

THE THEOLOGY OF THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON: AN ILLUSION OR FACTUAL

AUDU, VICTOR

**Biblical Studies Department,
Africa International University**

P.O.Box 24686-00502,

Karen, Nairobi,

Kenya

Email-victor.audu@africainternational.edu

Phone: +25473994206

ABSTRACT

Philemon as part of the Pauline Corpus is not held to be a theological treatise as it is not prominent for theological argument but rather a practical response to a complicated social situation. The epistle cannot be said to be entirely devoid of theological themes which are thoroughly practical in the objective. Thus the theology of Philemon invariably amounts to the theology of Paul its author and that contained in the epistle. The theology emanates from the passionate plea which he developed to achieve his object. It came under three broad Themes- Christology, ecclesiology and ethics although not adequately developed; they undoubtedly reflect present-day theological concerns than those of Paul within the epistle. Paul's epistle to Philemon hints the emergence of a Christian theology of ecclesiology developing along the line of Christian equality which is to become the groundwork for Christian social relations.

KEYWORDS: Theology, Christology, Ecclesiology Ethics, Social, Relation, Situation.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Letter to Philemon at a glance seems to have little or no theological content. Thus the main problem is not how to present it but rather how to grasp the text theologically. It is on the ground that the letter is concerned with a complicated social situation. Paul's impassioned plea on behalf of Onesimus who is Philemon's runaway slave (Lohse, 1979, 196-7; cf., Powell, 2009, 419). The theology of Philemon will invariably relate to this impassioned plea which runs through the letter from start to finish. This plea is not a theological treatise, but an urgent appeal to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. The author uses his rhetorical skill as a writer to persuade Philemon to accept Onesimus (Peterson, 1985, 131-50; cf., Powell, 2009, 421). Consequently, his theology is liable to be distorted if detached from its context. The ideas of Paul from the text of Philemon in this paper at each stage of the survey will be related to the main themes of New Testament theology thus arriving at a theology of Philemon. The rhetorical style of Philemon marks it out as having been written in response to a grave practical situation.

2.1 THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF PHILEMON

The setting of Philemon falls within the formative phase in the early history of Christianity. It is an era of interception between the church and its Greco-Roman cultural world. The early Christian movement had to face some problematic social problems, some of them inherited from its primarily Jewish roots, and some of them merely reflecting the Graeco-Roman world in which Christianity developed as a religious cult with its distinctive values (Theissen, 2006, 207-30). This epistle of Philemon reflects one of those social problems - the issue of slavery. The *Haustafeln* which encapsulate a number of the critical socio-economic issues involving males and females, children and parents, and slaves and masters, in which masters are seen to be slaves of Christ, nevertheless endorse obedience of slaves, and say nothing to overthrow the socio-economic order, in fact, extending the concept of slavery as a general principle (Schreiner, 2008, 796-8).

The letter to Philemon contains the most essential and extended explanation of the relationship between a slave and his master about Christ in the New Testament. The traditionally held view is that Onesimus was a runaway slave, and an alternative view is that, though a slave, he was perhaps not a runaway at all, but was nevertheless sent back with a letter to his master, whether that be Philemon or Archippus (Pearson, 1999; cf., Callahan, 1997). According to either view, the letter concerns a complicated social situation. This complicated social situation is multifaceted as it is rooted in a complex social convention of slavery, and the context of the church in the house of Philemon which is a distinct type of social organization. The two scenarios are intertwined. Whether a runaway or not, Onesimus appears to be a slave of Philemon and has for some time been with Paul. Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon, but with the desire of the restoration of Onesimus.

3.1 THE SITUATION OF THE READERS

Philemon reveals a genuinely caring Paul with a strong pastoral concern. Unlike other letters of Paul in which he was writing to respond to issues, Philemon is a letter Paul initiated himself. Evident from the epistle is the immense care employed in Paul's use of rhetorical skill to make the most compelling impact on Philemon. The traditional view is that the epistle bearing 'Philemon' is written to Philemon whom Paul appeals to reconsider his runaway slave who is now a believer in Christ. The letter aims to persuade him to accept Onesimus no longer as a slave but as a brother. Some presentations of the epistle strain credulity by bringing in speculative reconstructions based on supposed links with other parts of the New Testament (Moule, [1957] 2002, 14-7). It is so difficult to relate Philemon to what we know of the situation at Colossae from Paul's letters. Also, it is challenging to explain what effect the situation at Colossae might have had on the situation that Paul had to deal with in this epistle. In any case, Philemon shows no sign of opposition to Paul.

