The Slave is Your Brother: Koinoniac Witness in Paul's Epistle to Philemon

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Abstract

Unlike his other epistles, Paul does not overtly instruct the believers in Philemon, but rather he deals with a personal conflict between the master of the house church, Philemon, and his runaway slave, Onesimus, by summoning them to an alternative, missional way of living. This paper examines Paul's vision of this *koinoniac* witness of the church in the society at large, what it means for this community to relate to each other as siblings, the implications of this household's loyalty to King Jesus, and what is meant for Philemon and the entire house church to welcome a slave as a brother. In addition, it will discuss how Paul himself embodied the gospel to demonstrate the work of reconciliation. Finally, this paper examines the Holy Spirit's role in Philemon and in key moments of church history that demonstrate the power and potential of the koinoniac witness of the church. This discussion aims to challenge the modern church to exhibit this barrier-breaking koinoniac witness to the divisions that continue to plague society.

Introduction

Sitting in a prison in Birmingham, Alabama, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr wrote an epistle. He pens these words to his "Fellow Clergyman" of the time:

> I have longed to hear white ministers declare: "Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother." In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular. [1]

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King's compelling words called the church to a counterculture way of living. The larger society may have been segregated, but King[2] envisioned a church that lived as a "colony of heaven." When King[3] penned the words, "The Negro is your brother," he anticipated the possibility of an integrated, unified community of believers, whose witness would have real implications in the society at large.

Sitting in a prison, the apostle Paul writes an epistle. While the circumstances and the context differ significantly, Paul also calls the *ekklesia* to a countercultural way of living. In his epistle to Philemon and the church gathered in his house, Paul boldly pens the words, "The slave is your brother" (Philem. 16). The Apostle Paul and the Reverend King's letters bid the church to integrated relationships, devoid of barriers and they both envisioned the church to live in such a way that their communion displays the barrier-breaking work of King Jesus to society at large.

Unlike his other epistles, Paul does not overtly instruct the believers, but rather he deals with a personal conflict between Philemon and his runaway slave, Onesimus, by summoning them to an alternative, missional way of living. This paper examines Paul's vision of this *koinoniac* witness of the church in the society at large and what it means for this community to relate to each other as siblings. In addition, it will explore the implications of this household's loyalty to King Jesus and what it meant for Philemon and the entire house church to welcome a slave as a brother. And finally, it will discuss how Paul himself embodied the work of reconciliation that would define their witness to the world. This discussion aims to challenge the modern church to exhibit this barrier-breaking koinoniac witness to the divisions that continue to plague society.

Koinoniac Witness

In the Greek New Testament, Paul's letters written to churches commonly contain the word "*koinonia*"[4] to refer to the fellowship, or community of believers. Murray Dempster describes the significance of this word, "Koinonia in the New Testament sense occurs when the Spirit creates within the church the real experiential bond of belonging to one another in God's inclusive family of equally valued brothers and sisters."[5] Perhaps this type of bond spurs Paul's request to Philemon in the presence of the house church at the reading of this letter.

However, with the mission of the *ekklesia* in mind exists a fuller understanding of the purpose of this koinonia. This bond of belonging contains missional potential as the visible

expression of the koinonia creates a new vision for humanity. As this Christian community embodies forgiveness and reconciliation, they provide a noticeable witness to this pagan, Roman society of what life looks like under God's reign.[6] Their vocation as a community serves as a "witness to God's hope for all by living as communities of visibly redeemed creation."[7] Through exhibiting in its own life with the justice-doing and peacemaking of God, the church fulfills its vocation by becoming an anticipatory community of the new creation, a foretaste of the reign of God.

