is able to love His enemies and do good to those who are unworthy and undeserving.

**Genesis 3:14** The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life.” (NASB95)

The fact that the Lord pronounced a curse on the serpent does not indicate direct culpability on its part since it is not a moral rational creature that can make decisions but rather this curse was a perpetual reminder to the human race of the instrument of its fall and of the final destruction of Satan himself.

**Genesis 3:15** “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” (NASB95)

The seed of the serpent does not refer to unregenerate humanity (unbelievers) since the phrase “your seed” is used in contrast to the phrase “her seed,” which refers to one individual, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the phrase “your seed” refers to one individual, namely, the Antichrist who will be the ruler of a ten-nation confederacy constituting a Revived Roman Empire, during Daniel’s Seventieth week, which is also called by theologians as the “Tribulation Period.”

“Her Seed” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the “Last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) and if so, then, “your seed” refers to a single individual as well.

“He (Jesus Christ) shall bruise you (Satan) on the head” is the first prophecy concerning the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ would defeat Satan at the cross by being obedient to the Father’s will with His death on the cross.

The prophecy of Genesis 3:15 is the “seed plot” of the Virgin Birth and Incarnation of the Son of God (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:23; John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16) as well as the “seed plot” of the Redemption and Salvation of mankind as well as the defeat of Satan, which is developed in further detail in the rest of the Bible (Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; Col. 2:14; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Jn. 3:8).

“You (Satan) shall bruise Him (Christ) on the heel” is a symbolic or figurative reference to the Lord’s suffering and death on the cross, which the Father used as the instrument to destroy the works of the devil.
What Satan did to the Lord at the cross was only temporary and did not defeat the Lord but what the Lord did to Satan at the cross was to achieve total and complete victory over Satan since His death on the cross redeemed mankind and demonstrated the love of God for all men. Our Lord’s death refutes Satan’s argument that God does not love His creatures.

Genesis 3:16 To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” (NASB95)

God’s judgment on Eve was to increase her pain in childbearing and that her desire or impulse would be toward her husband and he would rule over her, not as a tyrant but in the same sense as the sun rules the day (Gen. 1:16). This, of course, was not God’s original intention but now in Christ the negative aspects of this are removed and the husband and wife are restored to a healthy partnership where the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:22-33) and the wife is to obey and respect her husband as to the Lord. Because, Eve chose to disobey God and did not eat from the tree of life resulting in immortality, she would now have to bear children, which in one sense was a curse but in another sense opened the door to redemptive history.

Genesis 3:17 Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.” (NASB95)

“Cursed is the ground” means the basic material of the physical creation and the elements themselves, the “dust of the earth,” out of which all things had been formed and produced were brought under the bondage of decay and disintegration.

Genesis 3:18 “Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

“By the sweat of your face you will eat bread” means that Adam would have to perform hard labor in order to get the earth to produce food for him.

Work was originally designed by the Lord to be a blessing for man but after the Fall, it became a curse (Gen. 3:17-19) but this curse is lifted in Christ.

“Till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; For you are dust and to dust you shall return” refers to the eventual death of Adam’s biological life meaning his physical body. This curse on Adam also included the entire human race, both male and female, of which Adam is the “federal” head of the old creation and is removed through faith in Christ who is the “federal” head of the “new” creation.
The fall of Adam not only affected his fellowship with God but also it affected his environment and his physical body! The physical body of human beings eventually ceases to function and decompose into the dust of ground because they are inherently sinful. They are inherently sinful because of the curse the Lord put on Adam and his posterity.

The sin nature resides in the genetic structure of the human body according to Romans 6:6.

Romans 6:6 This we are very familiar with through instruction, namely, that our old man was crucified with Him in order that the sinful body would be deprived of its power with the result that we are no longer in a perpetual state of being slaves to the sin nature. (Author’s translation)

Physical death is the result of possessing a sin nature since it resides in the human body. Spiritual death entered the human race through the sin nature.

Romans 5:12a, Therefore, based on this (principle), just as, through one man, the sin nature entered into the human race so that spiritual death entered through this sin nature. (Author’s translation)

Spiritual death is the result of possessing a sin nature and is perpetuated by the sinner through committing personal acts of sin. It means that the sinner has no capacity whatsoever to experience or establish a relationship with a holy God since he has absolutely no merit with a holy God. Spiritual death spread to the entire human race because of the imputation of Adam’s sin according to Romans 5:12b and 15a.

So the Lord put a curse upon man’s body and on his entire environment. This would not only force him to recognize the seriousness of his sin as well as his helplessness to deliver himself and his dominion from eventual destruction but also it would force him to recognize that Satan’s tempting promises had been nothing but lies. This curse on the First Adam will ultimately be lifted when the Last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ returns with church, the sons of God, at His Second Advent to deliver Israel from Antichrist and the Tribulational armies in order to establish His millennial reign (Rom. 8:18-22).

Spiritual Death Entered the Human Race Through the Sin Nature

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. (NASB95)

“And death through sin” presents the result of the sin nature entering into the human race through Adam’s disobedience.

“Death” is the articular nominative masculine singular form of the noun thanatos, which refers to “real spiritual death” and is the result of the imputation of...
Adam’s sin to our genetically formed old sin nature at the moment of physical birth (Gen. 2:17; Prov. 14:12; Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 5:12; 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:1, 5). Therefore, in Romans 5:12 is presenting a progression—Adam’s original sin plus Adam’s sin nature equals “spiritual death.” “Spiritual death” means that every member of the human race is separated from God and has absolutely no capacity to have a relationship with God who is holy.

There are five major consequences for “Spiritual death”: (1) Slavery to the sin nature and the devil and his cosmic system. (2) Physical death (Genesis 5:5). (3) Imprisonment in Torments after physical death prior to the Great White Throne Judgment (Luke 16:19-31). (4) Eternal condemnation in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15). (5) Unique voluntary substitutionary spiritual and physical deaths of Christ (Matt. 27:45-46; Mark 15:34; Philp. 2:8; Heb. 2:9, 14).

Spiritual death in the human race resulted in the Father sending His Son to die spiritually and physically on the cross as a substitute for members of the human race in order to deliver them from spiritual death and the sin nature. The problem of “real spiritual death” is resolved when God gives life to those members of the human race who exercise faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:16-18).

“Through sin” is composed of the preposition dia, “through” and the articular genitive feminine singular form of the noun hamartia, “sin.”

As was the case earlier in Romans 5:12, the noun hamartia is in the singular referring to the old Adamic sin nature. The preposition dia is used with the genitive form of the noun hamartia as a marker of personal intermediate agency and does not indicate means or instrumentality since the sin nature is being personified by the apostle Paul. This indicates that the sin nature is the personal intermediate agency through which spiritual death entered the human race.

Imputation of Adam’s Original Sin to the Entire Human Race

Not only does Romans 5:12 teach that the sin nature entered into the human race through Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden and spiritual death through the sin nature but also this passage teaches that spiritual death spread to each and every person in the human race because of the imputation of Adam’s sin to each and every member of the human race.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. (NASB95)

“And so death spread to all men, because all sinned” presents the result of spiritual death entering the human race through the sin nature. Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden resulted in the sin nature, which in turn “resulted in” spiritual death.
“So” is the adverb of manner houtos, which is drawing a comparison with the preceding statement and the one to follow. In the preceding statement Paul taught that through Adam, the sin nature entered into the human race and consequently spiritual death entered through the sin nature. In the statement to follow, he teaches spiritual death spread to each and every human being without exception or distinction. Therefore, houtos draws a comparison between the manner in which spiritual death entered the human race and the manner in which spiritual death spread to the entire human race.

The manner in which spiritual death entered the human race and the manner in which spiritual death spread throughout the entire human race is one and the same, namely, through Adam’s act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden.

The emphatic position of the prepositional phrase di’ henos anthropou, “through one man” clearly indicates this to be the case. The fact that Paul is emphasizing that Adam’s act of disobedience was the manner in which spiritual death entered into the human race and spread to the entire human race is clearly indicated by the context.

We have to remember that in Romans 5:12-21 Paul is making a comparison between the consequences of Adam’s act of disobedience and the results of Christ’s act of obedience to demonstrate to his readers the destiny of each member of the human race is tied up with these two.

Romans 5:15b For if by the transgression of the one the many died. (NASB95)

Romans 5:16a The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation. (NASB95)

Romans 5:17a For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one. (NASB95)

Romans 5:18a So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men. (NASB95)

Romans 5:19a For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners. (NASB95)

So we can see that Adam’s act of disobedience that brought condemnation to his posterity in comparison with Christ’s act of obedience that resulted in justification of life to all men underlines the entire discussion in Romans 5:12-21. Therefore, the adverb of manner houtos is comparing the manner in which the sin nature and spiritual death entered the human race with the manner in which spiritual death spread to the entire human race.

Adam’s act of disobedience was the manner in which both the sin nature and spiritual death entered the human race and also spread to each and every member of the human race without exception or distinction.
Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

“Death” is the articular nominative masculine singular form of the noun thanatos, which refers once again to real spiritual death.

Although, in Romans 5:12, thanatos is used of spiritual death, we must be aware of the fact that spiritual death also resulted in three other categories of death: (1) Physical death is the separation of the human soul (and in the case of the believer, the human spirit also) from the body (Matt. 8:22; Rom. 8:38-39; 2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:20-21; 2:27, 30). (2) Second death is the perpetuation of spiritual death into eternity or eternal separation from God and it is the final judgment of the unbelievers in the human race and fallen angels whereby they are cast in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41; Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:12-15). (3) Unique voluntary substitutionary spiritual death of the impeccable humanity of Christ in hypostatic union on the cross (Matt. 27:45-46; Mark 15:34; Phlp. 2:8; Heb. 2:9, 14).

Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths on the cross were needed to resolve the first three categories of death since physical death and the second death are the result of spiritual death.

“Spread” is the third person singular aorist active indicative form of the verb dierchomai, which is a compound word composed of the preposition dia, “through” and the verb erchomai, “to go,” thus the word literally means, “to go through, to pass throughout.”

In Romans 5:12, the verb dierchomai denotes that spiritual death “spread throughout” the entire human race. As many commentators believe, the word has a distributive force to it meaning that spiritual death spread to each and every member of the human race. This is correct since the adjective pas is obviously used in a “distributive” sense modifying the noun anthropos, “person.” Therefore, the verb along with these two words indicates that through Adam’s act of disobedience, spiritual death “spread to each and every person” in the human race.

In the same way, a deadly contagious virus can spread completely throughout an entire population so spiritual death spread throughout the entire human race. Spiritual death infected the entire human race because each person receives a sin nature that is received through imputation at the moment of physical birth and is passed down through sex. This sin nature is the result of Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden and manifests itself through the function of human volition.

This verb dierchomai speaks of the imputation of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden that every member of the human race receives at the moment of physical birth.

Imputation is the function of the justice of God in crediting something to someone for cursing or for blessing.
There are two categories of imputations: (1) “Real”: crediting to a person something which belongs to him. (2) “Judicial”: crediting to a person something which does not belong to him.

Real Imputations: (1) Imputation of human life at the moment of physical birth (Genesis 2:7). (2) Imputation of Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden at physical birth (Romans 5:12-19). (3) Imputation of eternal life to the sinner when he exercises faith in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior (John 3).

Judicial Imputations: (1) Imputation of sins to impeccable human nature of Jesus Christ on the Cross (2 Corinthians 5:21). (2) Imputation of divine righteousness to the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6).

The first judicial imputation, the imputation of personal sins to Christ, made possible the second judicial imputation, the imputation of divine righteousness.

These two judicial imputations produce an exchange: (1) The sinner’s sins go to Christ (2) The righteousness of God goes to the sinner.

At the moment of physical birth, every member of the human race becomes a sinner because he has received the imputation of Adam’s sin in the garden. The imputation of divine righteousness at the moment of spiritual birth is made possible by the imputation of Adam’s sin in the garden at the moment of physical birth (Romans 5:12-19).

