

Luther's Contributions to Commentary Writing: Philemon as a Test Case

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In June 2003, I embarked on a summer sabbatical to finish writing a commentary on Philemon.¹ As part of the process of bringing conclusion to the Philemon project, I added Luther citations to the mix: I had access to the original fifty-five volumes of the American Edition of Luther's Works² for this task. There were the fourteen pages of Luther's lectures on Philemon to incorporate into my treatment³ and the eleven references to Philemon in the Index volume of Luther's Works.⁴ These initial references primed the pump, so to speak, and soon I was saturating my rapidly expanding Philemon files with many Luther citations. I count 112 citations of the American Edition of Luther's Works and 14 more of the Weimar Edition in the Index of Passages in my commentary.⁵

Why use Luther citations, and how did they influence my own writing of the commentary? After doing my own translation and exegesis of the letter, I felt it necessary to examine my own and others' insights against the backdrop of Luther. The Concordia Commentary Series is supposed to be a *Lutheran* project, after all, so it might be expected that this series showcase Luther's exegetical insights, if any. Most of the eighteen commentaries read in the preparation of my own were of the Reformed, Evangelical, or historical-critical persuasion,⁶ so Luther's insights balanced nicely the insights of scholars formed by the likes of John Calvin, Rudolf

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² Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86). Hereinafter cited as AE.

³ The *Lectures on Philemon* appear in AE 29:91–105.

⁴ AE 55:454.

⁵ See Nordling, *Philemon*, 373.

⁶ Here are a few (by no means all!) of the critical commentaries I consulted in my own writing of *Philemon* for the Concordia Commentary Series: Peter Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, Papyrologische

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Bultmann, Karl Barth, and others. Naturally, the Luther material is dated: the reformer delivered his exegetical lectures on Philemon a bit less than five hundred years ago.⁷ But as anyone knows who reads Luther, the reformer's writing is direct, pertinent, and reveals Christ and the gospel in surprisingly fresh and unexpected ways. What usually happened during final revisions, then, was that I would run across a choice Luther morsel and know precisely where to place it in files approaching completion on my computer hard drive. What I was looking for in particular were Luther chunks that rounded off my own treatments—or, better yet, effected a bridge between arid exegesis and the day-to-day life of the pastors I hoped would be using my commentary in parish ministry.

In what follows, then, some selective examples will be shared where Luther helped me to complete—and, I think, improve—the Philemon commentary. I shall begin, first, with a *crux interpretum* (“interpreters’ crux,” i.e., difficult passage) on which I labored for the better part of a summer in the initial stages of the project. Luther helped resolve the difficulty appropriately, and I shall share some of the ways he sharpened my exegesis. Second, I shall share Luther’s insights on select passages in Philemon that shed light on the pastoral office—or, indeed, provide a unique solace for pastors. Third, I shall provide an example from my emerging commentary on Philippians where it appears that Luther shall again enrich my understanding of another key letter by Paul.

I. Luther’s Help with a Difficult Passage

In Philemon 6, Paul expresses the content of his prayers: that Philemon’s “participation in the faith may become effective in the realization of all the good that is among us in Christ [ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργῆς γένηται ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν].”⁸ It is important to see, first, that the clause

Kommentare zum Neuen Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003); Markus Barth and Helmut Blank, *The Letter to Philemon*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Victor A. Bartling, *Commentary on 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970); F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000); David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998). For further examples, see the bibliography in Nordling, *Philemon*, xxxiii–liii.

⁷ The timetable Luther apparently followed in his lectures on Philemon was to cover Phlm 1–6 on December 16, 1527; Phlm 7–16 on December 17; and Phlm 17–24 on December 18. See AE 29:x; Nordling, *Philemon*, 287n27.