Yet, Paul does not task the church with abolishing slavery in the whole of the Roman Empire. Scot McKnight explains, "For Paul, the social revolution was to occur in the church, in the body of Christ, at the local level, and in the Christian house church and household."[8] The decision to receive Onesimus into the fellowship of this community reveals a radical reaction to a fugitive slave.[9] Receiving Onesimus demonstrates the counter-culture response of the Spirit's work among them to demolish the dividing walls of social order. In this manner the Holy Spirit "creates koinonia that witnesses to the inclusive scope and egalitarian nature of God's reign." [10]

While this small act of obedience and humility by Philemon would not indicate a drastic change in the systemic injustice of slavery in the Roman empire, today the church looks back on this ancient biblical text as the seed that would bring down the slave trade in the coming centuries.[11] Author William Webb in his book *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* makes this point regarding a redemptive hermeneutic in Philemon. Paul's request sows seeds for an alternative way of living in Christ that in time would threaten the social institution of slavery.[12] This koinonia of Christian community under the empowerment of the Holy Spirit carries tremendous potential for future generations. John Yoder, in his book *The Politics of Jesus* reinforces this idea. "The primary social structure through which the gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community"[13]

Siblings

Paul states the motive of his letter with unreserved clarity. Perhaps the situation regarding his dear son Onesimus renders him with a feeling of helplessness, yet the apostle knows that his words carry influence, and so he states his desired outcome candidly. "No longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord."[14] (Philem. 16) Paul appeals to Philemon to receive

Onesimus as a brother.[15] The house church audience, perhaps astonished by this request, recognizes the significance of the sibling relationship for their context.

While the tightest units of loyalty and affection for Western kindred groups would be assigned to husband-wife and parent-child, the ancient Mediterranean family system, known as the Patrilineal Kindred Group as the sibling relationship, carried the strongest bond demanding utmost loyalty. This distinction serves the goal of this epistle in that Paul requests that Onesimus be received as a brother.[16]

Furthermore, the sibling relational model serves as the model followers of Jesus appropriate in their image of the church as family. Subsequently, the inclusion of Onesimus in the kinship of this New Testament household would demand more than Philemon as an individual forgiving his runaway slave. The house church listening to this letter understood the relational priority of a sibling,[17] and it would demand that the whole household accept the demolishment of a hierarchal[18] association to Onesimus, and instead their relationship with Onesimus would be governed by love and loyalty.

New Loyalty

In fact, loyalty and allegiance, rather than blood relationship, form the bond that unites this new community. As followers of the Jewish Messiah, this group finds its roots in the Abrahamic Covenant. Joseph Hellerman makes the connection to Abraham in his observations related to this covenantal family.[19] "It is most significant that the very origins of the Israelite people, according to their sacred traditions, are to be traced back to a single individual (Abraham) who opted for loyalty to God over loyalty to his father's house."[20] Abraham's allegiance to Yahweh surpasses even the most treasured member of his natural family, when he willingly offers his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

Jesus further develops this principle of loyalty and family in His interactions with His followers. All of the synoptic gospels include a passage of paramount importance related to this theme:

> Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-35)

While much discussion arises around the radical nature of Jesus' words, the point remains that Jesus envisions a surrogate kinship group, for which membership depends upon obedience to God rather than blood relationships. Therefore, inclusion in this new faith family demands a group commitment that surpasses one's blood family loyalties.[21]

And while these radical ideas may break through the culture's former constructs, in this new family formation Jesus assumes that His followers will relate to one another according to the standards shared by their culture's understanding of bloodline relationships. "Jesus promises Peter, who left his own family to follow him, that Peter will enjoy sibling-like relationships with others who have made such sacrifices ("brothers and sisters, mothers and children") and find life's necessary physical resources—such as shelter ("houses") and food ("fields") in the context of the new community.[22]

New Lenses on Slavery

As this koinoniac witness summons the church to exhibit a new vision of family, an even greater challenge remains. How might this community understand relationships within the hierarchal structures of slavery? Perhaps every discussion regarding Philemon must address the subject of slavery in the Roman world. Significant debate exists on the distinctions between slavery in ancient Rome, the transatlantic slave trade, and modern slavery, such as the trafficking of people. While the numerous distinctions remain, K. R. Bradley offers an apt characterization in his book *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control*. "Slavery by definition is a means of securing and maintaining an involuntary labor force by a group in society which monopolizes political and economic power."[23] The power inequity described by this definition, not just by individuals, but by the systems of society, exists in the slavery of all ages, contexts, and cultures.