The imputation of Adam’s sin at physical birth results in every person having the nature of Adam, which resides in the genetic structure of the physical body and can never please God but is selfish and self-centered and always disobedient to God. This imputation means that every person born into the world is born physically alive but spiritually dead, yet qualified for the imputation of divine righteousness through faith alone in Christ alone.

The imputation of Adam’s sin in the Garden also resulted in the imputation of the sins of the world to Christ on the Cross.

The reason why God imputed Adam’s sin in the garden to every member of the human race at physical birth is given in two passages of Scripture:

Galatians 3:22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (NASB95)

Romans 11:32 Therefore, God the Father has confined the entire human race to unbelief in order that He may extend the offer of grace to the entire human race. (NASB95)

Therefore, through a comparison these two passages, we can see that God’s purpose in imputing Adam’s sin to the entire human race was so that He might show grace to the human race by making the promise of justification by faith in His Son Jesus Christ and the blessings that result from it.
Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

“To all men” is composed of the preposition eis, “to” and the accusative masculine plural form of the adjective pas, “all,” which is modifying the accusative masculine plural form of the noun anthropos, “men.”

The noun anthropos denotes a “person, human being” and is used in a generic sense for the human race. It is modified by the distributive use of the adjective pas referring to “each and every” member of the human race without exception, both Jew and Gentile. Therefore, Paul is saying that spiritual death resulting in physical death spread to “each and every person in the human race without exception and without distinction.”

The preposition eis is employed with the verb dierchomai, “spread” as a marker of extension indicating the extent to which spiritual death spread among members of the human race.

The fact that the statement houtos eis pantas anthropous ho thanatos dielthen, “in this manner (through Adam’s sin), spiritual death spread to each and every member of the human race without exception” refers to the imputation of Adam’s sin to each member of the human race at the moment of physical birth is clearly indicated by the context.

The Entire Human Race Is Under The Headship of Adam

Romans 5:12 also teaches us that the result of God imputing Adam’s original sin to the entire human race was that the entire human race was under the headship of Adam.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. (NASB95)

“Because” is composed of the preposition epi and the dative neuter singular form of the relative pronoun relative pronoun hos.

The expression eph’ ho has been said by some as being the most mistranslated expression in the Greek New Testament. It has been translated “in whom” by Augustine and others.

For this to be the correct rendering of the expression, its antecedent would have to be the expression henos anthropou, “one man” a reference to Adam, which appeared earlier in the verse. If this is the case, then this would mean that “in Adam all sinned.” However, grammatically and syntactically this does not make sense since the distance between the expression henos anthropou, “one man” and the prepositional phrase eph’ ho is too great for this to be correct.
Also, the relative pronoun hos is neuter in gender and not masculine, which it would need to be if it were referring to Adam. Furthermore, Paul would have used a simpler or more obvious construction, which would be en ho (e)n w(%)).

The fact that eph’ ho does not mean “in whom” is further substantiated in that this expression is usually used as a conjunction. In fact, it is used as a conjunction in Philippians 3:12 and 2 Corinthians 5:4 and in the papyri.

As a conjunction, this expression has been rendered “from which it follows, with the result that, inasmuch as,” or “because.” The last rendering is the most popular among modern Bible scholars.

Many modern exegetes contend that the prepositional phrase eph’ ho is not looking back at any antecedent but rather is functioning as a causal conjunction meaning that it is introducing a statement that gives the reason why spiritual death spread to each and every member of the human race. This would mean that spiritual death resulting in physical death is universal for the precise reason that committing acts of personal sin is universal. This would emphasize that personal sin is the result of this sin nature. We are not responsible for what Adam had done but for what we have done.

Wallace says that this interpretation finds support in the papyri and in the rest of the Pauline corpus (cf. 2 Cor. 5:4; Phlp. 3:12) (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, page 342). However, this interpretation emphasizes the human race committing sin. The context does not support this interpretation since Paul is comparing the results of Adam’s disobedience with that of Christ’s act of obedience. He is emphasizing Adam’s actions and not his posterity!

Mounce offers another interpretation saying that the prepositional phrase ep’ ho functions not as a causal conjunction but rather has a consecutive sense, he writes, ”the primary cause of our sinful nature would be the sin of Adam; the result of that sin would be the history of sinning on the part of all who enter the human race and in fact, sin of their own accord.” (The New American Commentary, volume 27, page 142; Broadman and Holman Publishers)

Moo commenting on this view, writes, “Death, then, is due immediately to the sinning of each individual but ultimately to the sin of Adam; for it was Adam's sin that corrupted human nature and made individual sinning an inevitability.” (The Epistle to the Romans, page 325).

Though this is true theologically, it is not the correct interpretation. The aorist tense of the verb hamartano is speaking of a particular point of time in the past, which the context indicates is Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden.

Interpreting eph’ ho as introducing a result clause emphasizes the personal acts of sin by each member of the human race. However, the context clearly indicates that Paul’s is comparing the results of Adam’s disobedience with the results of Christ’s obedience and thus emphasizing Adam’s actions and not his posterity.
Therefore, not only does it make more sense grammatically and syntactically that *eph’ ho* should be taken as a causal conjunction but also the context supports this interpretation. This interpretation emphasizes that God considered the entire human race as sinning the moment Adam committed his act of sin in the Garden of Eden. We will translate *eph’ ho*, “*because*.”

**Romans 5:12** Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. (NASB95)

“All sinned” is composed of the nominative masculine plural form of the adjective *pas*, “*all*” and the third person plural aorist active indicative form of the verb *hamartano*, “*sinned*.”

The adjective *pas* is again used in a distributive sense referring to “each and every” member of the human race without exception, both Jew and Gentile.

The verb *hamartano* is used intransitively (without a direct object) and refers to any mental, verbal or overt act of sin that is contrary to the will and law of God.

The distributive of *pas* along with this constative aorist tense of the verb *hamartano* indicates that Paul is teaching that each and every member of the human race sinned the moment Adam sinned. In other words, Adam is both the “federal” and “seminal” head of the human race, we thus became sinners by nature, the moment Adam sinned.

The verb *hamartano* means, “to miss the mark,” and which mark is the absolute perfection of God’s character, which is His holiness. Each and every member of the human race has missed the mark of the absolute perfection of God’s character, i.e. His holiness that was perfectly manifested by the Lord Jesus Christ during His First Advent.

The aorist tense of the verb *hamartano* is a “constative” aorist describing in summary fashion that the entire human race without exception or distinction sinned the exact moment Adam disobeyed the Lord’s prohibition to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and which disobedience involved his posterity.

Some like Calvin contend that in the verb *hamartano* is referring to the personal sins of each person in the human race. However, the verb *hamartano*, “*sinned*” is in the aorist tense and not the present tense.

The present tense could emphasize a habitual or continuous or repetitive action. The aorist tense emphasizes that this action of sinning took place at a particular point in time in the past. The context clearly indicates that the aorist tense of the verb is referring to Adam’s act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden.

Some maintain that all sinned in the sense that the human race follows the example of Adam in sinning but our sin is our own. Again, the aorist tense of *hamartano* refutes this interpretation since the verb would be in the present or imperfect tense if Paul was writing about the continued, habitual or repeated acts.
of sin committed by members of the human race. The aorist tense does not say we were imitating Adam.

Also, again, the statements 5:15b, 16a, 17a, 18a and 19a do not mean that the human race is following Adam’s example. Paul’s emphasis in Romans 5:12-21 is to compare the results of Adam’s disobedience with Christ’s act of obedience. This means that in the same way that we are declared justified by God and reconciled to God through one man’s act of obedience, the God-Man, Jesus Christ so also we were condemned by God through man’s act of disobedience, Adam’s. This does not imply that Paul is teaching that each person is not responsible for his own actions since this is not his emphasis. He is concerned with what Adam did and the consequences of his actions in the Garden of Eden.

Therefore, the aorist tense of the verb hamartano along with the distributive use of the adjective pas and Paul’s statements in Romans 5:15b, 16a, 17a, 18a and 19a indicate clearly that the entire human race was condemned by God the moment Adam sinned. This interpretation emphasizes that Adam’s sin brought condemnation upon Adam’s posterity and the only way to be delivered from this condemnation is through One Man, Jesus Christ.

So when Paul says that “all sinned” he is referring to the fact that the moment Adam sinned, he not only died spiritually and then eventually physically but also his posterity did the same. Therefore, in Romans 5:12, Paul is saying that because of Adam’s act of disobedience each and every member of the human race possesses a sin nature, which through the function of human volition produces mental, verbal and overt acts of sin resulting in spiritual death and eventually, physical death and the second death for those who reject Jesus Christ as Savior.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, based on this (principle), just as, through one man, the sin nature entered into the human race so that spiritual death entered through this sin nature. Thus, in this manner, spiritual death spread to each and every member of the human race without exception because each and every member of the human race sinned (the moment Adam sinned). (Author’s translation)

Paul is teaching in Romans 5:12 that each and every member of the human race-past, present and future, are sinners by nature since they are under both the “federal” and “seminal” headships of Adam. The entire human race was condemned before they ever committed an act of sin because of Adam’s sin. Again, God condemned the human race through one man so that He could save the human race through one man. So in Romans 5:12-21, Paul presents Adam and Christ as “federal heads” of two groups of people.

Dr. Thomas L. Constable commenting on the headship of Adam and Christ, writes, “The apostle viewed Adam and Christ as federal heads of two groups of people. A federal head is a person who acts as the representative of many others
and whose actions result in consequences that the individuals he represents inevitably experience. Examples of federal heads include a king, a president, a member of congress, and a parent, among others. In this section Paul was not looking primarily at what individual sinners have done, which had been his interest previously. Rather he looked at what Adam did in the Fall and what Jesus Christ did at the Cross and the consequences of their actions for humanity. Adam's act resulted in his descendants sinning and dying. We inherit Adam's nature that was sinful, and this accounts for the fact that we all sin. We are sinners not only because we commit acts of sin but also because Adam's sin corrupted the human race and made punishment inevitable for his descendants as well as for himself. However, Christ's act of dying made all who trust in Him righteous apart from their own works.” (Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible; page 54)

Bible Knowledge Commentary writes, “The federal headship view considers Adam, the first man, as the representative of the human race that generated from him. As the representative of all humans, Adam’s act of sin was considered by God to be the act of all people and his penalty of death was judicially made the penalty of everybody.” (New Testament Edition, page 458).

There is also the “seminal” or “natural” headship view.

Bible Knowledge Commentary writes, “The natural headship view, on the other hand, recognizes that the entire human race was seminally and physically in Adam, the first man. As a result God considered all people as participating in the act of sin which Adam committed and as receiving the penalty he received. Even adherents of the federal headship view must admit that Adam is the natural head of the human race physically; the issue is the relationship spiritually. Biblical evidence supports the natural headship of Adam. When presenting the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood to Aaron’s, the author of Hebrews argued that Levi, the head of the priestly tribe, ‘who collects the 10th, paid the 10th through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor’” (Heb. 7:9-10) (New Testament Edition, page 458).

S. Lewis Johnson favors the ‘immediate federal imputation view’ which says that “Adam is the federal head of the race. Men are regarded as having stood their probation in him as their representative. His act was, therefore, deemed to be their act. He, the covenantal head of the race, fell, and in him the race fell. The fact that he was the head of the race is indicated by the fact the threats that were given him by God on the condition of his failure of the probation have been carried out on Adam and his posterity. All men, and not simply Adam, die.”

Both the “federal” and “natural” or “seminal” headship views are present in Romans 5:12-21. In Romans 5:12, the expression “because all sinned” emphasizes that Adam is the “federal” head of the human race in that he is the representative of the human race that generated from him so that God considered
his act of sin to be the act of all people and his penalty of death was judicially made the penalty of everybody. The constative aorist tense of the verb *hamartano* along with the distributive use of the adjective *pas* and Paul’s statements in Romans 5:15b, 16a, 17a, 18a and 19a, which we noted earlier, support this interpretation. The expression “because all sinned” also emphasizes that Adam is also the “seminal” or “natural” head of the human race in that the entire human race was seminally and physically in Adam so that God considered the entire human race as participating in the sin Adam committed and receiving the penalty he received.