To attempt a reconstruction of the situation behind the text, careful observation of the rhetorical structure of Philemon is essential. The identity of the author and his readers, the place of writing and the date are pointers in this direction. Behind this brief instruction to Philemon there lies the major issue of the whole letter. Philemon is urged to accept Onesimus which is consistent with the gospel which he initially received (Powell, 2009, 417). He might be more likely to do so, remembering how effective faithfulness to the gospel is to Paul who means so much to him. Persuading people is always tricky, as it involves winning their emotions. The epistle was written to give Onesimus a stronger sense of solidarity with Philemon and the household church. Paul aims to inspire Philemon so strongly that he can have the emotional pull to decide to reintegrate Onesimus into his house and life of the Christian community with renewed confidence and zeal.

4.1 PERSONS, PLACES, AND DATE

The people addressed in Philemon can be identified with the groups of Christians at Colossae. In both Colossians and Philemon, the writer refers to his imprisonment, in both same Onesimus figures, and Archippus is noted to be among the recipients of greetings or messages. In both, Timothy, Aristarchus, Epaphras, Mark, Luke, and Demas are among the senders of greetings. They are Pauline Christians. Thus in Philemon, we have a glimpse into this segment of earliest Christians. The situation addressed in the epistle involves some figures (Peterson, 1985, 89-199). They are the purported writers Paul and Timothy. Traditionally the epistle to Philemon has been identified with Paul. Evident in Paul's usual epistolary opening giving his name. The mention of Timothy alongside Paul cannot be mere speculations as it attests to proper recognition of the unique character of Pauline epistles. There are alternative suggestions in modern scholarship, but it is the reluctance to classify the author alongside any New Testament writer other than Paul (Moule, 2002, 14-7). The recipients Philemon, Apphia and Archippus including the church in 'your' house, and Onesimus, about whom there is discussion and who appears to figure as in some way an intermediary between the writer and the recipients.

Others who feature in the epistle but not as pronounced as those enumerated above comprise of God our Father in verse 3, and the Lord Jesus Christ also mentioned in verses 3 and 25; cf. vv. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 20, 23. Others are Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, whom the author(s) speak of as 'my fellow-workers' in verse 24 and the saints or holy ones, mentioned with the Lord Jesus in verse 5. How does one chart these relationships? Even among the primary participants, there are several further distinctions. One is that although the letter prescript includes two people, only the first-person singular, not the first-person plural, is used from Philemon 4. It is clear that Paul is the primary speaker and writer of the letter, referring to himself by name in verses 9 and 19 and as an old man/elder in verse 9. Noteworthy also is that the adscript addresses three persons Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus (including the church in 'your' house), reference is to the second-person singular from verse 2. This singular reference has led some to posit that Archippus was the recipient, according to Knox's popular theory, although most interpreters take it as Philemon by his name listed first (Moule, 2002, 14-7; Cf., Streett, 2005, 587-8). If this is the case, then the social relations seem to be reducible to three major ones—Paul to Philemon, Paul to Onesimus, and Philemon to Onesimus.

Also, Philemon is the recipient of the letter regardless of any theory of his identity. The epistle to Philemon became attached to the letter as its heading in the manuscripts. Paul is known personally to Philemon and those mentioned in the epistle. It is most likely that those addressed alongside Philemon are Gentile Christians although this will not elude the presence of Jewish Christians too. The Church referred to in the house of Philemon gives no idea of the location. However, since Paul mentions two members of this household church in Col. 4:9 and 17, one can probably assert that the household church situates in or near Colossae (Powell, 2009, 416). Though, it is not impossible that beside the household church domicile in Philemon's residence, there are several independent Christian church groups.

The date and place of writing the Epistle can be ascertained within narrow limits as there is no internal evidence. On the other hand, external evidence from Col. 4:9 might assign it to the same period of Paul's life. As one of the purported letters of Paul written from prison; Philemon (1, 9, 10, 13), Philippians (1:7, 13-16), Ephesians (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), Philippians (1:7, 13-16), and Colossians (4:3, 18), sent by one messenger, Tychicus (Philemon 10-12; cf., Eph. 6:21, 22; Col. 4:7-9), (Dunn, 1996, 308). Paul suffered two imprisonments of two years each after his third missionary journey, one at Caesarea, 58-60 CE (Acts 23:23-27:1), and the other at Rome, 61-63 CE (Acts 28: 16-31). His imprisonment in Rome was on account of the Gospel as such he was under the custody of a Roman guard, although permitted to live by himself in a rented house or apartment and to receive a guest (Dunn, 1996, 308). It is convincing to postulate that Rome is the likely place where these epistles Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon originated.