Most scholars agree that Paul's request remains far removed from the abolishment of slavery.[24] The economy in the Roman Empire depended on slavery and therefore this kind of request holds significant implications for this house church community.[25] In fact, the context suggests that Paul is oblivious to slavery as an issue of morality in the larger society. Paul seems unconcerned for the conduct of the larger empire. He holds no allegiance to that empire. Paul's focus addresses the structures of this new community of redeemed believers.[26]

Furthermore, Paul confronts Philemon and challenges the notion of the status of slaves in relationship to this house church family. By every definition of slavery, Philemon holds the power in this relationship. Onesimus stands at the mercy of Philemon. Paul understands how this works in society, but the transforming power of the gospel calls the church to a new way of living. In verse eleven, Paul uses a pun to address Philemon's view of Onesimus, whose name means "useful" in the Greek. "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me" (Philem. 11). Lewis Brogdon suggests that "useless" serves as a reference to Philemon's perception of slaves. "Masters view slaves through a utilitarian lens. Slaves' value was tied to assigned duties and social invisibility. In all likelihood, Philemon assigned this kind of worth to Onesimus. As a slave, Onesimus worth ties to his utility. Because of this, Philemon cannot envision the need to include Onesimus in his fellowship."[27]

Moreover, the possibility exists that the exclusion of Onesimus in the *ekklesia* causes Onesimus to run away.[28] Philemon treated Onesimus as a slave, his property. For this reason, Philemon would not easily even consider the possibility of Onesimus' inclusion in this fellowship. Paul knows this reality and for this reason his language related to Onesimus in this epistle holds tremendous significance. Paul's relationship with Onesimus elevates the status of this slave. He moves from different properties to "beloved son." Paul describes him as "my very heart" (Philem. 12). Paul envisions this community forming the "vanguard of creating a place where those deemed by the world and society in culture as unequals will be welcomed, not in terms of the world, but in terms of being in Christ."[29] The epistle calls Philemon and all who are watching to see with new lenses. Lenses cleared of societies stains by the reconciling power of the gospel.

Reconciliation and Embodiment

Interestingly, the gospel appears uncharacteristically absent in this epistle. The themes of Christ's atonement, so abundant throughout the other epistles, remain unmentioned. However, Paul clearly communicates the reconciling power of the gospel, not explicitly described through preaching, rather through his actions regarding Onesimus. Paul embodies the reconciling work of Jesus, and in effect, he represents Christ to Philemon. "So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your

owing me even your own self" (Philem. 16-18). Paul takes on the character of King Jesus. Paul values the outcast, the enslaved one. Paul, like Christ, offers himself as the one to satisfy the debt that Onesimus owes but can never repay.

Yet, Onesimus is not the only slave in this epistle. Paul envisions a freedom for Philemon, but not only Philemon, in fact for his whole household from the systems of the Greco-Roman world that compartmentalize people as Jew, Gentile, male, female, slave, or free.[30] Christ's salvific work on the cross breaks the chains that enslave even the privileged and the resource-blessed populations to look down on the outcast or exclude the marginalized. Freedom in Christ "causes earthly relationships to take on new meaning. This is what Paul wants Philemon to understand, and it is only by understanding this that Philemon can move from exclusion to inclusion in his fellowship with his slave Onesimus."[31]

While the systems of society remain enslaved to social distinctions, the gospel forms relationships in Christ that transcend the distinctions created by society.[32] Paul proclaims this kind of freedom to Philemon and his household as the one to stand in as a Christ-like reconciler.

Furthermore, Paul's embodied appeal to Philemon echoes his words in 1 Corinthians 5. The "no longer" (οὐκέτι) language of this epistle links to verse 15, "He died for us all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves" and "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer." (1 Cor. 5:17) In Philemon, the church observes through Paul's actions the example of the "ministry of reconciliation."[33]

In his other epistles, Paul uses the metaphor of slavery to assist the understanding of sin and the nature of Christ's atoning work. Here in this epistle, as Paul embodies the work of Christ, as he offers Philemon and the household the opportunity to live in a freedom that breaks down divisions created by society. Paul's message of reconciliation and the payment of the debt, which remains appealing to Philemon, likewise proclaims the no longer (οὐκέτι) concept of Romans 6:6 "so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." "No longer a slave" means freedom, not just for Onesimus but also for Philemon and the whole fellowship of believers gathered in his house. This kind of freedom includes the potential for them all to exist as a visible witness of freedom to those enslaved in the society at large.