Paul’s statement in Romans 5:12 that “through one man the sin nature entered the human race so that spiritual death entered through the sin nature” supports this view as well since the sin nature has been passed down through the male in copulation.

**Total Depravity of the Entire Human Race**

*Romans 5:12* Therefore, based on this (principle), just as, through one man, the sin nature entered into the human race so that spiritual death entered through this sin nature. Thus, in this manner, spiritual death spread to each and every member of the human race without exception because each and every member of the human race sinned (the moment Adam sinned).

(Author’s translation)

In Romans 5:12, Paul is teaching his readers of the “total depravity” of mankind. “Total depravity” means not only that the corruption has extended has extended to all aspects of man’s nature, to his entire being as well but also that because of that corruption mankind has no merit with God. The implications of depravity are critical in relation to salvation in that man has no ability whatsoever to save himself or justify himself before a holy God.

The Lord labeled His disciples evil in Matthew 7:11 because of their depraved nature. Romans 1:28 and Ephesians 4:18 teach that the mind of mankind is affected and Hebrews 9:14 says that the conscience is unclean. The heart is deceitful according to Jeremiah 17:9 and by nature mankind is under the righteous indignation of God, i.e. His wrath according to Ephesian 2:3 and Romans 1:18. Depravity affects the soul (Mark 7:20-23), thus defiling man’s thought process, which manifests itself in sinful words and actions.

The concept of total depravity does not mean that mankind cannot perform actions that are good or helpful to others or in God’s sight. What it does mean is that man can perform no action that could gain him merit with God.

Total depravity means that man has absolutely no merit with God since he does not measure up to God’s perfect standards. It also means that man’s conscience has
been affected by the Fall of Adam so that it cannot be a safe and reliable guide. Nor, does total depravity mean that people will indulge in every form of sin or any sin to the greatest extent possible.

The fact that the entire human race is totally depraved is manifested through the practice of sin among both Jew and Gentiles. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul demonstrates that the Gentiles are unrighteous and totally depraved by virtue of their sinful conduct and failure to worship God in light of God’s self-revelation in creation as well as their failure to obey the moral law inherent within them. In Romans 2:1-29, he demonstrates that the Jews are unrighteous and totally depraved as well as manifested in their failure to obey perfectly the written Law of God and committing the same sins that the Gentiles committed. In Romans 3:9-20, Paul summarizes his statements in Romans 1:18-2:29 and teaches the totally depravity and universal unrighteousness of mankind, both Jew and Gentile.

There are other passages of Scriptures that address the issue of man’s total depravity (cf. Job 14:1-4; 15:14-16; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:19-20).

Location of the Sin Nature

As we noted briefly, Genesis 3 and Romans 6:6 teach us that the sin nature resides in the genetic structure of the human body.

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. (NASB95)

“Our body of sin” is composed of the articular nominative neuter singular form of the noun soma, “our body” and the articular genitive feminine singular form of the noun hamartia, “of sin.”

The noun soma is a reference to the human body. The noun hamartia is not in the plural but rather in the singular and is articular indicating the sin nature is in view rather than personal sins. In other words, the word in the singular emphasizes sin as an entity and not sins in general. The noun refers to the inherent propensity in mankind to commit mental, verbal and overt acts of sin.

The articular construction also emphasizes that Paul is speaking of sin as an entity emphasizing the underlying root cause of personal sins or the principle of sin.

The noun soma is modified by the articular genitive form of the noun hamartia, “sin,” which functions as an “attributive genitive” meaning that it specifies an attribute or an innate quality of the head noun, which is soma, “body.” This type of genitive expresses quality like an adjective but with more sharpness and distinctness. Thus, it emphasizes the “sinfulness” of the human body or in other words, that it is “inherently sinful” because it is corrupted by the sin nature, which
resides in its genetic structure. This would agree with what we see in our own bodies, which deteriorate with age and eventually cease to function and decompose. This is further indication that the sin nature resides in the genetic structure of the physical body.

The fact that the sin nature resides in the genetic structure of the physical body is why the justified sinner needs a resurrection body to replace his sinful body. This is one of the reasons why Christ had to die physically and rise from the dead in a resurrection body because the sin nature resides in the human body. Therefore, the human body is inherently sinful, which is the result of the curse that the Lord put on Adam and his posterity (See Genesis 3:18-19).

Douglas Moo and others disagree with this interpretation. Commenting on the usage of the words *soma* and *hamartia* in Romans 6:6, Douglas Moo writes, “The ‘body’ to which Paul refers is naturally often understood to refer to the physical body. If so, the qualification ‘of sin’ would not mean that the body is inherently sinful (a Greek notion rejected by the Bible) but that the body is particularly susceptible to and easily dominated by, sin...There is little evidence that Paul conceived of the physical body as the source or reigning seat of sin. However, we should not go so far as to say simply that ‘body of sin’ means ‘man in his fallenness.’ Paul chooses *soma* to connote the person as the instrument of contact with the world, a choice especially appropriate in a context that speaks of crucifixion. It is that ‘aspect’ of the person which ‘acts’ in the world and which can be directed by something else: either by that person’s new, ‘higher nature’ or by ‘sin.’ Here, then, Paul wants to say that our capacities to interact with the world around have been rescued from the domination of sin.” (The Epistle to the Romans, pages 375-376; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.).

Some like Dodd define *soma* in Romans 6:6 as “the self as the organization of the sinful impulses inherent in the flesh.”

Murray, Lloyd Jones and others contend that it means that the body is dominated by sin. The body is sin’s body; it belongs to sin; sin has made it its own. (Cited by Morris, The Epistle to the Romans; page 251; W. B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press)

Mounce contends that the expression *to soma tes hamartias*, “the body of sin” refers “not to the physical body as inherently sinful but to the whole person under the control of sin.” (The New American Commentary, volume 27, Romans, page 151; Broadman and Holman Publishers).

J.R.W. Stott interprets as “our fallen, self-centered nature” (Romans [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994], page 175).

Morris contends that the expression “body of sin” in Romans 6:6 refers to the human body, which so easily responds to sinful impulses.
As we can see from Moo’s statement, in order for him to come to his interpretation of this expression “body of sin” he must interpret *soma*, “body” as being “the person as the instrument of contact with the world.” If he doesn’t then as he even noted, then this expression means that the body is inherently sinful.

The problem with Moo’s interpretation is that *soma* is never used this way by the apostle in all of his writings. In the writings of the Paul, the noun *soma* refers to the following: (1) The human body whether the body of mortals or Christ’s human body (Romans 1:24; 4:19; 6:6, 12; 7:24; 8:10, 11, 13, 24; 12:1; 1 Corinthians 5:3; 6:13, 15, 18, 19, 20; 7:4, 34; 9:27; 12:14, 15, 16, 17, 18; 13:3; 15:35, 40, 44; 2 Corinthians 4:10; 5:6, 8, 10; 12:2; Galatians 6:17; Ephesians 5:28; Philippians 3:21; Colossians 2:11, 23; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 10:5, 10, 22) (2) Figuratively for the body of Christ (Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17; 12:12, 13, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27; Ephesians 1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30; Colossians 1:22, 24; 2:17, 19; 3:15; Hebrews 13:3 (3) Figuratively for the Person of Christ in the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:24, 27, 29) (4) Resurrection body of the believer (1 Corinthians 15:37, 38, 44) (5) Moon, stars and planets (1 Corinthians 15:40). (6) Bodies of animals (Hebrews 13:11).

Furthermore, up to this point in the book of Romans, *soma* has always been used with reference to the human body by Paul with no reference whatsoever that it denotes the person as the instrument of contact with the world.

**Romans 1:24** Therefore, God gave them over in the lust of their hearts to impurity, namely, they degraded their bodies between themselves. (NASB95)

**Romans 4:19** In fact, without becoming weak with respect to his faith, after careful consideration and observation he was thoroughly aware of his own physical body as now being sexually impotent while already being approximately a hundred years of age as well as the impotence of Sarah’s womb. (Author’s translation)

Also, the noun *soma* is used in Romans 6:12, 7:4, 24, 8:10, 11, 13 and 23 and in every instance it refers to the human body and not the person as the instrument of contact with the world.

**Romans 6:12** Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts. (NASB95)

**Romans 7:24** Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? (NASB95)

Notice that Paul calls the human body, the “body of this death” meaning that the sin nature is the reason why human beings are born spiritually dead and eventually die physically.

**Romans 8:10** If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. (NASB95)
Notice again, Paul says that the “body is dead” because of the sin nature. Paul could not be more explicit.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Paul not only teaches that the sin nature resides in the genetic structure of the human body but also the Holy Spirit indwells the believer’s body and will raise the believer’s body at the resurrection.

Romans 8:13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (NASB95)

Romans 8:23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (NASB95)

Although an excellent and able expositor of the Scriptures, Moo’s exegesis in this particular instance is strained to say the least. It seems that maybe there were some preconceived notions as to what the body of sin is, rather than letting the text speaks for itself. The body is inherently sinful.

As we noted earlier, the fact that the sin nature resides in the human body is further indicated in that Jesus Christ’s human body was not the result of the sexual union between Mary and Joseph but rather the result of the Holy Spirit impregnating Mary (Luke 1:35; cf. Hebrews 10:5-7). He could not have a human body that was the result of human copulation because the sin nature is passed down in this manner and resides in the body. This is significant in that it makes clear that Jesus Christ did not have the principle of the sin nature residing in Him since the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary. He did not have a human father who could pass down the sin nature in sex. This makes clear that our Lord was not under the headship of Adam like the rest of the human race.

Every member of the human race is under the headship of Adam due to physical birth. However, Jesus Christ did not have a sin nature because He did not receive a human body as a result of human copulation.

Now, because He did not have a human father and that His human body did not have a sin nature residing in it, it is then clear that the rest of the human race are sinners due to the fact that they possess a sin nature that resides in their physical bodies since it is passed down through copulation. The human body of Adam became corrupted as a result of his disobedience, which he passed down to his posterity. Also, in Romans 6:6, the noun hamartia could also be interpreted as a “genitive of production,” which takes place when the genitive substantive “produces” the noun to which it stands related. Therefore, we could translate the expression to soma tes hamartias, “the body, which produces sin.” Either way you
slice it, the text makes clear that the sin nature is resident in the physical body, thus making the human body inherently sinful.

Genesis 3:18-19 teaches that the fall of Adam not only affected his fellowship with God but also it effected his environment and his physical body! The physical body of human beings eventually ceases to function and decompose into the dust of ground because it is inherently sinful. They are inherently sinful because of the curse the Lord put on Adam and his posterity. Therefore, in Romans 6:6, the noun *soma* is obviously a reference to the human body.

In Romans 6:6, commenting on the meaning of the noun *soma* in Romans 6:6, Thayer writes, “Since the body is the instrument of the soul (2 Corinthians 5:10) and its members the instruments of righteousness or of iniquity (Romans 6:13, 19), *soma tes hamartias*, the body is subject to, the thrall of, sin” (The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, page 611).

Bauer, Gingrich and Danker say that *soma* in Romans 6:6 refers to man’s mortal body “because it is subject to sin and death” (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 799).

Therefore, we can see that every member of the human is born into this world, physically alive yet spiritually dead and in need of justification. Thus, the status of spiritual death was passed down to Adam’s posterity since spiritual death entered the human race through the sin nature.

So, spiritual death is the status of possessing a sin nature due to the imputation of Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden. Physical death is passed down to the entire human race through the sin nature. Adam died spiritually first (Genesis 3:6-8) and then physically (Genesis 5:5). This pattern holds true for his posterity, the human race.