Nevertheless, some scholars hold the view that the entire four epistles were written from Caesarea while others that at least one or two might have originated from there, but an alternative conviction holds that all four proceeded from Rome (Dunn, 1996, 308). The Book of Acts is specific in regards to the period Festus took office as Roman procurator in 60 CE (Acts 25 cf., 24:37). There is a consensus that Paul made his two speeches before Festus same year in 60 CE and sailed for Rome in the fall of that year. Paul in the company of other

prisoners arrived Rome in the spring of 61 CE. His imprisonment at Rome which lasted two years would have been within the years 61-63 CE. It was the period to which the Epistle to Philemon emerged between 62 or 63 CE (Dunn, 1996, 308). However, there is no all-embracing proof for an assertive conclusion, and such precision is not needed to understand the letter's theological and ethical message.

5.1 BACKGROUND OF THOUGHT

Paul exhibits a good mastery of the Greek language and style in this epistle of his to Philemon which indicates some degree of Greek education, especially in the art of rhetoric (Peterson, 1985, 131-50). In this letter, he utilizes all the resources at his disposal to press home his point. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, and Philemon is a work of persuasion from start to finish. It's usage anchored in the context of this epistle's setting, and worldview differs from ours. In general, the context seems to belong to an enclosed world of meaning which is archaic and not immediately accessible to us today (Peterson, 1985, 131-50). Every reader is likely to feel Paul's rhetorical power which illustrates the richness of Philemon in its capacity to appeal to the emotions of the readers.

The display of his rhetorical skill seen in his use of the following rhetorical markers; *Euphemism* in his reference to Onesimus's problematic absence which he merely talked about as *ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν* "separated for an hour," in verse 15. *Paradoxical tact* in which he vowed he was not going to mention Philemon's debt to him but did in the long run (v. 19). *Pun* on Onesimus's name whom he attests was once *ἄχρηστον* "useless," a word similar to *ἄχριστός* "without Christ," but is now truly *εὐχρηστον* "useful" as his name is (v.11). *Wordplay* by referring to Onesimus as *τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα* "my heart," (v.12) and calling on Philemon to *ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα* "refresh my heart," (v.20). It gives double meaning to what his heart is - Onesimus on the one hand and his very heart on the other which he calls Philemon to refresh by accepting Onesimus; to achieve the object of persuading Philemon to reconsider Onesimus (Powell, 2009, 416). These features naturally suggest the chief influence on the thought of Paul is the mainstream of Christian life. Philemon is not a departure from the tradition of master-slave relationship but rather an explication of it. Nevertheless, the epistle does not show influence or sign of radical ideas imported from an external religious, social system. The rhetorical skill with which Paul seeks to reassure Philemon to reconsider Onesimus echoes the pastoral concern of Jesus to those estranged or ostracized by the society in which they lived.

6.1 THE THEOLOGY OF PHILEMON

The text of Philemon provides the clues for understanding the situation of the writer and readers. Those who have attempted to unravel the theology of the epistle gave attention to some theological themes emanating from the text while others disproportionate attention, and some little or no attention at all (Streett, 2005, 586). Perhaps, because the text contains no section on the doctrine of God and Paul here assumes awareness of the monotheistic idea of God common to Judaism and earliest Christianity which he has dealt with perhaps in his other letters, especially that to the Colossians. Thus the theology of Philemon will invariably amount to the theology of Paul whose name appears unmentioned in the letter and that contained in

the epistle (Keck, 2006, 109-22). Paul's epistle to Philemon hints the emergence of a Christian theology in the making. We share in this creative experience because Paul has in this epistle seized an extension of ideas not previously exploited. Two ideas are unique in this direction in the New Testament. The brotherhood of slave and master in Christ which is entirely new thus adds a fresh dimension to the development of ecclesiology. Similarly, Paul's willingness to be charged and to pay back for Onesimus' wrong is a reminiscence of Christ's sacrificial death arises directly from the particular character of the pressing problem which the epistle seeks to address.