The demolishment of the division between Philemon and Onesimus serves as an example of the Spirit's work to empower the visible witness of the church. From the inception of the Early Church in Acts, the Holy Spirit enables believers to continually break through barriers put up by society. Almost immediately, these new believers are challenged by divisions of ethnicity and economics with the neglect of the Hellenistic Jews, yet the Spirit causes this group to push past divisions and reconcile with the needy widows among them (Acts 6:1-7). The barriers continue to be broken with Samaritans (Acts 8:25), a eunuch (Acts 8:26-35), a Roman Centurion (Acts 10), and other Gentiles (Acts 11:19-21). In almost every chapter of the book of Acts, the public witness of this church demonstrates a counterculture way of living because of the mission of God.

History continues to record the barrier-breaking work of the Spirit in the visible witness of the church. The Moravian revival of the 1700s caused two European men to offer themselves as slaves in order to reach Africans slaves in the West Indies.[34] In the 1850s Pandita Ramabai, a high caste Indian woman who converted to Christianity in a visit to England, founded a girl's home for child widows and orphans, the Mukti Mission. In 1905 the Mukti Mission experienced a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the girls of this home went out as evangelists to the surrounding villages. Ramabai herself deplored divisions in society and believed the Spirit empowered her as "a dedicated ecumenist before this word was coined in the twentieth century."[35]

Perhaps the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 in Los Angeles serves as the most important example of the Spirit's barrier breaking work in the church. During a time of heavy racial segregation in the United States, the Holy Spirit demolished the walls of race and gender in Los Angeles, California. Participants in the revival services came from various ethnicities and backgrounds which included African Americans, European Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and more represented nationalities.[36] William J. Seymour's early leadership team included mixed races and women. Frank Bartleman, an eyewitness and historian, would report in his detailed account of the revival, "The color line was washed away in the blood."[37]

Sadly, the beautiful witness of the Spirit's work in Los Angeles remained unsustainable and today the church in America suffers the consequences of its demise. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, offers a possible reason for the tragic conclusion to the Azusa Street Revival. He writes, "After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3) Later in this same chapter, Paul reminds the Galatians of their identity created by the reconciling work of the Spirit, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

The Apostle Paul's incredible request in Philemon becomes clear in connection with Galatians. Paul emphatically believes that the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church results in the demolishment of division and hierarchal structures that are built by society. Hollenweger offers an important observation in his forward to *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*. "Pentecost is an intercultural agent throwing a bridge across the troubled waters between two cultures which otherwise may never meet."[38]

Conclusion

Paul's short letter to Philemon appears to confront a personal conflict between Philemon and Onesimus. Still, the epistle truly intends to address the community of believers because Paul's vision included the *koinoniac* witness of the church to the society at large. This witness surfaces as a visible expression through the barrier-breaking fellowship of these early Christians, joining slaves and masters into sibling relationships in the family of God. Instead of bonds formed by blood kinships, this new faith family emerges out of their common loyalty and allegiance to King Jesus and His Kingdom. Paul understands the power of the gospel to form these bonds. In this letter he embodies the message of reconciliation and freedom for all by referring to Philemon, Onesimus, and the fellowship of believers. This short epistle serves as one of many historical records that demonstrate the potential within the body of Christ to demolish divisions created in society. Throughout history, from Acts and on through the Azusa Street Revival, the Holy Spirit manifested within the *ekklesia* breaks down barriers between class, race, and gender.

Ironically, in the history of the slavery in the United States, this Pauline epistle served more as an endorsement of slavery, and not as a catalyst for koinonia.[39] Perhaps in part, this hermeneutical failure in history serves as one of the many reasons the church in America

continues to fight the demons of division. It is a terrible shame when letters written from prison cells remain unheard; freedom cries from prison cells, loud and clear.