Now, personal sin is the result of obeying the desires of the sin nature. It is a manifestation that one has a sin nature. The penalty for committing personal sin is spiritual death. This is what Adam and Eve suffered the moment they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Spiritual death is the result of possessing a sin nature and committing personal sin perpetuates this status. Physical death is the result of possessing a sin nature that resides in the genetic structure of the human body. Spiritual death is the product of the sin nature and personal sin perpetuates this status of spiritual death. The human race is under the status of real spiritual death because of the sin nature, which was passed down from Adam. Therefore, spiritual death is the consequence of not only possessing a sin nature but also obeying its desires and committing personal sin.

Spiritual reigned over the entire human race because of Adam’s transgression.

Romans 5:17a For if, and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument that by means of the transgression committed by the one, spiritual
death reigned as king through this one. Of course, we know this is true.

(Author’s translation)

The entire human race was condemned because of Adam’s transgression.

Romans 5:18a Therefore, as previously stated, just as through the one who committed the transgression resulted in condemnation affecting each and every member of the human race without exception. (Author’s translation)

Eternal condemnation, the second death (Revelation 20:11-15) is the ultimate consequence of possessing a sin nature, committing personal sin, being spiritually dead. Therefore, the problems of the sin nature, spiritual, death, physical death, personal sins and eternal condemnation are all interconnected.

Jesus Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths dealt with all of these. Instead, of the human race suffering the consequences of possessing a sin nature and obeying its desires and committing personal sin, Jesus Christ died spiritually in their place as their Substitute. Thus, His spiritual death negates one of the effects of Adam’s sin, which is spiritual death that is the result of possessing a sin nature and committing sin.

Our Lord had to die physically to solve the problem of the sin nature since the sin nature resides in the body of every human being. Our Lord’s resurrection body replaces the sinful body of Adam. The believer will receive a resurrection body like Christ in order to replace his physical body that possesses the sin nature, the Adamic body. Christ also died physically in order to deprive the indwelling sin nature its power over the justified sinner. He was raised from the dead to permanently eradicate the indwelling sin nature in the human race and that eradication of the sin nature from the human race will take place with the creation of the new heavens and new earth.

The sinner who is declared justified through faith in Christ is identified with Christ in His spiritual death in order to solve the sinner’s problem of real spiritual death. Therefore, God the Father viewed His Son’s spiritual death as negating spiritual death in the human race (see Romans 6:3). Christ’s spiritual death also addressed and solved the problem of personal sins, which perpetuates the status of spiritual death. The Father viewed His physical death as negating the sin nature. The sinner is identified with Christ in His physical death in order to solve the sinner’s problem with the old sin nature (cf. Romans 6:4-7). Therefore, Christ’s spiritual and physical death resolved the human race’s problem with the sin nature, personal sins, spiritual and physical death and eternal condemnation.

The first Adam sinned and then, he died spiritually while simultaneously acquiring a sin nature and then he died physically (Genesis 5:5) and this sin nature is passed down to his posterity at physical birth. The last Adam obeyed the Father, died spiritually as a Substitute for Adam and his posterity, and then died physically to break the power of the sin nature. Then, the last Adam was raised from physical
death and received a resurrection body, which would be passed down to His spiritual posterity, namely, those who trust in Him as Savior.

Substitutionary Spiritual Death of Jesus Christ

Our Lord’s spiritual death is recorded in Matthew 27:46.

Matthew 27:45 Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” that is, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?” (NASB95)

When the Lord Jesus Christ cried out “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? He was experiencing spiritual death meaning that in His human nature he was separated from His Father.

In John 19:30, the Lord triumphantly said “It is finished” while He was still alive and which statement refers to the payment of our sins.

John 19:30 Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.” (NASB95)

Therefore, it was His spiritual death that was the payment for our sins and not His physical death since the consequences of the human race possessing a sin nature and committing personal sins is spiritual death. In His sinless human nature, our Lord suffered the loss of fellowship with the Father during those last three hours of darkness on the Cross so that we might never suffer the second death in the eternal lake of fire, which is eternal loss of fellowship with God. Therefore, God the Father considers Christ’s spiritual death to be the believer’s since this death dealt with the believer’s problem of real spiritual death.

Every person that is born into the world is physically alive yet spiritually dead and possesses a sin nature as a result of God imputing Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden to his posterity, i.e. the human race. This sin nature and spiritual death manifest itself in the life of a human being through the function of the volition in obeying the desires of the sin nature.

The fact that our Lord’s spiritual death was the payment for our sins and not His literal blood is illustrated in Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53:10 But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. (NASB95)

“Anguish of His soul” refers to the intense suffering of our Lord’s human soul as a result of being separated from the Father on the Cross and experiencing
spiritual death as a perfect sinless human being. This suffering no angel or man will ever be able to identify with since no angel or man has kept themselves experientially sinless.

Notice that Isaiah says that the anguish of the Son’s soul while experiencing spiritual death “satisfied” the Father, which refers to propitiation. This passage further substantiates that it was the Lord Jesus Christ’s spiritual death that propitiated the Father and not His literal blood.

The greatest suffering the humanity of Christ endured on the cross was “not” the physical and mental torture of the cross but rather when He experienced separation from His Father during those last three hours on the Cross as a result of receiving the imputation of the sins of the entire world by the justice of God the Father.

The physical suffering that our Lord endured through the scourging and beatings at the hands of the Jews and Romans as well as the crucifixion itself were in fact part of His bearing the judgment for our sins.

Remember, the unbeliever will suffer eternity in the Lake of Fire in a resurrection body according to Daniel 12:1, Romans 2:7, Revelation 20:11-15 and many other passages. This suffering is not only spiritual death but also physical suffering. Thus, since our Lord died spiritually so that no human being will be separated from God for all of eternity in the Lake of Fire so Christ suffered the physical torture so that no human being will suffer physically forever in the Lake of Fire.

Our Lord’s loss of fellowship with His Father in His humanity during those last three hours in darkness on the Cross was infinitely more painful to our Lord than the physical suffering He had endured and was enduring. Our Lord’s loss of fellowship with His Father in His humanity during those last three hours in darkness on the Cross was valued infinitely more by the Father than the shedding of His literal blood or His physical suffering.

This is not to say that the Father did not value the physical suffering of His Son, or His literal blood, which was sinless, He did, but literal blood though sinless cannot resolve man’s problem of separation from God under real spiritual death. A sinless human being suffering the loss of fellowship with the Father was the penalty that had to be paid in order to redeem human souls from the curse of Adam sin of disobedience and real spiritual death.

Our Lord died spiritually and was separated from His Father during those last three hours on the Cross so that we might never be separated from God for all of eternity due to sin.

During the last three hours on the cross, God the Father imputed every sin in human history—past, present and future to the impeccable humanity of Christ in
hypostatic union. Consequently, Christ voluntarily suffered the penalty for this imputation as our Substitute, which was spiritual death.

2 Corinthians 5:21 He (Christ) who never knew sin experientially (Christ was impeccable), on behalf of us (as our Substitute), was made (the representative of) sin in order that we might become the very righteousness of God in Him. (Author’s translation)

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE.” (NASB95)

This spiritual death served as the propitiation for these sins, the reconciliation of the world to God, the redemption of the entire human race out of the slave market of sin and the basis for the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation.

Imputation is the function of the justice of God in crediting something to someone for cursing or for blessing.

There are two categories of imputations: (1) Real: “crediting to a person something which belongs to him” (2) Judicial: “crediting to a person something which does not belong to him.”

A real imputation has a target or a home whereas as a judicial imputation has no target or home, and emphasizes the Source, the justice of God. To complete a judicial imputation divine justice must immediately pronounce a verdict, cursing or blessing.

Judicial Imputations: (1) Imputation of human sin to Christ (2) Imputation of divine righteousness to sinful mankind through faith in Christ.

Sin is any thought, word or action that is contrary to the will and holy character of God and is thus disobedience to the commands and prohibitions of God. Therefore, during the last three hours on the cross, God the Father imputed every sin in human history-past, present and future to the impeccable humanity of Christ in hypostatic union.

During the last three hours on the Cross, God the Father credited to the impeccable humanity of Christ something, which did not belong to Him, namely the sins of the entire world-past, present and future! When the sins of mankind were imputed to the impeccable humanity of Christ, the justice of God took action and pronounced a guilty verdict. Therefore, when Christ was receiving the imputation of the sins of the world, God was not projecting into the soul of the human nature of Christ the sins of the world, nor does imputation put Him into contact with sin.

This imputation made the Lord a curse for us and set Him up to receive the penalty for our sins, which is spiritual death, i.e. separation from God.
When Christ cried “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” He was suffering the “consequences” for our sins, which was separation from the Father and was “not” coming into contact with our sins, nor was He becoming literal sin. Christ could not experience or come into contact with sin unless He Himself chose to sin. You cannot experience or come into contact with sin unless one chooses to sin. Therefore, there is no way possible that the Lord could come into contact with our sins or experience them.

Furthermore, the imputation of every sin in history to Christ does “not” mean that Christ became literal sin, which is a heretical statement. If the Lord did become literal sin then He would no longer be qualified to be our perfect Substitute.

Therefore, Jesus Christ died spiritually meaning that in His human nature, He was separated from His Father in the sense that He lost fellowship with His Father during those last three hours on the Cross. He suffered this spiritual death so that no member of the human race should have to. Thus, the believer is identified with our Lord’s spiritual death since this death spared the believer from the second death in the eternal lake of fire.

The Substitutionary Physical Death of Jesus Christ

The physical death of our Lord is recorded in the Gospels (Matthew 27:47-50; Mark 15:22-40; Luke 23:33-49; John 19:16-30). The Lord Jesus Christ did “not” die from suffocation or exhaustion, nor did He bleed to death, or die of a broken heart but rather He died unlike any person in history, namely by His own volition. Remember what our Lord said in John 10:18.

\[
\text{John 10:18} \quad \text{No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father. (NASB95)}
\]

If He had bled to death, He would have fainted. The Lord Jesus Christ was in total control of His faculties and was totally and completely alert throughout all His suffering on the cross. Our Lord’s voluntary physical death was another indication to those observing Him at the Cross that He was indeed the Son of God. He died like no other man in history, namely, of His own choosing. This is why the centurion stated that our Lord was the Son of God.

\[
\text{Matthew 27:50} \quad \text{And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. (NASB95)}
\]

“Yielded up” is the aorist active indicative form of the verb *aphiemi*, “to dismiss, to release, to let go.” The aorist tense of the verb is a culminating aorist, which views an event from its existing results, the Lord Jesus Christ's physical death.
The active voice expresses the fact that the Lord Jesus died of His own volition since the active voice indicates that the subject produces the action of the verb.

The Lord is the only human being in history to dismiss His own spirit from His body. Every human being that dies physically as a result of a sovereign decision of God but here the Lord chooses to die physically. Our Lord’s voluntary physical death was another indication to those observing Him at the Cross that He was indeed the Son of God. He died like no other man in history, namely, of His own choosing. Our Lord’s burial is recorded in John 19:38-42.

The perfect sinless humanity of Christ was born trichotomous: (1) Body (2) Soul (3) Spirit. Therefore, our Lord’s physical death was unique because it was a trichotomous separation: (1) His physical body went to the grave (Luke 23:50-53). (2) His human spirit went to heaven (Luke 23:46; John 19:30). (3) His human soul went into Paradise a compartment of Hades (Luke 23:43; Acts 2:27; 2:31; Eph. 4:9).

The Lord was brought back from the dead by three categories of divine omnipotence: (1) Omnipotence of God the Father sent back our Lord’s human spirit to the body in the grave (Acts 2:24; Rom. 6:4; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Pet. 1:21). (2) Omnipotence of God the Holy Spirit sent back our Lord’s human soul to the body in the grave (Rom. 1:4; 8:11; 1 Pet. 3:18). (3) Omnipotence of God the Son raised His physical body from the grave (John 2:20-23; 6:39-40, 54 10:17-18).