⁸ This is the translation provided in Nordling, *Philemon*, 187. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this article are my own.

marker ὅπως does not signal purpose here⁹ but rather demarcates an object clause that specifies the content of Paul's prayers that are implicit in the noun for "prayers" at the end of verse 4.¹⁰ Hence, the thought progression proceeds as follows:

... making remembrance of you in my prayers [ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, v. 4b] ... [my prayers] that [ὅπως, v. 6a] your participation in the faith [ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου, v. 6a] may become effective in the realization of all the good that is among us in Christ.¹¹

So what might the words "your participation in the faith [ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου, v. 6a]" mean? The question is vital, because if ὅπως is indeed an object clause (and not purpose), the words reveal just what Paul was praying about while "giving thanks" to God and "remembering" Philemon during what one imagines was a stressful, though amazingly productive, imprisonment. In the commentary I suggest that Paul likely wrote Philemon while imprisoned in Rome in the mid- to late fifties AD, literally chained to a soldier (Acts 28:16, 20), yet the apostle would have been in a position to receive and interact with visitors (such as the Jewish legation that came to him, Acts 28:17–28), and could preach the kingdom of God and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ for two whole years "without hindrance" (ἀκωλύτως, Acts 28:30–31).¹²

Many interpreters maintain that by "fellowship of your faith," Paul referred to the "kindly deeds of charity which spring from your [Philemon's] faith."¹³ To them, the passage seems parallel to Galatians 5:6: "faith working through love [πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη]"—and, to be sure, both passages share two key words: "faith" (πίστις), and the description that such faith was "effective" (ἐνεργής, Phlm 6) or the

⁹ Contra Paul Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939), 55; Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon*, 96.

¹⁰ C. F. D. Moule, ed., *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 142; Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 193n18; Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 250.

¹¹ In Nordling, *Philemon*, 189.

¹² Philemon can confidently be dated to within a decade (AD 53–63). See Nordling, *Philemon*, 5n14. For my preference for Rome as the place where Paul wrote Philemon (as opposed to Ephesus or Caesarea Maritima), see Nordling, *Philemon*, 7–8. That Paul was imprisoned during the writing of Philemon is established by such internal considerations as verse 1a: "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus [Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ]." See also verse 9b: "being such a one as Paul, an old man and now indeed also a prisoner of Christ Jesus [ὢν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ]." Paul is called a δέσμιος ("prisoner") also in Acts 23:18; 25:14, 27; 28:17.

¹³ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1879), 335. Similar is the statement by Marvin R. Vincent: "Your faith imparting its virtue through your deeds of love;" see *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1897), 180.

cognate “working” (ἐνεργουμένη, Gal 5:6). It is simply assumed by these interpreters—who are generally of the Evangelical persuasion—that the word πίστις (“faith”) refers to Philemon’s subjective faith in Christ (*fides qua creditur*) and so κοινωνία (“fellowship, participation”) must consist of Philemon’s charity in forgiving Onesimus and possibly releasing him for further service to Paul.¹⁴

However, ἡ κοινωνία and its cognates usually pattern with a genitive of the “thing shared”—that is, with an objective genitive.¹⁵ Many New Testament examples establish the fact that, as a matter of Greek grammar, ἡ κοινωνία in Philemon 6 should pattern with objective (and not subjective) genitives:

- God has called us “into the *fellowship* with his Son [εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ]” (1 Cor 1:9).
- “the *fellowship* with the Holy Spirit [ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος]” (2 Cor 13:14 ESV; 13:13 in the Greek New Testament).
- The cup is “a *communion* with the blood of Christ [κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ]” (1 Cor 10:16a).
- The bread is “a *communion* with the body of Christ [κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶν]” (1 Cor 10:16b).
- Paul describes the Gentile offering as a “*sharing* in this ministry to the saints [τὴν κοινωνίαν τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους]” (2 Cor 8:4).
- Paul experienced the “*fellowship* of his [Christ’s] sufferings [κοινωνίαν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ]” (Phil 3:10; cf. 2 Cor 1:7b; Heb 10:33).
- Those who eat the sacrifices are “*partakers* in the altar [κοινωνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου]” (1 Cor 10:18).¹⁶

These objective genitives, then—and many more can be provided¹⁷—argue against the common Evangelical interpretation, which forces the phrase to mean “the generosity which results from [or] which is the expression of, your faith.”¹⁸ No: Paul’s assiduous prayers were for Philemon’s “participation in the faith,” whatever that phrase meant originally. Since, however, the expression occurs nowhere else in

¹⁴ For this, see especially Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 161, and Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 194.