Martin Luther King Jr.[40], writing from his prison cell, envisioned the church as a "headlight leading men to higher levels of justice." Paul's prison letter envisions similar light beaming from the fellowship of believers in Philemon's house. Paul sees the possibility because of the power of the Spirit to break down barriers. He sees the headlight beaming in their brotherhood, in their loyalty to a different kingdom, and in welcoming the slave as his brother. This essay attempts to serve as a catalyst for the kind of *koinonia* that would beam a light to the road ahead for the American Church living in a culture still enslaved by unnecessary division.[41]

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[1] King, Martin Luther, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," 1968. 30.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] *Koinonia* is used in this epistle referring to Philemon as a partner. The familial language of this letter diminishes traditional hierarchal structures in society. Besides the fact that it calls for Onesimus as a slave to be an active and equal participant in that *koinōnia,* he includes Gentiles as his family members and addresses Apphia as having at least equal influence with the men in her church.

[5] Murray Dempster (1991, 29-31) discusses the church's koinoniac ministry thoroughly in *Called and Empowered.* Dempster (1991, 29-31) explains that the koinoniac witness validates the truthfulness of the gospel proclamation, exhibits its character as counter community, demonstrates its responsibility to function as a moral community, and serves as a "signpost" that points to God's future reign.

[6] Dempster, Klaus, and Petersen, *Called & Empowered*. 29.

[7] Larry Rasmussen, "Creation, Church, and Christian Responsibility," in *Tending the Garden Essays on the Gospel and the Earth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1987), 150.

[8] Scot McKnight, *The Letter to Philemon*, The New international commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017). 10.

[9] Bernardo Cho writes that Onesimus was not a runaway slave but went to the Apostle Paul in prison to address a grievance against Philemon (2014, 101). While Allen Callahan considers that Onesimus was not a slave but Philemon's estranged brother, and that this letter is Paul's attempt to encourage solidarity between Onesimus and Philemon and the church that met in his home (1997,12).

[10] Dempster, Klaus, and Petersen, *Called & Empowered*. 30.

[11] While this point is somewhat disputed by McKnight (2017, 27), "if Paul was planting seeds no one watered them." He does not believe that Paul's agenda was to abolish slavery. However, Paul's agenda, as understood by McKnight (2017, 36) relates to a vision of a kingdom reality that takes root in the *ekklesia*. "From there a new form of primary socialization could take root that would, could or should work its way into the whole of society."

[12] Bernard Cho Bernardo Cho, "Subverting Slavery: Philemon, Onesimus, and Paul's Gospel of Reconciliation," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (April 2014): 99–115., in "Subverting Slavery: Philemon, Onesimus and Paul's Gospel of Reconciliation," writes "Paul's redemptive rationale behind the argument of the Epistle to Philemon has played a crucial role throughout Western history as a seed inspiring the implementation of genuine social change and eventually splitting the rock of slavery."

[13] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus:*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Carlisle, UK: Eerdmans ; Paternoster Press, 1994). 157.

[14] All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, come from the New International Version.

[15] Paul describes church members and "brothers" 112 times in his writings. For Paul, Christians call one another "brother" and "sister" because they are children of the same Father. Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

[16] According to Joseph Hellerman (2001, 43) "An ideally functioning group of siblings shared the following practical responsibilities; protection of family honor to outsiders and sharing of resources among insiders."

[17]According to Hellerman (2001, 43) there are economic implications to Paul's request, Onesimus would share not only in the emotional bonds of the group, but equally share and contribute to the resources of the group.

[18] Nikki Holland, "Philemon in Light of Galatians 3:28," *Priscilla Papers* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 12–16. discusses the hierarchy in Philemon in her article "Philemon in Galatians 3:28." "The Greco-Roman family was governed by strictly tiered hierarchy with the father on top, then the mother, then sons, then daughters. But we do not see these lines of power reflected in the letter to Philemon."

[19] Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001). 62.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 66.

[22] Likewise, beyond the canon of Scripture, the epistle to Diognetus from Early Church History (second century or third century) further demonstrates the significance of allegiance in this new kinship group. In chapter five of the epistle, the author describes Christians not as different with respect to their customs, language, food, or everyday living, rather, they have an allegiance of citizenship elsewhere. He describes their ethic and conduct in ordinary life as exemplary; "…they display to us their wonderful and admittedly striking way of life" (Jefford 2013, 221).

[23] K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). 18.