Philemon is not held to be a theological treatise as it is not prominent for theological argument but rather a practical response to a complicated social situation (McRay, 1996, 609a; 1996, 609b; Towner, [2000] 2003, 330-6; Harris, [2000]; 2003, 336-7). Philemon is not entirely devoid of theological themes which are thoroughly practical in intention. This practical resolve explains the rhetorical character of Philemon. Paul requires that Onesimus, a runaway slave who has found faith in the Lord reconcile with his master. His object is to persuade Philemon to reconsider Onesimus with the intent to overcome his despondency towards him (Powell, 2009, 417). Also, the reintegration of Onesimus not only to Philemon's home but ushering him to the believing community with a renewed confidence in Onesimus as behoove of the gospel, and its expression of the Christian life is central (Streett, 2005, 588). The theology will emanate from the passionate plea which he develops to achieve his object. The theology is liable to be parodied if detached from the persuasion. The task before us is to take hold of the distinctive features of the theology of the New Testament to arrive at a theology of Philemon. We cannot debunk the close connection between the theology and the practical purpose of the letter (Rowland and Bennett, 2006, 186-206). It will fall under three broad Themes-Christology, ecclesiology, and ethics for convenience and clarity (Guthrie, 1981, 71-4). It is imperative to note that these themes are not adequately developed and thus undoubtedly reflects present-day theological concerns more than those of Paul within the epistle.

6.1.1 CHRISTOLOGY

Paul in Philemon does not give us the definition of God nor introduce philosophical or speculative ideas about God except for reference made to θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν "God our father" (v. 3). Paul assumed belief in God was congruous with primitive Christian conceptions known to these recipients herein addressed (Chester and Martin, [1994] 1996, 42-3; cf., Schreiner, 2008, 119-7). Little is made known about Christ except for the fact that Paul invoked Him throughout the letter vv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 20, 23 and 25. Invoking the Lord Jesus for Paul would appear as if the Lord Jesus were observing all that is said and hoped in the letter. To avoid the temptation of arguing for more than there is it will not be necessary to allude to more that is written therein as the recipients are not in doubt about the person of Jesus whom he is referring (Chester and Martin, 2008, 43). This referential way of writing is not intended to obscure the issues, for there is no real doubt as to what Paul meant.

He refers to the name of Jesus in points which are fundamental to his theology. His use of Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ “Christ Jesus,” (v. 1) is appropriately the titular meaning “Christ” or “Messiah,” which is fronted before the name of Jesus as understood by the early Christians (Guthrie, 1981, 288). Hence the Pauline “in Christ” which is strictly in agreement with this primitive Christian conception. The very name of Jesus does appear from the very beginning to the end of the epistle, but the most obvious Christological feature is the use of κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ “Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 25) which is primitive in early Christian theology and even in the New Testament itself. It was a confessional formula of the church affirming “Jesus is Lord” (Dunn, 1998, 175). By this Paul wishes to recall Philemon and the church in his house to the fact that Jesus is Lord and the unifying factor and the message of the gospel. It seems unnecessary to go farther for the origin of the usage than to affirm that for Paul in Philemon, the supremacy of God as father and the centrality of Christ as Lord over all should manifest in the way they live.

6.1.2 ECCLESIOLOGY

Paul in Philemon does not give a clear understanding of the conception of the doctrine of the church but the unambiguously referred to the ἐκκλησίᾳ “church,” domicile in Philemon’s house (v. 2). It leaves only one possible option of the church that is local in its reference and the sense of a group of professed believers in Philemon’s house (Coenen, 1975, 1:291-307). Philemon has no developed ecclesiology (Guthrie, 1981, 701-89). It is true that the brief nature of the epistle does not warrant it to address the issue of the organization of the local church under a structured institutional leadership. The primary emphasis is on pastoral care and restoration. Nevertheless, it is wise to affirm that Paul assumes that the readers are aware of his using it with its full theological weight. Thus for Paul, the Church is the community of believers (Esler, [1987] 1996, 24-45). Involved, therefore, is a complex social dynamic regarding the organization and function of this early Church. A few features of its ecclesiology is glaring from the text which is enumerated below.

6.1.2.1 Fellowship

A primary ecclesiological concept of the epistle of Philemon is ἡ κοινωνία “the fellowship” (v. 6 cf., 17). The term connotes the idea of “participation,” and it is especially participation in Christ that brings them into a new level of sharing and involvement with each other. This participation in the knowledge of Christ transcends the social barriers threatening their unity. This fellowship manifests itself in their mutual participating in Christ so that reconciliation, forgiveness, and harmony becomes a reality.