¹⁵ J. Y. Campbell, “KOINΩNIA and Its Cognates in the New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51, no. 4 (1932): 358, 373, 380.

¹⁶ Emphases mine.

¹⁷ See the remaining references in Nordling, *Philemon*, 206n110. For numerous extra-biblical examples, see 205–206n106.

¹⁸ With respect to which Campbell states (“KOINΩNIA,” 371), “No ordinary Greek reader would ever have understood the phrase in this way, and . . . the resultant interpretation has nothing to commend it.”

the New Testament, I directed my attention to that little word “faith” (πίστις). I began to notice that “faith” in the New Testament does not always have to mean Philemon’s personal faith as a Christian (*fides qua creditur*)—his subjective faith in Christ—as the word is commonly assumed nearly everywhere. Πίστις can mean in the New Testament “that which is believed, [that is, the] *body of faith/belief/teaching*.”¹⁹ Passages where “faith” holds this objective meaning include the following:

- “. . . *the faith* once for all delivered to the saints [τῇ ἅπαξ παραδοθείσῃ τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστει]” (Jude 3);
- “Many of the company of the priests were obedient to *the faith* [ὁπήκουον τῇ πίστει]” (Acts 6:7);
- “. . . exhorting them [the disciples] to continue in *the faith* [ἐμμένειν τῇ πίστει]” (Acts 14:22); and
- “He [Paul] who once persecuted us is now preaching *the faith* [εὐαγγελίζεται τὴν πίστιν] he once tried to destroy” (Gal 1:23).²⁰

In light of these passages—and again, more can be provided²¹—I saw that Paul’s fervent prayer must have been for the corporate, even sacramental dimensions of Philemon’s faith. This is where Luther’s contribution greatly aided my own coming to terms with the difficult passage. First, there was Luther’s translation of the phrase, which boldly states what is only latent in the Greek text: *dein glaupe den wir mit einander haben* = “your faith, which we have in common.”²² Second, Luther’s emphasis on the fuller dimensions of the words “the realization of all the good that is among us in Christ [ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν]” (Phlm 6b). On the rambling, yet highly salvific phrase, Luther opines,

This is what I have often said, and it is a topic that deserves to be emphasized: that Christian doctrine is to be set forth often . . . so that it is the most important thing among Christians that they grow in the knowledge of Jesus, as Peter also says [allusion to 2 Pet 3:18] . . . This is the most important thing we do and hear throughout our lives, because this knowledge is being opposed by

¹⁹ Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3, original emphasis. Hereafter BDAG.

²⁰ Emphases mine.

²¹ See also Rom 1:5; 1 Ph 4:13; 1 Tim 4:1; 4:6; 2 Tim 3:8.

²² Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bibel*, vol. 7 (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1931), 295.

sin, a weak conscience, and death; Satan frightens and persecutes it, and the heretics undermine it . . . One has to grow up into this knowledge.²³

Hence, as a result of my own exegetical labors, greatly aided by the contributions of others and enriched by Luther's old lecture notes, I concluded that the obscure passage revealed Paul's pressing concerns for the vitality of the word and the sacraments in the congregational assembly for which he prayed. The very gospel was at stake, and Paul's concern was for the efficacy of the word in Philemon's congregation during the difficult times that followed Onesimus's theft and flight. Paul's highest concern was that the gospel would predominate in this troubled congregation as Christians there came increasingly to possess "the realization of all the good that is among us in Christ" (Phlm 6b). This "realization of all the good" is what every congregation possesses through the preaching of Christ crucified and reception of the evangelical sacraments, and this salvific operation was under assault on account of the disruption that Onesimus' theft and flight caused in Philemon's house church, as we see in all too many troubled congregations yet today. Just this was what Paul was praying for so assiduously—as I argued in my commentary—every time he was "remembering" Philemon in his prayers (*μνείαν σου ποιούμενος*) and "hearing" (*ἀκούων*) of Philemon's love and faith, which apparently were everyday occurrences during Paul's imprisonment.²⁴ No other commentary quite puts matters thus, and I have Luther largely to thank for helping me to see it this way.