The Lord Jesus Christ died physically in order to deal with the problem of the sin nature in the human race, which is located in the physical body of a person as a result of God imputing Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden to every person at the moment of physical birth. Therefore, the Christian’s problem with his indwelling Adamic sin nature is resolved when he is identified with Christ in His physical death through the baptism of the Holy Spirit the moment they were declared justified through faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior (Romans 6:1-10).

The Blood of Christ and Redemption

Ephesians 1:7 In whom (the Beloved) we have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace. (NASB95)

1 Peter 1:17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth, 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (NASB95)
The “blood of Christ” redeemed us. The blood of Christ does not refer to the literal blood of Christ but is part of a representative analogy between the physical death of the animal sacrifice in the Mosaic Law and the spiritual death of Christ. The animal blood was the means of teaching the doctrine of redemption in the Old Testament (Ex. 12:7; 12-13; Heb. 9:22). The animal sacrifice is a “representative” analogy in which the physical death of the animal on the altar represents the spiritual death of Christ on the cross.

The animal sacrifice is also a “real” analogy which would be a literal death compared to a literal death. The physical death of the animal is compared to the physical death of Christ.

A “representative” analogy is the physical death of the animal on the altar representing the spiritual death of Christ on the cross. A “real” analogy is that the physical death of the animals is compared to the physical death of Christ. The analogy requires that the blood of Christ be taken figuratively and metaphorically.

Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines figurative, “representing by a figure or resemblance: emblematic; of or relating to representation of form; expressing one thing in terms normally denoting another with which it may be regarded as analogous: metaphorical.”

The term “the blood of Christ” is a metaphor. Webster’s defines metaphor, “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.”

Animal blood was used to represent the figurative blood of Christ. This was done from Genesis 3:21 to the Levitical offerings of Leviticus 1-5. The blood of the animal is the seat of animal life (Lev. 17:10-14). The blood of the animal was used to represent redemption to Old Testament believers (Heb. 9:18-22). The animal was real and literal but it did not represent the literal blood of Christ shed on the cross. The animal blood represents the spiritual and physical deaths of Christ on the cross (Col. 1:20; Heb. 10:19; 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:2). The blood of the animal sacrifices were merely a shadow pointing to the reality of the cross (Heb. 9:12-24). Therefore, the phrase “His blood” refers to our Lord’s substitutionary spiritual and physical deaths on the Cross as our Substitute.

“The blood of Christ” is analogous to: (1) Redemption (2) Reconciliation (3) Propitiation. Our Lord was still alive on the Cross-when He finished making the payment for our sins (John 19:30). Our Lord did not bleed to death like the animals in the Mosaic sacrifices. He didn’t pass out on the Cross-from loss of blood, but in fact was in total command and was totally alert when He said, “It is finished.” He didn’t die like ordinary men who die involuntarily, but instead, He did voluntarily (John 10:17-18). Therefore, the blood of the animal sacrifices were merely a shadow pointing to the reality of the Christ’s spiritual death on the Cross (Heb. 9:12-24). So the Lord’s spiritual death on the Cross was the payment for our sins
and not His physical or shedding of his literal blood. His physical death dealt with the sin nature.

Paul’s Teaching in Romans 6

In Romans 6:1-2a, Paul emphatically rejects the idea that a Christian living under the dominion of the sin nature accentuates the grace of God.

**Romans 6:1-2a** Therefore, what is the conclusion that we are forced to? Should we persist in living under the dominion of the sin nature in order that grace might increase? Absolutely not! (Author’s translation)

In Romans 5:20b, Paul taught that where personal sin increased, God’s grace infinitely abounded. Then, in Romans 6:1, he poses the rhetorical question that presents the concept of a believer persisting in living under the dominion of the sin nature in order that God’s grace might increase in the sense of giving God more opportunity to manifest His grace through the forgiveness of sins. In Romans 6:2a, he emphatically rejects this idea. Then, in Romans 6:2b, Paul poses another rhetorical question that demands a negative response and rejects the idea of the believer persisting to live in under the dominion of the sin nature in order that God’s grace might increase or manifest itself more often.

**Romans 6:2b** Absolutely not! We, who are indeed of such character and of a particular class of individuals, have died with reference to the sin nature, how shall we still live under its dominion? (Author’s translation)

In Romans 6:3, he speaks of the justified sinner being identified with Christ in His spiritual death so as to solve the believer’s problem of being spiritually dead.

**Romans 6:3** Or, are some of you in a state of ignorance concerning the fact that all of us who have been identified with Christ, who is Jesus, have been identified with His spiritual death? (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 6:4, he speaks of the justified sinner being identified with Christ in His physical death so as to solve the problem of possessing a sin nature.

**Romans 6:4** Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism with respect to His physical death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead ones through the glory of the Father, in the same way, we, ourselves will also walk in the realm of an extraordinary life. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 6:5, the apostle teaches that the justified sinner is identified with Christ in His resurrection in order that the believer might receive a resurrection body like the last Adam, Christ so as to replace his sinful body.

**Romans 6:5** Therefore, if and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument that we are entered into union with Him, conformed to His physical death. Of course, we believe this is true. Then, certainly, we will also be united with Him, conformed to His resurrection. (Author’s translation)
In Romans 6:6, we studied that the believer’s old Adamic sin nature has been crucified at the Cross in order that it might be deprived of its power so that the believer might not be its slave.

**Romans 6:6 This we are very familiar with through instruction, namely, that our old man was crucified with Him in order that the sinful body would be deprived of its power with the result that we are no longer in a perpetual state of being slaves to the sin nature. (Author’s translation)**

In Romans 6:7, Paul teaches that the believer is freed from the tyranny of the indwelling old Adamic sin nature because he has died with Christ as a result of having been identified with Christ in His physical death through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 6:7 For you see the one who has died is freed from the power of the sin nature. (Author’s translation)**

Paul instructs the Roman believers in Romans 6:8 that since they have died with Christ through the baptism of the Spirit, they will as a certainty, in the future, at the resurrection, i.e. rapture of the church live with Christ in the sense that they will receive a resurrection body like Christ.

**Romans 6:8 Now, as previously stated, if and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument that we have died with Him. Of course, we have already established that this is true. Then, we do have this absolute confidence that we, as a certainty, will in the future also live with Him. (Author’s translation)**

Then, in Romans 6:9, he teaches that physical death no longer has dominion over Jesus Christ because He has been raised from the dead. The implication of this is that if physical death no longer has any control over Christ, then neither does the sin nature, which resides in the physical bodies, have dominion over the believer who is identified with Christ in His physical death and resurrection.

**Romans 6:9 Because we know for certain, namely that because Christ was raised from the dead ones, He can never again, as an eternal spiritual truth, die. Death can never again, as an eternal spiritual truth, have dominion over Him. (Author’s translation)**

Paul in Romans 6:10 instructs the believers in Rome that the Lord Jesus Christ died physically for the destruction of the sin nature but now lives to God.

**Romans 6:10 For you see, the physical death that He died, He died for the destruction of the sin nature once and for all but the life that He now lives, He lives forever for the benefit of God the Father. (Author’s translation)**

Then, in Romans 6:11, the apostle Paul commands the Roman believers to regard themselves as dead with respect to the sin nature but alive with respect to God in union with Christ Jesus.
Romans 6:11 In the same way, also, on the one hand, all of you without exception make it your habit to regard yourselves as dead ones with respect to the sin nature while on the other hand those who are, as an eternal spiritual truth, alive with respect to God the Father, in union with Christ, who is Jesus. (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 6:12, Paul prohibits the believers in Rome from letting the sin nature reign as king in their bodies with the result that they obey its lusts.

Romans 6:12 Therefore, do not make it a habit to let the sin nature reign as king in your mortal body with the result that you habitually obey its lusts. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 6:13a, Paul prohibits the Roman believers from placing the members of their bodies at the disposal of the sin nature as instruments of unrighteousness and commands them instead to place the members of their body at the disposal of the Father as instruments of righteousness. Then, in Romans 6:13b, he commands the believers in Rome to place the members of their body at the disposal of the Father as instruments of righteousness.

Romans 6:13 Nor, all of you place the members of your body at the disposal and benefit of the sin nature as instruments, which produce unrighteousness but rather I solemnly charge all of you to place yourselves at the disposal and benefit of God the Father as those who are, as an eternal spiritual truth, alive from the dead ones and in addition your members as instruments, which produce righteousness for the benefit of God the Father and do it now! (Author’s translation)

Paul teaches the believers in Rome in Romans 6:14 that the sin nature is not to be their master since they were no longer under law, but under God’s grace.

Romans 6:14 For the sin nature, will, as a certainty, never again, have dominion over all of you for all of you, as an eternal spiritual truth, are by no means under the authority and dominion of the Law but rather under the authority and dominion of grace. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 6:15, in response to any possible misconceptions regarding his teaching in Romans 6:14 by those Jews who insist that the Law is necessary to restrain sin and those Christians who might erroneously conclude that grace is a license to sin, Paul emphatically rejects any idea that grace is a license to sin.

Romans 6:15 What shall we conclude then? Should we commit an act of sin because we, as an eternal spiritual truth, are by no means under the authority and dominion of the Law but rather under the authority and dominion of grace? Absolutely not! (Author’s translation)

Romans 6:16 emphasizes that there is no compromise with sin now that the Christian is no longer under the Law but under God’s grace policy. He is either a slave to the sin nature, which results in temporal spiritual death, i.e. loss of
fellowship with God or he is a slave to obedience to the Father’s will, which results in the believer experiencing the divine righteousness imputed to him the moment he exercised faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Romans 6:16 Are you totally unaware concerning this fact, namely that the one whom you desire to place yourselves at the disposal of as slaves for obedience, you will be slaves for the benefit of this one whom you desire to obey, either the sin nature resulting in temporal spiritual death or obedience to the Father’s will resulting in righteousness? (Author’s translation)

In Romans 6:17, Paul thanks God the Father because the Roman believers were once perpetual slaves to the sin nature but then they obeyed the gospel and as a result were delivered positionally from the tyranny of the sin nature.

Romans 6:17 But now, thank God! Because all of you were once in a perpetual state of being slaves to the sin nature but then all of you obeyed from the heart that particular doctrinal standard with respect to which all of you were taught. (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 6:18a, he teaches the Christians in Rome that they were freed from the sin nature through their obedience to the gospel. He teaches in Romans 6:18b that they were enslaved to God through their obedience to the gospel.

Romans 6:18 And also, because having been set free from the tyranny of the sin nature, all of you became slaves of righteousness. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 6:19, the apostle Paul commands the believers in Rome to present the members of their bodies as slaves to righteousness just as they presented the members of their bodies as slaves to impurity and lawlessness prior to being declared justified through faith in Christ.

Romans 6:19 I am speaking according to your human frame of reference because of the weakness, which is your flesh. Therefore, just as all of you placed your members as slaves at the disposal of and with respect to that which is impurity and in addition with respect to that which is lawlessness resulting in further lawlessness, in the same way, now, I solemnly charge all of you to place your members as slaves at the disposal of and with respect to righteousness resulting in sanctification and do it now! (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 6:20, Paul explain why the Roman Christians should obey the command to place their members as slaves at the disposal of and with respect to God who as to His nature is righteousness.

Romans 6:20 For you see, when all of you were once in a perpetual state of being slaves to the sin nature, all of you were in a perpetual state of being free with respect to righteousness. (Author’s translation)

Next, in Romans 6:21, Paul poses a rhetorical question to the Christians in Rome reminding them that prior to their conversion to Christianity that their
actions of which they now were ashamed only served to perpetuate their status of being spiritually dead.

Romans 6:21 Therefore, what benefit were all of you at that time in a perpetual state of possessing because of those things, which all of you are now at the present time ashamed of? In fact, the result produced by these things is, as an eternal spiritual truth spiritual death. (Author’s translation)

Then, the apostle Paul in Romans 6:22 teaches that because the Roman Christians have been freed from the sin nature and enslaved to God, the benefit that they now possess is that of being a servant of God rather than the sin nature, which results in sanctification and eternal life.