6.1.2.2 Believers as Saints

Home churches were the basic unit of early Christianity in the days of Paul evident in the church in Philemon’s home (v.2 cf., Col. 4:15). Paul referred to the believers who are in the reception of Philemon’s love as τοὺς ἁγίους “the saints” (v.5) in a way he never so speaks of the members of a house church. Thus introducing a new dimension into the ecclesiology of the nature of the church in Philemon’s house.

6.1.2.3 Brotherhood

The thanksgiving portion of the epistle introduces a new concept altogether in which we see Paul characterizing his recipients as his equal. This runs through the entire epistle in his use of metaphors such as *συνεργός* “fellow-worker,” with Philemon (v. 1); a brother of Apphia and a *συστρατιώτης* “fellow-soldier,” of Archippus (v. 2); *ἀδελφός* “brother” (v. 7, 20) and *κοινωνός* “partner” (v. 17), to Philemon; a *συναιχμάλωτός* “fellow-prisoner,” of Epaphras (v.23). This language places Paul on the same level as that of his recipients, as he does Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke at the end of the letter (v. 24). Paul also in several places affirms his superiority to Philemon as in verse 8, he says that he could order Philemon, but he chooses not to. He switches instead to a form of appeal (vv. 9, 10), placing himself in a position of dependence upon the favor of Philemon (v. 14), characterizing himself as either an old man or elder and a prisoner (vv. 1, 9). Paul establishes a familial link with Onesimus the slave (v. 16) by addressing him as a son (v. 10) but hoping that Philemon will have a relationship with him as a brother (v. 16). Moreover, as brothers, Paul’s admonishment is they should act by love (v. 8). Also, he referred to Apphia as *ἀδελφή* “sister,” being at par with him and the others (v. 2) who is a significant entity in the Philemon’s house church thus attesting to the role of women in the Church. The term brothers and sisters is a primitive Christian conception which is rooted in the teachings of Jesus who identifies himself with the humblest member of the Church (Matt. 25:40).

6.1.2.4 Indebtedness to Christ and one another

Paul also introduces an entirely new concept using an economic metaphor to characterize relationships. Whereas Onesimus is indebted to Philemon (v. 18), Philemon himself appears to be a debtor to Paul (v. 19). Paul intended to consciously place Onesimus and Philemon on the same level both of them as brothers, and both of them as debtors. Thus he indicates their commonalty before him. Paul in speaking this way is also aware of his indebtedness to Christ thus he is treating Onesimus and Philemon via an extension of the life and character of Jesus which should lead to reconciliation and forgiveness (Guthrie, 1981, 431-509).

6.1.2.5 A hint of a leadership role

Paul characterizes his recipients as his equals. However, he also demonstrated his superiority with bold words of authority and position in the body of the letter grounded in his being ‘in Christ.’ It sets the tone of his appeal. He appeals to his addressees to act by love, but it is clear that a proper response is meant to be inconsonant with Paul’s desire as one having authority in Christ (Powell, 2009, 422). Thus when Paul refers to himself as an old man or elder and as a prisoner in Christ Jesus, these references seem to function on two levels. On the literal level he may well have been an old man and in prison, but he is also the one who represents Christ’s authority to Philemon, and he is making a request for Onesimus, who is characterized first as a son. Paul then develops and makes clear how useful this ‘son’ has been and would be in the future. Paul closes the body of the letter by an open exercise of his authority, first in his expressing confidence in Philemon’s obedience, secondly in his reference to Philemon surpassing his request, and thirdly in his desire for preparation of a room (v. 22), (Powell, 2009, 422). Paul saw himself as one who has both a position of authority and a set of needs

that he thinks can be best served by Onesimus. Realizing that Onesimus is a slave, and hence is the 'property' of another, he writes a letter, to attempt to effect a change in the social relations. These social relations, as noted above, exist on several levels, including legal, economic and ecclesiastical. Paul is attempting to effect change in all three.

6.1.3 ETHICS

The epistle of Philemon also shows relationship with social ethics based on the practical concern which the Apostle Paul writes to them. According to Guthrie, "No New Testament theology would be complete without a consideration of the ethical teaching contained in the New Testament." We will dwell on the transformation which Christ brings about on the new man both about God and about his fellow believers. Ethical considerations here are to examine the behavior expected of Christian believers in their present environment. Our inquiry will concentrate on the moral guidance which the New Testament gives to Christians for their personal lives and will also examine the important issues of social ethics and responsibilities from the social side(Guthrie, 1981, 893-952).