II. Luther's Insights on the Pastoral Office

As most students of Luther know, the reformer has had much to say about the office of the holy ministry, and I was able to sample a small portion of this abundance while completing the Philemon project. I found an especially appropriate Luther quote that pertained to the beginning of the Thanksgiving formula, where Paul writes, "I thank my God always [*εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε*], making remembrance of you [*μνείαν σου ποιούμενος*] in my prayers, hearing [*ἀκούων*] of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints" (Phlm 4–5).²⁵ Some commentators expressed reservations about Paul's statement that he kept "hearing" (*ἀκούων*) positive reports regarding

²³ Luther "Lectures on Philemon" (1527), AI: 29:97.

²⁴ The present tense of the participles "remembering" and "hearing" reveal ongoing (or progressive) activity. Under "Progressive *Aktionsart*" in Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 136, see the following definition: "A verb depicts a process or action in progress. This may occur when imperfective aspect combines with any lexeme that is not punctiliar or stative and when the context allows progression."

²⁵ As translated in Nordling, *Philemon*, 187.

Philemon's love and faith. Since the source is not divulged directly, a few have argued—implausibly, I think—that Paul's use of the verb *hear* was a mere signpost, indicating that the apostle had no firsthand knowledge of the letter's recipient, Philemon.²⁶ This argument, however, ignores the fact that in verse 19b, Paul writes that Philemon owed him [Paul] his very self—a statement implying that some earlier meeting between the apostle and Philemon evidently occurred, resulting in the conversion of the latter;²⁷ and it overlooks the fact that the participle *ἀκούων* appears in the present tense, indicating ongoing activity.²⁸ So Paul could well have had, during his imprisonment, current and up-to-date reports regarding Philemon and the situation unfolding in the congregation that met in Philemon's house (see “your house [οἶκόν σου],” v. 2b). Epaphras, whom Paul mentions at the end of the letter (v. 23a), represents one likely source, because he was the apostle's “beloved fellow servant” and the “faithful minister of Christ” on behalf of the Colossians (Col 1:7–8; cf. 4:12). Another source could well have been Onesimus himself, who, in spite of his illegal activities, likely gave Paul an at least grudgingly positive account of his master's faith and Christian commitments. Here again is a place where Luther put a nice finish on my own exegetical labors—plus, as an added bonus, paid tribute to those rare faithful pastors about whom one hears good things in ministry. Luther develops the joyful satisfaction Paul received when, amid the rigors of imprisonment, he kept hearing reports concerning Philemon's love and faith. Luther continues:

Paul had suffered from false prophets and . . . heard that many were forsaking the faith and . . . stirring up heresies and sects, just as is happening to us. It is a rare thing to hear [of] a preacher who is constant in the Word. But if we hear [of] one, this is a cause for prayer and thanksgiving. The very nature of the Gospel of the Spirit produces this in us. So we are trained by hearing evil everywhere to give thanks when we hear something good. *I thank*, so that things may remain as I have heard.²⁹

²⁶ Martin (*Colossians and Philemon*, 160) on the basis of Martin Dibelius, *An die Kolosser, Epheser, an Philemon*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1953) ad loc.; and Heinrich Greeven, “Prüfung der Thesen von J. Knox zum Philemonbrief,” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 79 (1954): 376.

²⁷ I argue in my commentary (*Philemon*, 21) that Philemon, visiting Ephesus on business, could well have been among the “all” who heard one or more of Paul's lectures—either among the Jews at the synagogue for three months (*μῆνας τρεῖς διαλεγόμενος*, Acts 19:8) or among the disciples at the lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years (*τοῦτο . . . ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο*, Acts 19:10). For more on the same possibility, see Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 31; and John G. Nordling, “Philemon in the Context of Paul's Travels,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74 (2010): 293–294.