Romans 6:22 But now, at the present time, because all of you have been set free from the tyranny of the sin nature and because all of you have become slaves to God the Father all of you at the present time possess your benefit (of being a servant of God) resulting in sanctification and the result, eternal life. (Author’s translation)

Romans 6:23, Paul teaches that the wages of sin is spiritual death resulting in physical death and ultimately the second death in the eternal lake of fire but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23 For you see the sin nature pays out spiritual death however God the Father graciously gives eternal life in the Person of Christ, who is Jesus, our Lord. (Author’s translation)

Paul’s Teaching in Romans 7

In Romans 7:1, in which Paul poses a rhetorical question to the Jewish Christians in Rome and asks if they are ignorant of the fact that the Mosaic Law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives.

Romans 7:1 Or, are some of you in a state of ignorance concerning this fact spiritual brothers (specifically, I am now addressing those who are very familiar with the Law through instruction), namely, that the Law does, as an eternal spiritual truth, have jurisdiction over a person during the entire extent of time they do live? (Author’s translation)

That Paul is addressing the Jewish Christians in Rome specifically in this passage, which is indicated in his parenthetical statement “I am now addressing those who are very familiar with the Law through instruction.” Thus, when he uses the term “Law” he is referring specifically, to the Mosaic Law, i.e. the Jewish law and not to an axiom of political justice both Jewish and Roman.

Now, even though Paul’s comments in verses 1-6 are specifically directed towards the Jewish Christians in Rome, these comments would also be of benefit
for the Gentile Christians as well in that it would protect them from the Judaizers’ legalistic teaching, which the Galatian church fell victim to (See Galatians 5).

Then, in Romans 7:2, Paul presents the principle found in the Mosaic Law that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives but if he dies, she is discharged from her marriage contract with her husband.

**Romans 7:2** For example, the married woman is always bound by contract to the husband while he does live. However, if the husband dies, then she is, as an eternal spiritual truth, discharged from the contract with respect to her husband. (Author’s translation)

Paul teaches in Romans 7:3 that if a Jewish woman’s husband dies, then she is not an adulteress if she remarries.

**Romans 7:3** Therefore, based upon what has been previously stated, if while her husband does live she enters into marriage with another man, then she will, as a certainty, cause herself to be known publicly as an adulteress. However, if her husband dies then she is, as an eternal spiritual truth free from the contract with the result that she is, as an eternal spiritual truth not an adulteress if she enters into marriage with another man. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 7:4, Paul teaches that in the same way that a Jewish wife is discharged from the marriage contract with her deceased husband and free to marry another so the Christian has been discharged from the Law and was married to Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 7:4** Therefore, my spiritual brothers, all of you without exception have also been put to death by means of Christ’s body with the result that all of you have been entered into marriage with another, the one who was raised from the dead ones in order that we might produce fruit for the benefit of God the Father. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 7:4a, he teaches that the Jewish Christians in Rome were dead with respect to the Mosaic Law through the body of Christ or in other words their identification with Christ in His physical death. Then, in Romans 7:4b, the apostle teaches that the Jewish Christians in Rome and all Christians for that matter have been married to Christ in order to bear fruit for God the Father.

Next, in Romans 7:5, Paul taught the Roman believers that prior to their conversion to Christianity, when they were in bondage to the sin nature, the sinful passions of their sin natures produced personal sin as a result of their permitting these desires to be operative in their human bodies.

**Romans 7:5** For you see, when we were once in a perpetual state of being in bondage to our flesh, the sinful desires, which were aroused by means of the Law were perpetually allowed to be operative in the members of our body
resulting in the production of fruit related to spiritual death. (Author’s translation)

This passage describes the Roman Christians prior to their conversion to Christianity whereas Romans 7:6 describes their present status of having been freed from the Law, having died to it and now having the capacity to serve in newness of the Spirit.

Next, in Romans 7:6, Paul teaches the Jewish Christians in Rome that they have been discharged from their legal and moral obligations to the Mosaic Law as a result of being identified with Christ in His physical death. Consequently, he teaches that they are forever in a state of being slaves for the benefit of the Father. This he teaches was by means of the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit the moment they trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior and never by means of the useless observance of the letter of the Law.

Romans 7:6 But now in our present state, we have been discharged from the Law as a result of having died with respect to that which we were once in a perpetual state of being bound. Consequently, we are, as an eternal spiritual truth, forever slaves for the benefit of God the Father by means of the extraordinary work of the Spirit and never by means of the useless observance of the letter, which is the Law. (Author’s translation)

In verse 7, Paul poses a rhetorical question that anticipates the false inference from his teaching in Romans 5:20, 6:14b and 7:5 that the Law is equivalent to the sin nature. He empathically rejects the idea that the Law is sinful but rather that it made him aware of his sin nature and then presents an example with the tenth commandment that prohibits coveting and identifies it as a sin.

Romans 7:7 Therefore, what is the conclusion that we are forced to? Is, the Law, in the state of being identical with the sin nature? Absolutely not! On the contrary, I would have never become aware of my sin nature except by means of the Law. For example, I would never have been able to identify covetousness if the Law had not said, “You shall never covet.” (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 7:8, Paul teaches the Christians in Rome that because the sin nature seized a base of operations through the tenth commandment, the sin nature produced in him each and every kind of covetousness. At the conclusion of the verse he begins to explain why this is the case. He states that apart from the Law, personal sin is dead in the sense that it can never be charged to the account of the sinner when the Law is not in effect.

Romans 7:8 In fact, because the sin nature seized a base of operations by means of the tenth commandment, it produced in me each and every kind of covetousness for you see apart from the Law personal sin is, as an eternal spiritual truth dead. (Author’s translation)
Then, in Romans 7:9, Paul teaches that when the tenth commandment became a reality in his life, his sin nature suddenly became active and consequently, he died spiritually.

**Romans 7:9** However, at one time, I used to be alive apart from the Law but when the tenth commandment became a reality (in my life), the sin nature suddenly became active. Consequently, I became spiritually dead. (Author’s translation)

In this passage, he teaches that his awareness of the significance of the tenth commandment awakened his sin nature and he died spiritually. For a Christian to die spiritually is to lose fellowship with God, which is restored through the confession of sin (1 John 1:9).

Next, we read in Romans 7:10 that Paul surprisingly discovered through his own personal experience as a Christian that the tenth commandment prohibiting coveting, which was intended to give life instead resulted in his experience temporal spiritual death.

**Romans 7:10** In other words, this commandment, which was for the purpose of life, was surprisingly discovered through my own personal experience to result in temporal spiritual death. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 7:11, he teaches that because his sin nature seized a base of operations through the commandment, it deceived and killed him.

**Romans 7:11** For you see because the sin nature seized a base of operations by means of the tenth commandment, it deceived me and in addition by means of it, put me to death. (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 7:12, Paul presents a positive inference from his teaching in verses 7-11 by stating that the Law is holy and the tenth commandment is holy, righteous and good.

**Romans 7:12** Therefore, indeed, the Law is, as an eternal spiritual truth holy. Furthermore, the tenth commandment is, as an eternal spiritual truth holy and in addition righteous as well as good. (Author’s translation)

In this passage, Paul refutes in emphatic terms the erroneous conclusion that could be inferred from his teaching in Romans 5:20, 6:14b and 7:5 that the Law is equivalent to the sin nature by stating that the Law is holy and the tenth commandment is also holy, and righteous as well as good. In Romans 7:13a, Paul poses a rhetorical question that anticipates an erroneous conclusion that could be inferred from his teaching in verses 7-12 that the commandment caused him to lose fellowship with God. This false assertion, he emphatically refutes and declares that it was the sin nature, which caused him to lose fellowship with God. Then in Romans 7:13b, he teaches that the Mosaic Law was given to expose man’s sinful nature and the sin nature’s extraordinarily sinful character.
Romans 7:13 Therefore, did that which is good cause temporal spiritual death in me? Absolutely not! On the contrary, the sin nature caused temporal spiritual death in me in order that the sin nature would be exposed by repeatedly producing temporal spiritual death in me by means of that which is good in order that by means of the tenth commandment, the sin nature would demonstrate itself extraordinarily sinful in character. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 7:14, Paul acknowledges that the Law is spiritual but that he is unspiritual because he still possesses as a Christian a sin nature.

Romans 7:14 For you see, we acknowledge this fact, namely that the Law is, as an eternal spiritual truth spiritual. However, I myself, as an eternal spiritual truth, perpetually exist in a state of being unspiritual, sold as a slave under the authority and dominion of the sin nature. (Author’s translation)

Next, in Romans 7:15, Paul reveals that he does not practice obedience to the Law that he desires to do but rather commits sin in violation of the Law, which he hates.

Romans 7:15 For you see, I habitually produce what I by no means understand because I by no means habitually practice the very thing that I habitually desire to do. On the contrary I habitually commit the very thing that I do hate. (Author’s translation)

Then in Romans 7:16, Paul presents even more evidence to his readers that he possesses a sin nature by arguing that if he practices sin, which he hates, then he agrees with the Law’s assessment of his conduct that it is sinful and testifies that it is perfect.

Romans 7:16 However, if, and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument I habitually commit the very thing that I by no means habitually desire to do as I’ve already admitted to. Then, I do agree with the Law. I do testify that it is, as an eternal spiritual truth perfect. (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 7:17, he presents the logical conclusion that he possesses a sin nature that agrees with his claim in verse 14 that he possesses a sin nature and which logical conclusion is based upon the evidence presented by him in verses 15-16.

Romans 7:17 So then, as previously stated, based upon the evidence presented, I myself do no longer produce it but rather, the sin nature, which does perpetually dwell in me. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 7:18, Paul states to the Christians in Rome that he recognizes that nothing good dwells in his physical body because the desire to do God’s will is present in him but the power to do so is not.

Romans 7:18 For you see, I know as a fact through experience, namely that absolutely nothing good, as an eternal spiritual truth, dwells in me, that is, in
my flesh because the desire is, as an eternal spiritual truth, present in me, however, the capacity to produce that which is perfect, is, as an eternal spiritual truth absolutely not. (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 7:19, he acknowledges that he does not do what he desires to do but rather the evil he does not want to do.

**Romans 7:19** For you see, the good that, I habitually desire to do, I by no means habitually accomplish. On the contrary, I habitually practice the very evil that I by no means habitually desire to do. (Author’s translation)

Next, in Romans 7:20, Paul concludes that his sin nature is the source of evil in his life.

**Romans 7:20** So then, as previously stated if, and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument, I habitually commit the very thing that I myself by no means habitually desire to do and of course I’ve demonstrated this is true and have already admitted to this. Then, I myself do no longer produce it but rather the sin nature, which, does perpetually dwell in me. (Author’s translation)

Next, Paul in Romans 7:21 relates to the Christians in Rome that he discovered a spiritual principle that when he desired to obey the Law that evil was present in him in the form of the sin nature.

**Romans 7:21** Therefore, I surprisingly discovered through my own personal experience the principle: when I, at any time, desire to accomplish that which is perfect that evil is, as an eternal spiritual truth, present in me. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 7:22, Paul states that he joyfully concurs with the Law of God in the inner man.

**Romans 7:22** For you see, I habitually and joyfully agree with God’s Law the Father with respect to my inner man. (Author’s translation)

Paul in Romans 7:23 writes to the believers in Rome that his sin nature, which resides in the members of his physical body, wages war against his mind and makes him its prisoner.

**Romans 7:23** However, I habitually recognize a different kind of propensity in my members as perpetually waging war against the propensity originating from my mind and in addition perpetually making me a prisoner of war with respect to the propensity originating from the sin nature, which does perpetually exist in my members. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 7:24, Paul concludes his description of his experience as a Christian desiring to obey the Law of God and to experience deliverance from his sin nature by obedience to the Law apart from the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 7:24 A wretched person, I myself always am! Who will deliver me from this body, which produces temporal spiritual death? (Author’s translation)

In Romans 7:25a, the apostle Paul expresses his thanks to the Father for his deliverance from the power of his sin nature through the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, in Romans 7:25b, Paul presents his conclusion by stating that he serves the Law through his new nature but the sin nature through his flesh.