6.1.3.1 The church and slavery

The book of Philemon seems to bears upon a conflict of social values within the confines of a church community. Whether Onesimus was a runaway slave or not, for Paul his priorities as apostle took precedence over the institution of slavery. The history of interpretation of Philemon, however, is not one of the Christian church wholeheartedly endorsing such an ethic toward slavery. In that sense, the interpretation of the book was not consonant with its original discursive purpose. It is not the place to note the history of interpretation of Philemon, but there are some general points to note. One is the tradition that Onesimus was manumitted and became a bishop. An interesting story, it is hard to prove that this Onesimus is the Onesimus of this letter. More to the point, however, is the fact that this letter was retained and eventually incorporated into the Pauline and then the New Testament canon. It indicates a plausible scenario that the scene as Paul has linguistically dictated it was fulfilled in ways at least approximate to his purpose, and that the letter was well-looked-after as an example of the useful and productive correspondence of the apostle (Schreiner, 2008, 794-801). Onesimus was a slave in so far as the Roman law was concerned, but his having been in contact with Paul led to a change in his identity. Paul constituted him as a son, and as a brother of Philemon. In effect, Paul is re-examining the institution of slavery within a Christian context, and finding that it is not compatible with at least gospel ethos (Guthrie, 1981, 942). Therefore, he pleads with Philemon to reintegrate Onesimus but not as a slave but as a brother within the context of all of the participants functioning 'in Christ.'

6.1.3.2 Social Relations

Paul uses metaphors that mediate the link between text and society. His use of metaphor has ethical implications (Guthrie, 1981, 942). Because believers belong to the community, thus their actions affect the community as a whole. These include those of family relations (e.g. brother, sister, son, father), relations in the workplace (e.g. fellow-workers, servants), legal relations (e.g. prisoner), socio-economic relations (e.g. slave, debtor), and even military

relations (e.g. fellow-soldier) constituted in Philemon as Paul chooses to describe his recipients. The significant difference is that these are all within the context of the church (v. 2), with an appeal throughout to the authority of Jesus Christ. However, there is a correlation in which these metaphors are responsive to the world outside of the text and another in which the text constitutes this world. It can be seen in Paul being a prisoner on the one hand, literally in chains and in need of help (v. 10), and also a prisoner of Christ Jesus (vv. 1, 9). Also, Onesimus has now become a brother of Philemon in the faith, and both are in some sense debtors, which places them on a similar social level about Paul (Peterson, 1985, 200-05). Philemon also had once been the slave's owner, now he was depicted as his brother, and whereas he once probably thought of himself as Paul's equal, perhaps even his superior because of economic status and security, he found himself his debtor. Thus it is worthy to assert that, Paul is not so much bothered on their social position within this community of believers but instead on their relationship with God and one another.

7.1 CONCLUSION

Paul's passionate plea requires attention on the part of Philemon and the church, employing ideas which have not previously brought into play to address such a complicated social situation in his basic Christian teaching. The theology of Philemon seizes on the distinctive features of the theology of the New Testament far as it bears witness to theological themes deduced from the New Testament writings. Paul goes beyond the most nascent assertion in seeing Onesimus as one with Philemon in Christ. Thus in Philemon, we can see ecclesiology developing along this line of Christian equality which is to become the groundwork for Christian social relations. Paul here is dealing with a delicate pastoral issue as he is cautious in persuading Philemon and the church in his house to come to terms with Onesimus as such he strongly moved to resort to help the Christian community.

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Moreover the Epistle has all the marks of a genuine Pauline production. It is self-attested, contains the usual Pauline blessing, thanksgiving and salutation, reveals the character of the great apostle and clearly exhibits his style. Yet even this short and admirable Epistle has not enjoyed universal recognition. Baur rejected it because of its close relation to Colossians and Ephesians, which he regarded as spurious. He called it "the embryo of a Christian romance," like that of the Clementine Recognitions, its tendency being to show that what is lost on earth is gained in heaven. H 4. Theological Affinities: This letter has been called the crown of Paulinism due to its rich Pauline theology: a. Although the "Church" is a new emphasis in the letter, there is a clear background of Pauline theology. b. God is glorious (1:17), powerful (1:19ff), and merciful (2:4ff). c. The Believer is "in Christ" (1:3,10,11, etc.)

1. The theology of chapters 1--3 focuses upon the need for the Ephesians to increase in their awareness of God's love so that they will imitate it to God's glory.
2. The application of chapters 4--6 are specific expressions of love for one another in view of God's love.
- D. Paul is encouraging the church to maintain their position of unity: 13.