²⁸ See note 24 above.

²⁹ Luther, “Lectures on Philemon” (1527), AE 29:95–96 (emphasis original).

Near the end of the letter's main body,³⁰ Paul anticipates what obstacle would prevent Philemon from extending forgiveness to Onesimus, namely, Philemon's considerable loss of property and goods as a result of Onesimus's theft and flight. Such loss is hinted at in the highly suggestive conditional phrase, "And if he has wronged you in any way [εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε] or owes you anything [ἢ ὀφείλει] . . ." (Phlm 18a).³¹ By shifting Onesimus's infidelities to a conditional clause ("if . . ."), Paul mollifies Philemon's anger and pain by directing that slave master's attention to Paul's much more important promise to make amends:

- "Charge this to my account [τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα, v. 18b]"; and
- "I, Paul, write with my own hand [ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ]: 'I will repay [ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω, v. 19a]'."

Paul's promise to make amends has led interpreters to speculate just how the apostle assumed the damages caused by Onesimus, most of which safely can be sidestepped here.³² Paul's usual habit, however, was to bear the entire cost of the apostolic ministry himself, by plying his skills as a tentmaker (*σκηνοποιός*, Acts 18:3) and supporting himself vocationally, no matter how wretched his personal circumstances probably were as a result.³³ At times, he tapped other sources of income too, as when, for example, Epaphroditus revived the apostle by bringing gifts from Christians at Philippi (Phil 2:25, 30; 4:18). Perhaps the written promise in Philemon indicates Paul's expectation that "the Lord would provide" the apostle with what he needed in the matter at hand, just as he always had.³⁴ In any event, Paul's paying Onesimus's damages in full would model for the congregations the apostle's famous self-sufficiency: "His pay was to receive no pay. His work was between him and God; he would not be paid for it."³⁵

Such explanations still do not fully account for the *theological* significance of the repayment, however. Paul would not have located himself so centrally in the

³⁰ Most scholars (e.g., see Nordling, *Philemon*, vi–vii) divide Philemon as follows: The Salutation (vv. 1–3); The Thanksgiving (vv. 4–7); The Main Body (vv. 8–22); The Final Greeting and Blessing of Grace (vv. 23–25).

³¹ For the use of the verbs *ἀδικέω* ("I wrong") and *ὀφείλω* ("I owe") in documentary papyri designating the illegal activities of persons who refuse to pay debts and so incur criminal prosecution, see Nordling, *Philemon*, 261–262nn8–9; and John G. Nordling, "The Gospel in Philemon," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 71 (2007): 73–74nn10–12.

³² For some of these possibilities, see Nordling, *Philemon*, 272–273.

³³ "Paul's trade . . . also provided him with his principal means of livelihood, though never with enough to make him anything but a poor man and sometimes not even with that much, so that hunger and thirst and cold were at times his lot" (Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980], 67–68).

³⁴ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 220.

³⁵ P. W. Barnett, "Tentmaking," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 927.

recompense of Onesimus's debt were not his very person intended somehow to serve Philemon and the congregation as a kind of blank check.³⁶ Not only were his written obligations (vv. 18–19a) significant,³⁷ but so, too, the fact that the apostle expected to receive hospitality from Philemon and the congregation at his upcoming visit (v. 22a). In my commentary, I suggest that the two ideas—Paul's repayment and visit—are in fact related: arguably the primary purpose of Paul's visit alluded to in verse 22a was for the apostle to deliver a generous recompense to Philemon and the congregation and so fulfill the pledge of verse 19a. Paul's repayment to Philemon would be analogous to the way the apostle drummed up a collection among the Gentile Christians to deliver an impressive gift “for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (Rom 15:26).³⁸ Or might Paul have desired to become resident for a time in Philemon's abode for the purpose of impressing the richness of the gospel on Philemon and the other working Christians whom Onesimus had impoverished by his theft and flight? Consider that God's greater gifts usually are of a nonfinancial kind: Christ appears beggarly to sinners,³⁹ yet a poor pastor who baptizes and preaches Christ crucified brings the inestimable wealth of forgiveness and salvation to many. Here, then, is another place where Luther's awareness of the often despised and impoverished pastoral office helped derive more evangelical benefit from Paul's letter to Philemon than was otherwise possible. Luther continues:

If I had gone . . . and seen and heard a poor pastor baptizing and preaching, and if I had been assured: “This is the place: here God is speaking through the voice of the preacher who brings God's Word”—I would have said: “Well, I have been duped! I see only a pastor.” We should like to have God speak to us in His majesty. But I advise you not to run hither and yon for this. . . . Christ says: “You do not know the gift” [Jn 4:10]. We recognize neither the Word nor the Person of Christ, but we take offense at His humble and weak humanity.

³⁶ Note the concentration of first person singular forms in Paul's specific promise to make amends: “I, Paul [ἐγὼ Παῦλος], write with my own hand [τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ]: ‘I will repay [ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω]’ ” (Phlm 19a). Nowhere else in the epistle does Paul so powerfully concentrate his literary presence. He does, however, emphasize his own person in verses 1, 9, and 20 of the letter. See figure 10, “Paul's Literary Presence,” in Nordling, *Philemon*, 302.

³⁷ “With this ‘receipt,’ Philemon could have required damages of Paul in the courts” (Barth and Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon*, 483).

³⁸ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 110. For the collection of money for distressed Christians in Jerusalem, see Rom 15:25–28; 1 Cor 16:1–4; and 2 Cor 8:1–15.

³⁹ “The Lord is poor; He does not possess a single heller [a small coin worth less than a penny]; and women follow in His train to support Him [Luke 8:2–3]. But since He does not own a single heller, how is it possible for him to impart anything to others?” (Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John 1–4* [1537–1540], AE 22:466).

When God wants to speak and deal with us, He does not avail Himself of an angel but of parents, of the pastor, or of my neighbor.⁴⁰

If the impending visit consisted in a kind of residency in Philemon's house church, then the apostle doubtless presented himself as the type of "poor pastor" (to paraphrase Luther) who would have been content to proclaim nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified—just as Paul had preached during an analogous residency at Corinth.⁴¹ The point of the apostle's anticipated visit would have been to drive home the incalculable wealth of Christ and the gospel on impoverished Philemon and the others. In the person of Paul, the apostle and "prisoner of Christ Jesus" (Phlm 1a), Christ himself would visit them.⁴² The apostle's crushing poverty would make many rich⁴³ and so more than cover Onesimus's damages. This recompense from Paul would mimic—however imperfectly—the atoning sacrifice of Christ crucified, risen, and ascended, who paid off all our debts to God the Father. Luther says it best in his perhaps most oft-quoted exposition of Paul's letter to Philemon:

What Christ has done for us with God the Father, that St. Paul does also for Onesimus with Philemon. For Christ emptied himself of his rights [Phil 2:7] and overcame the Father with love and humility, so that the Father had to put away his wrath and rights, and receive us into favor for the sake of Christ, who so earnestly advocates our cause and so heartily takes our part. For we are all his Onesimus[es] if we believe.⁴⁴

Another pastoral application Luther provides is his tendency to see in Paul—and other bearers of apostolic office—servile qualities. That is to say, as Paul and other bearers of this office served their respective constituencies, they rather resembled slaves in Greco-Roman antiquity. This point is difficult for moderns to grasp—even for pastors—so I shall warm to the theme gradually.

The commentary series editors wanted my *Philemon* to help modern Christians adopt a properly biblical understanding of slavery—rather than, as so often happens,

⁴⁰ Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4" (1537-1540), AF 22:526-527.

⁴¹ During Paul's eighteen months in Corinth, he focused the congregation's attention on the message of "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). See Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 84.