Romans 7:25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. (Author’s translation)

Paul’s Teaching in Romans 8

In Romans 8:1, Paul assured his Christian readers in Rome that there is never any condemnation, none whatsoever for them because of their union with Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now, as an eternal spiritual truth, never any condemnation, none whatsoever for the benefit of those in union with Christ who is Jesus. (Author’s translation)

Next, in Roman 8:2, he taught the Christians in Rome that the life-giving Spirit’s authoritative power, by means of Christ Jesus, has set them free from the authoritative power of the sin nature as well as spiritual death’s.

Romans 8:2 Because, the life-giving Spirit’s authoritative power, by means of (the death and resurrection of) Christ, who is Jesus, has set you free from the sin nature’s authoritative power as well as spiritual death’s. (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 8:3, Paul “explains how” or presents the “reason why” the life-giving Spirit’s authoritative power, by means of (the death and resurrection of) Christ Jesus has set them free from the sin nature’s authoritative power as well as spiritual death’s.

The first statement in this passage teaches that the Law was unable to deliver sinful humanity from the sin nature and real spiritual death. Then, we read in this verse where the Spirit was able to set the Christian free from the sin nature and real spiritual death because the Father executed the sin nature through Christ’s physical death.

Romans 8:3 Because with reference to the Law’s inability in which it was always powerless through the flesh, God the Father accomplished by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. In fact, with regards to the sin nature, He (the Father) executed the sin nature by means of His (Son’s) human nature. (Author’s translation)
Romans 8:4 teaches that the Father’s purpose for sacrificing His Son on the Cross was so that the righteous requirement of the Law would be fulfilled in an experiential sense in those Christians who are not conducting their lives in submission to the sin nature but in submission to the Spirit.

Romans 8:4 In order that the Law’s righteous requirement would be fulfilled in us, those of us who are not, as an eternal spiritual truth, conducting our lives in submission to the flesh but rather in submission to the Spirit. (Author’s translation)

Then, in Romans 8:5, Paul teaches that those Christians who are in submission to the sin nature, occupy their minds with the desires of the sin nature whereas those who are in submission to the Spirit occupy their minds with desires of the Spirit.

Romans 8:5 For you see those who at any time exist in the state of being in submission to the flesh are, as an eternal spiritual truth, preoccupied with the things produced by the flesh. However, those in submission to the Spirit, the things produced by the Spirit. (Author’s translation)

Paul in Romans 8:6 teaches that the mind-set produced by the sin nature is temporal spiritual death, i.e. loss of fellowship with God whereas the mind-set produced by the Spirit is life, i.e. experiencing eternal life and peace.

Romans 8:6 In fact, the mind-set produced by the flesh is, as an eternal spiritual truth temporal spiritual death. However, the mind-set produced by the Spirit is, as an eternal spiritual truth life as well as peace. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 8:5-6, Paul taught that when the believer is preoccupied in his or her thinking with the godly desires produced by the Spirit, which would produces in them a mind-set, which gives them the capacity to obey the Law, then they are under the influence of the Spirit or filled with the Spirit. Paul teaches in Romans 8:5-6 that the believer whose mental attitude is produced by the sin nature as a result of being preoccupied with the desires produced by the sin nature will experience loss of fellowship with God. While on the other hand, the believer whose mental attitude is produced by the Spirit as a result of being preoccupied with the desires produced by the Spirit will experience eternal life and peace and thus fellowship with God.

Paul in Romans 8:5-6 is in effect, describing how to be filled with the Spirit, which is commanded of the believer in Ephesians 5:18.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. (NASB95)

Then, in Romans 8:7, he teaches that the mind-set produced by the sin nature is antagonistic toward God and has no capacity to obey His Law.
Romans 8:7 Because, the mind-set produced by the flesh is, as an eternal spiritual truth antagonistic towards God for you see, it never, as an eternal spiritual truth, permits itself to be subjected to God’s Law because it, as an eternal spiritual truth, does not even have the capacity to do so. (Author’s translation)

Next, in Romans 8:8, Paul teaches that those in bondage to the flesh, i.e. the sin nature can never please God.

Romans 8:8 Furthermore, those who at any time exist in the state of being in bondage to the flesh, as an eternal spiritual truth can never please God. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 8:9, Paul teaches that the Christian is not in bondage to the sin nature in a positional sense but rather in subjection to the authority of the Spirit and is indwelt by the Spirit in contrast to the unbeliever who is not.

Romans 8:9 However, all of you, without exception are, absolutely not, as an eternal spiritual truth, existing in the state of being in bondage to the flesh but rather in subjection to the authority of the Spirit, if in fact-and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument the Spirit, who is God does dwell in all of you. Of course, He does. However, if, and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument anyone does not possess at all the Spirit proceeding from Christ, then this one, as an eternal spiritual truth, by no means belongs to Him. (Author’s translation)

Paul teaches in the protasis of a first class condition that appears in Romans 8:10 that the Christian is indwelt by Christ. Then, in the apodasis, he teaches that while on one hand, the Christian’s body is dead due to the sin nature but on the other hand, the Spirit is life and peace because of imputed righteousness.

Romans 8:10 However, if, and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument Christ does, as an eternal spiritual truth, exist in all of you. Of course, He does! Then, on the one hand, the body is, as an eternal spiritual truth dead because of the sin nature while on the other hand, the Spirit is, as an eternal spiritual truth, life in all of you because of righteousness. (Author’s translation)

Next, the apostle teaches in Romans 8:11 that the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to the Christian’s mortal body through the Spirit who indwells the Christian.

Romans 8:11 However, if, and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument the Spirit, proceeding from the One (the Father) who raised the unique Person of Jesus from the dead ones, does dwell in all of you. Of course, He does! Then, the One (the Father) who raised Christ from the dead ones, will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who does permanently dwell in all of you. (Author’s translation)
Paul in Romans 8:12 teaches that the Christian is by no means obligated to live in submission to the flesh.

**Romans 8:12** Indeed, therefore, spiritual brothers, we, as an eternal spiritual truth, are debtors, by no means to the flesh, that is, a lifestyle in submission to the flesh. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 8:13a, Paul teaches that the Christian, who submits to his flesh, will lose fellowship with God.

**Romans 8:13a** Because, if, and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument, you, at any time, live in submission to the flesh, then, you will certainly die. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 8:13b, he teaches that if by the Spirit, the Christian puts to death the deeds of the sin nature, then he will live and experience fellowship with God.

**Romans 8:13b** However, if and let us assume that it is true for the sake of argument by means of the omnipotence of the Spirit, you, at any time, put to death the actions produced by the body, then, you will certainly cause yourself to live. (Author’s translation)

In Romans 8:14, Paul teaches that the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.

**Romans 8:14** Because, all of us who are, as an eternal spiritual truth, led by means of the Spirit, who is God, these are, as an eternal spiritual truth, God’s sons. (Author’s translation)

*Results of Redemption*

There are many results of the redemption accomplished by the cross of Jesus Christ. The first is the forgiveness of sins (Isa. 44:22; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12-15). Redemption is also the basis of justification (Rom. 3:24). It delivers from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13; 4:4-6). Redemption is the basis for sanctification (Eph. 5:25-27). It is the basis for the eternal inheritance of believer (Heb. 9:15). Redemption is the basis for the strategic victory of Christ in the angelic conflict (Col. 2:14-15; Heb. 2:14-15). Redemption of the soul in salvation leads to redemption of the body in resurrection (Eph. 1:14). Redemption is the ultimate status of regenerated human beings forever (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30).

*Paul’s teaching with regards to Slaves and their Masters*

The apostle Paul addresses the conduct of slaves and slave masters in regards to each other in many places (1 Corinthians 7:20-24; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-25; 1 Timothy 6:1-2). Peter gives instructions regarding Christian slaves in 1 Peter 2:13-25.
In many New Testament studies and commentaries such as Philemon, the German term, *Haustafeln* is used for the apostles’ instructions in the New Testament regarding domestic relationships between husband and wife, children and parents, slaves and masters in the home or church.

Ephesians 6:5-9 teaches the Ephesian believers the responsibilities of Christian slaves towards their masters and the responsibilities of Christian slave owners towards their slaves.

**Ephesians 6:5** Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ. (NASB95)

The first reason why slaves were to obey their masters was that they were really serving Christ as signified by the phrase “as to Christ.”

“With fear and trembling” indicates that Christian slaves were to honor and respect their masters. Therefore, Christian employees should obey their bosses with fear and trembling meaning that should honor and respect them.

“In the sincerity of heart” means that Christian slaves were to do their work for the masters sincerely and not two faced, they were not to be hypocritical. They should not be licking the boots of their master when he is around and stabbing him in the back when he is out.

“Sincerity of heart” means that they were to do their work conscientiously without complaining.

**Ephesians 6:6** not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. (NASB95)

Christian slaves were commanded to be obedient to their masters since this was the will of God for their lives.

“Eyeservice” refers to working only when the boss is watching or working extra hard when he is watching to give the impression he is doing a very good job.

**Ephesians 6:7** With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men. (NASB95)

“With good will” means that Christian slave should do his work without prompting or compelling or in other words, with zeal, a great attitude and enthusiasm.

**Ephesians 6:8** knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. (NASB95)

The third and final reason why Paul commanded slaves to obey their masters is that they would eventually be rewarded by the Lord Jesus Christ at the Bema Seat Evaluation of the church (Col. 3:23-25; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

**Colossians 3:22** Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work
heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men. 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (NASB95)

Ephesians 6:9 And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (NASB95)

Many Christians in the first century were slave owners and were commanded by Paul to treat their slaves in the same manner that Paul described to the Christian slaves in Ephesians 6:5-8. This was in accordance with the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 7:12 “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (NASB95)

The phrase “give up threatening” means that Christian slave owners were not to threaten their slaves with severe punishment such as scourging.

Christian slave owners were to grant their slaves just and fairness knowing that they will give an account to the Lord for their treatment of their slaves.

Colossians 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. (NASB95)

Both the Christian slave owner and the Christian slave were to recognize that they were both slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ and were serving Him.

The Word of God never commands slaves to seek their freedom or leave their masters or rebel against them. Many slaves and their masters belonged to the same local assembly in the early church. This obviously could produce problems in the local assembly. The doctrine of the apostles does not deal with this problem by telling masters to release their slaves, nor does it teach slaves to leave their masters.

Slaves who had the opportunity to gain their freedom by legal means were not condemned for doing so, but were encouraged (1 Cor. 7:21). Being a slave in the natural realm was not a hindrance to serving God since He has given each church age believer in Christ spiritual freedom. The slave had equal opportunity to bring glory to God and receive rewards for faithfulness to the Lord, as did his Christian master.

Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (NASB95)

Paul taught Christian slaves that they were in reality slaves of the Lord and therefore, were in reality serving Him since He purchased them out of the slave market of sin with His spiritual death on the cross.
1 Corinthians 7:20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. 21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called. (NASB95)

In this passage, Paul’s teaching is emphasizing with the Christian slaves in Corinth that their service as a slave is ultimately on behalf of Christ Himself rather than their master. In essence he is telling them that freedom to serve the Lord Jesus Christ transcends freedom from their earthly masters, which makes their condition bearable as well as an opportunity to glorify the Lord in their state of being a slave. The Son of God became a slave according to Paul’s teaching in Philippians 2:7. The Lord Jesus Christ became a human being in order to serve mankind. He voluntarily served sinful humanity by suffering a substitutionary spiritual and physical death on a Roman cross as a criminal in order to deliver them from sin and Satan (cf. Mark 10:45). Thus, Christian slaves can imitate Him in their present condition as slaves.

In 1 Timothy 6:1-2, Paul addresses the proper conduct of Christian slaves towards their masters.