[24] Bruce W. Longenecker and Todd D. Still, *Thinking through Paul: An Introduction to His Life, Letters, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014)219.; McKnight, *The Letter to Philemon*; 30.; N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament commentaries v. 12 (Nottingham, England : Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press ; IVP Academic, 2008). 174.

[25] N.T Wright (2008, 174) quips that had Paul asked the Early Church to discontinue the practice of slavery in the Roman World, it would be like asking Christians today to give up their cars. One could argue that fuel emissions destroy the environment that Christians have been called to steward. Yet society depends on cars to function and therefore, however moral the request, it would be impossible to comply.

[26] Leander E. Keck, ed., *The second letter to the Corinthians, the letter to the Galatians, the letter to the Ephesians, the letter to the Philippians, the letter to the Colossians, the first and second letters to the Thessalonians, the first and second letters to Timothy and the letter to Titus, the letter to Philemon*, vol. 11, The New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon press, 2007). makes this observation in "The Letter to Philemon" in *The New Interpreters Bible*; "The central meaning and purpose of the letter to Philemon concern the difference the transforming power the gospel can make in the lives and relationships of believers, regardless of class or other distinctions. Close study of the text makes clear that Paul's primary focus is not on the institution of slavery but on the power of the gospel to transform human relationships and bring about reconciliation."

[27] Lewis Brogdon, "Reimaging Koinonia: Confronting the Legacy and Logic of Racism by Reinterpreting Paul's Letter to Philemon," *Ex auditu* 31 (2015): 27–48. 43.

[28] Ibid.

[29] McKnight, *The Letter to Philemon*.

[30] Mary Hinkle Shore, "The Freedom of Three Christians: Paul's Letter to Philemon and the Beginning of a New Age," *Word & World* 38, no. 4 (2018): 390–397.

[31] Brogdon, "Reimaging Koinonia." 38.

[32] "Paul lived in a particular context. While he states that it is better to be free (e.g., 1 Cor 7:23), he also lived in a world that could not imagine itself without slavery. He lived in a world where he could face serious legal

repercussions for not returning a fugitive slave. He lived in a world where slaves were considered things rather than people. Within such a world, Paul was able to restore Onesimus's humanity by recognizing his status in Christ, and he expected Philemon to accept that as well, by recognizing Onesimus as his beloved brother (v. 16)" (Holland 2018, 12).

[33] The term, *katalloso*, or reconciliation, remains absent from this epistle, but very present as a concept in that the story behind the letter is a story of a breakdown of relationships. Max Turner , "Human Reconciliation in the New Testament with Special Reference to Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians," *European Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (April 2007): 37–47. believes it to be the most "exquisite short piece ever written" in any attempt to resolve relational conflict.

[34] William J. Danker, *Profit for the Lord: Economic Activities in Moravian Missions and the Basel Mission Trading Company* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002). 71.

[35] Allan Anderson, "Pandita Ramabai, the Mukti Revival and Global Pentecostalism," *Transformation* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 37–48. 43.

[36] Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, Tennessee: Emanate Books, 2017). 14.

[37] Frank Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: The Story Behind the Azusa Street Revival*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck and Darrin Rodgers (Gospel Publishing House, 2017). 54.

[38] Ian MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA.* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Xiv.

[39] Demetrius K. Williams (2012, 11-58) offers an important discussion regarding the history related to this epistle. In addition, Lloyd A. Lewis Felder in the article *Stony the Road We Trod,*. "An African American Appraisal of the Philemon-Paul-Onesimus Triangle" addresses this. He makes the point that Philemon is "a letter that black peoples have heard as a proof-text to justify slavery in the past and to some extent racial bigotry" and thus invites the Church into "new, nonstatic social configurations."

[40] King, Martin Luther, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

[41]Authors Michael Emerson and Christian Smith (2000, 85) explore the issue of this division in the modern American Church in his book *Divided by Faith.* "Until blacks and whites pray together, U.S. race relations are fundamentally unhealthy. There is no getting around this, segregated churches have been and will continue to be a direct reflection on America divided." Similarly, Jemar Tisby and Lecrae, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2019). makes the sobering point that; "there would be no black church without racism in the white church."