⁴² "Even if Christ did no more than greet us, it would be a treasure above all treasures; it would be honor and treasure enough. He has another treasure in store for us, however, which He reveals when He brings us forgiveness of sin and redemption from death, devil, and hell, when He transforms us into heavenly people and illumines our hearts. We can never express the value of this treasure adequately. We shall always fall short of recognizing it fully and of esteeming it as we really and truly should" (Luther, AE 22:527). Cited in Nordling, *Philemon*, 275n84.

⁴³ Paul describes the ministry of himself and his co-workers (2 Cor 6:1-12) as "poor men [πτωχοί], yet making many rich [πολλούς δὲ πλουτίζοντες]" (v. 10).

⁴⁴ Luther, "Prefaces to the New Testament" (1534), AE 35:390. Cited twice in Nordling, *Philemon*, 156n31 and 232n46. Also in Nordling, "The Gospel in Philemon," 80.

allow the lens of nineteenth-century antebellum slavery in the American South (a racist and an exploitive system if ever there was one) to distort one's appreciation of the many biblical passages that feature slaves.⁴⁵ Basically I argued that the type of slavery operative in Greco-Roman antiquity when Paul wrote the letter to Philemon did not necessarily have the same baggage moderns typically bring with them when they see the word *slave* in the canonical New Testament (see preceding footnote); thus, in my commentary's introduction,⁴⁶ I point out that the ancient world Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus inhabited was a world quite unlike our own. Ancient slavery was arguably a morally ambiguous institution (neither completely good nor uniformly bad, but quite simply the place where the enslaved rendered services in society). There were significant differences between ancient and modern (antebellum) slavery to consider, as well as the fact that New Testament slavery needs to be appreciated theologically (on account of its pertinence to Christian vocation), and not simply historically—although a historical appreciation of slavery as it actually existed in the first century AD is greatly preferable to one that “reads in” insights drawn from our own nation's legacy of slavery and its bitter aftermath.⁴⁷ My investigations seemed relevant at the time, because Onesimus had indubitably been a slave⁴⁸ and research continues to favor the idea that Onesimus had been a runaway (Gk: δραπετης –ου, m.; Lat: *fugitivus* –i, m.), despite much scholarly reaction to the contrary.⁴⁹ This survey demonstrates that the letter to Philemon has been

⁴⁵ For some scholarship that approaches Philemon from sensitivities forged by African American servile experiences, see Allen Dwight Callahan, *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon*, *The New Testament in Context* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); and especially, Matthew V. Johnson, James A. Noel, and Demetrius K. Williams, eds., *Onesimus Our Brother: Reading Religion, Race, and Culture in Philemon*, *Paul in Critical Context Series* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012). For a representative selection of a few of the many passages in the New Testament that feature slaves and slavery, see Matt 18:23–35; Matt 24:45–51 // Luke 12:42–48; Matt 25:14–30 // Luke 19:12–27; Luke 16:1–8; 1 Cor 7:20–24; Eph 6:5–8; Col 3:22–25; 1 Tim 6:1–2; Titus 2:9–10; Phlm; 1 Pet 2:18–21.

⁴⁶ See “Slavery in Ancient Society” and “Theological Implications of Slavery in the New Testament” in Nordling, *Philemon*, 39–108 and 109–139, respectively.

⁴⁷ I develop this latter point at greater length in “Christ Leavens Culture: St. Paul on Slavery,” *Concordia Journal* 24.1 (1998): 43–52; and “A More Positive View of Slavery: Establishing Servile Identity in the Christian Assemblies,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19.1 (2009): 63–84.

⁴⁸ The word δοῦλος –ου, m. (“slave”) is twice used in the letter to describe Onesimus (“no longer as a slave but more than a slave [οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον],” v. 16a ESV), a fact that ought forever to lay to rest Callahan's argument that Onesimus really was not a slave at all but Philemon's estranged brother (to be sure, Paul also refers to Onesimus as a “beloved brother” [ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν] in v. 16). See Callahan, *Embassy of Philemon*, 11, 30, 50, 69–70 and my critical review in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 64 (2000): 249–252.