1 Timothy 6:1 All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against. 2 Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles. (NASB95)

It appears that in 1 Timothy 6:1-2 that some slaves in the Ephesian Christian community were not using their new found freedom in Christ properly and were being disrespectful of their masters whether these were believers or non-believers. This is indicated by the fact that usually when Paul discusses the proper conduct of Christian slaves as he does in Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22-4:1, it is accompanied by instructions as to the proper treatment of slaves by Christians who were slave masters. However in 1 Timothy 6:1-2 he addresses only the proper conduct of Christian slaves towards their masters and never addresses Christian slave owners. Verse 1 implies that there was a problem with some Christian slaves being disrespectful of their masters. Verse 2 is more explicit implying the same thing.

In Colossians 3:18-4:1, Paul teaches with regards to the proper conduct of Christian wives and husbands and children followed by slaves and then masters. In Ephesians 6:1-9, he teaches with regards to the proper conduct of children, parents,
slaves and masters. However, in 1 Timothy 6:1-2, he only discusses the proper conduct of slaves. This strongly suggests that he is addressing a specific problem at that time in the Ephesian Christian community concerning insubordinate conduct among Christian slaves in Ephesus.

Paul wants these slaves to be obedient and honor their masters if they are unbelievers in order to evangelize them. Their insubordination will destroy their testimony before their unregenerate masters. Respectful conduct towards their masters will go a long way to the evangelization of these masters. Respectful conduct towards those masters who were believers would promote unity in the body of Christ but also aid these masters.

The question naturally arises as to why the apostle Paul does not teach against slavery and even reject this institution of the Roman Empire? The answer is simple. He knew that social change that is a blessing to mankind can only come through the gospel of Jesus Christ. He knew social problems can only be resolved through the gospel. Thus, he knew that if enough slave masters were evangelized and responded by faith to the gospel and were regenerated, then this could result in the abolishment of slavery. This was in fact what happened for within a few centuries, slavery was gone. Paul knew that once the hearts of slave owners were regenerate by the gospel, then slavery could be dealt with. Christians in America in the twenty first century should learn a lesson from this.

In the Word of God, the Holy Spirit does not prohibit Christians from becoming involved in various aspects of society (we are, after all, “the salt of the world”). However, when the Christian exchanges the gospel for a social agenda they are contaminating their mission. There are social implications of the gospel that are quite extensive, but Christians are never forget that our primary task in relation to the world is not to change political structures, but through the gospel offer forgiveness of sin in the name of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Paul does not seek to abolish slavery because slavery was not condemned by God in the Old Testament and in fact was practiced in Israel. Also, Paul knew that being a slave did not adversely affect a Christian’s ability to execute the Father’s will to become like Jesus Christ. In fact, you could do God’s will by simply being an obedient and submissive slave.

Whether a Christian is a slave or freeman, male or female, Jew or Gentile, they have equal privilege and equal opportunity to execute the Father’s will (Galatians 3:26-28). There are no social, gender or racial distinctions in the family of God. The gospel of Jesus Christ brought all of this about.

Therefore, Paul’s main objective was to teach and propagate the gospel rather than be a social activist who marches around the Emperor’s home demanding the abolition of slavery in the Roman Empire.
Themes

There are many themes that resonate throughout this tiny epistle. The first is that of forgiveness. Paul is appealing to Philemon to forgive his runaway slave Onesimus who had stolen from him. This results in reconciliation which is another theme permeating this epistle.

Also, Paul does not condemn slavery or order Philemon to free Onesimus. Rather he emphasizes that the justified sinner’s relationships with people are fundamentally changed as a result of their conversion whether it is a relationship between a slave and his master or vice versa or a wife and her husband as well as parents with children. Furthermore, Paul appeals to Philemon to forgive Onesimus because of the common relationship that have with each other which is based upon faith in Jesus Christ. This is indicated by the chiastic structure of the letter. This common relationship based upon faith in Jesus Christ in turn serves as the basis for Philemon operating in God’s love towards Onesimus which is demonstrated by forgiving him and receiving him as a fellow brother in Christ. Thus, Paul in no way seeks to persuade Philemon.

As we noted earlier, the apostle Paul’s appeal in his epistle to Philemon with regards to freeing his slave Onesimus is based upon his understanding of the doctrine of redemption. Philemon was a slave to sin just like Onesimus and through faith in Jesus Christ, both slave and slave owner were redeemed out of the slave market of sin. Thus, Philemon is obligated to forgive Onesimus.

In Paul’s letter to Philemon, the apostle undermines the foundation of slavery which is that slaves were non-persons or non-entities. In Galatians 3:26-28, he teaches that the Christian slave has equal privilege and equal opportunity to execute the will of the Father just like the Christian Freeman or slave owner. In 1 Corinthians 7:21-24, he urges Christian slaves to live according to their new status of being in union with Christ rather than be disturbed or upset by their status as slaves. This encouragement is more fundamental than any social or legal change of status or condition.

Nowhere does Paul condemn slavery or commend the institution. The apostle does not seek to abolish slavery but rather taught something that transcended the termination of social problem. Rather, he taught the gospel of Jesus Christ which responded to by faith in Jesus Christ results in the destruction of all social problems whether starvation, crime, war or slavery. Jesus Christ and His apostles dealt with the problems of society by proclaiming the gospel, which Paul taught was the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. The problems of society are the direct result of sin and Satan. The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims His victory over sin and Satan. This victory is appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ. The church’s failure to make an impact on society throughout the centuries is the
direct result of not having the conviction that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Any success the church has achieved is the direct result of having the conviction that the gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.

Wiersbe writes “We need to remember that slavery was an accepted institution in the Roman Empire. Romans and Greeks brought multitudes of slaves (old and young) home from their wars, and the buying and selling of slaves was a daily part of life. Paul had a tender interest in slaves (1 Cor. 7:20–24; Col. 3:22–4:1; Eph. 6:5–9), encouraging them to be the best Christians possible and to win their freedom lawfully if they could. We do not read that Paul specifically attacked the institution of slavery; the Gospel itself, preached and lived in the early church, ultimately destroyed this social problem. Paul’s letter to Philemon is a classic example of how Christ changes a home and society by changing lives. It was not that Paul avoided the problem of slavery; rather, he realized the true solution would be found as men and women gave their hearts to Christ.”58

Daniel Streett writes “In the final analysis, a focus on slavery has obscured the true theological message of Philemon: The church is to be a radically new society, where divisions founded upon race, gender and social status are overcome by unity in Christ. In the church the reconciliation and forgiveness modeled by the Lord is manifested in a spirit of agapeic servanthood. Without dispute, this is a message the church in every age needs to hear.”59

**Chiastic Structure**

Paul employs the literary figure of chiasmus in his epistle to Philemon because it appears he saw the providence of God in this entire affair between himself, Philemon and his runaway slave. There is irony in this story in the sense that Onesimus had to runaway and leave Philemon in order to return and be his spiritual brother. This change in relationship between the two appears to be the reason why Paul uses chiasmus in this epistle.

“Chiasmus” is the use of inverted parallelism of form or of content which moves toward and away from a strategic central component and explicitly states what the inverted parallelism only implied. In other words, “chiasmus” is a literary form in which ideas that have been presented in order (A, B, C…) correspond to ideas that later occur in reverse order (…C, B, A) and revolve around a central component.

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For example, the statement “Winners (A) never quit (B) and therefore, perseverance is the key to success (C) because quitters (B) never win (A).” So we can see that the statement “winners never quit because quitters never win” emphasizes that winning demands perseverance.

Chiasmus is also called chiasm and may be defined as “Chiasm, also called chiasmus, may be defined as “a stylistic literary figure which consists of a series of two or more elements followed by a presentation of corresponding elements in reverse order.”

A literary device in which words, clauses or themes are laid out and then repeated but in inverted order. This creates an a-b-b-a pattern, or a “crossing” effect like the letter “x” (χιασμός, “a making of the letter χ”). Also called inverted parallelism.

Ronald Man writes that chiasm “derives from the Greek verb χιάζω, meaning ‘to mark with two lines crossing like a χ (Chi)’ (Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek English Lexicon, rev. Henry Stuart James and Roderick McKenzie, 2 vols. [Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1953], s.v. “χιάζω,” 2:1991). If the two mirrored halves of a simple chiastic structure (with the form ABB’A’) are placed one under the other and then lines are drawn connecting the corresponding elements, the lines form a shape resembling the capital Greek letter χ (Chi).”

Brad McCoy writes “Chiasmus (or chiasm) is an important structural device/form commonly found in ancient literature and oratory, both secular and sacred. Robert Norrman’s concise definition, which affirms that chiasmus involves ‘the use of bilateral symmetry about a central axis,’ well describes its basic essence. However, the present author’s definition of chiasmus as ‘the use of inverted parallelism of form and/or content which moves toward and away from a strategic central component’ intentionally goes beyond Norrman’s statement in that it more explicitly mentions the literary dynamics of chiasmus in its fullest technical sense. Chiasmus has been found as early as the third millennium B.C. in the organization of certain Sumero-Akkadian and Ugaritic texts. The first specific use of the term chiasm in reference to the dynamic of rhetorical development by means of a parallel inversion of thematic topics is found in the writings of the fourth century B.C. Greek rhetorician Isocrates. The term chiasmus originated from the Classical Greek verb ciazw, which means “to mark with two lines crossing like a χ [ci].”

Man cites Miesner who writes “The position of members in a chiastic structure indicates points of emphasis… in respect to both form and sense, the rest of the

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63. Chiasmus: An Important Structural Device Commonly Found in Biblical Literature; www.chafer.edu/journal; page 1
structure pivots around the center, which may be either a single or a double unit. Thus, the exegete must attach special importance to the center of a chiastic structure… By centering the thought of a passage, the structure shows the emphasis of the whole.”

A  Paul’s imprisonment is the back to the epistle (1-3)
   B  Paul’s prayer for Philemon (4)
   C  Philemon’s love, faithfulness and hospitality (5-7)
   D  Paul refrains from using his apostolic authority (8)
   E  Paul appeals to Philemon instead (9-10)
   F  Onesimus is Paul’s convert (10)
   G  Onesimus is profitable as a result of Paul’s ministry (11)
   H  Receive Onesimus as Paul’s own heart (12)
   I  Onesimus now a servant of the gospel (13)
   J  Paul will not require Philemon to take Onesimus back (14)
   J  Perhaps Onesimus left Philemon so that he could take him back forever (15)
   I  Philemon receives Onesimus back as a brother in the Lord (16)
   H  Paul requests Philemon receive Onesimus back as he would him (17)
   G  Paul pay Philemon back for any loss incurred by loss of Onesimus (18-19)
   F  Philemon is indebted to Paul as his convert (19)
   E  Paul appeals to Philemon (20)
   D  Paul does not ask for obedience but knows Philemon will do more than he asked (21)
   C  Paul requests the hospitality of Philemon for himself (22)
   B  Philemon’s prayers for Paul (22)
   A  Paul’s Imprisonment in the backdrop to the epistle (23-25)

The heart of the letter presents to Philemon a choice he is to make. He wants Philemon welcome back Onesimus as his new spiritual brother even though he was a runaway slave. As we can see, Paul reminds Philemon that he is indebted to him just as Onesimus is since he led both to the Lord. Philemon is thus obligated to

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Paul. The apostle also explains that even though Onesimus ran away, it all worked out for the best.

Outline

I. Greetings (verses 1-3)
II. Thanksgiving and prayer (verses 4-7)
III. Paul’s plea for Onesimus (verses 8-21)
   A. Paul’s appeal (verses 8-11)
   B. Paul’s motives (verses 12-16)
   C. Paul’s request (verse 17)
   D. Paul’s offer (verses 18-20)
   E. Paul’s confidence in Philemon (verse 21)
IV. Conclusion-Final Remarks and Greetings (21-25)
   A. Final request (21-22)
   B. Short list of greetings (23-24)
   C. Benediction (25)