⁴⁹ See the scholarship engaged in my two articles on this topic, namely, “*Onesimus Fugitivus*: A Defense of the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41 (1991): 97–119; and “Some Matters Favoring the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon,” *Neotestamentica* 44.1 (2010): 85–121.

for me something much more than a casual research interest. Indeed, I think that little Philemon—no more than a scrap from Paul’s otherwise voluminous correspondence—holds the potential of exerting a more salubrious influence on pastors and their respective congregations than the letter’s diminutive size might otherwise suggest.

Were those pastors or elders explicitly identified as such in the New Testament church (e.g., Acts 14:23; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet 5:1–2) in any way associated with slavery? This question nagged at me while writing the commentary, though I never took up the matter directly. Still, I think that at least some of the men appointed by Paul and his representatives for authorized service in the church could well have been slaves (or of servile extraction),⁵⁰ and that this possibility holds implications for the pastoral office still today. Consider, for example, how many of Jesus’ parables feature slaves: the unmerciful slave (Matt 18:23–35); the slave entrusted with supervision (Matt 24:45–51; Luke 12:42–48); the parables of slaves entrusted with talents (Matt 25:14–30) or of minas (Luke 19:11–27); the unjust steward—likely a slave—(Luke 16:1–8),⁵¹ and others too numerous to engage here.⁵² Their ubiquity could indicate that Jesus pitched his parables before small and great—that is, before slaves and their masters, before non-elites and the fully franchised.⁵³ Pastors still preach these parables today before entire congregations to accentuate various points of Christian life and doctrine. The assumption seems to be that such parables are relevant for all the assembled, irrespective of vocation—not simply those singled out for particular service.

⁵⁰ In general, the progression assumed in Roman society was (in the order of occurrence) slavery, manumission, “freed” status, and then the enjoyment of increasingly significant levels of wealth, familial pedigree, and influence (*auctoritas*). See, Nordling, *Philemon*, 83; idem, “A More Positive View of Slavery,” 68.

⁵¹ See Nordling, *Philemon*, 81. Also, “the οἰκονόμος of the parable is probably a slave,” Mary Ann Beavis, “Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the New Testament Servant Parables with Special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–8),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 49.

⁵² Some additional parables that feature approximately the same superior-subordinate relationships are the master and his slaves in the parable of the tares among the wheat (Matt 13:24–30); the man who commands his doorkeeper to stay awake (Mark 13:33–37); the slaves waiting for their master to come from the wedding feast (Luke 12:35–38); the master of the house and those excluded (Luke 13:25–30); the slaves who confess their unworthiness (Luke 17:7–10); the king who sends his slaves to invite guests to his son’s wedding feast (Matt 22:1–14); and the bridegroom and her ten virgins (Matt 25:1–13). The patient husbandman (Mark 4:26–29), too, may be a highly placed slave.

⁵³ I attempted to make this point in the commentary (see *Philemon*, 54). As for slavery itself, Jesus seems to have accepted it as a fact of his environment. See Paul Robinson Coleman-Norton, “The Apostle Paul and the Roman Law of Slavery,” in Paul Robinson Coleman-Norton, ed., *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honor of Allan Chester Johnson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 158–159; S. Scott Bartchy, “Slavery (Greco-Roman),” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:68; Nordling, “Christ Leavens Culture,” 43–44n2.

Nevertheless, a fair number of the stories feature upwardly tending slaves whose service resembles—at least superficially—pastoral ministry. For example, in the parable of the slave entrusted with supervision (Matt 24:45–51; Luke 12:42–48), it was not an impoverished drudge whom the master would come upon at the unexpected hour, “cut to pieces” (διχοτομήσει, Matt 24:51), and demote to the level of a flatterer (Matt 24:51) for beating up on the other slaves and acting like a drunkard (Matt 24:49). In fact, he was a high-level slave (δοῦλος, Matt 24:45, 46, 48, 50) who had enjoyed the master’s complete confidence—the one, in fact, whom the master set over his entire household to give to the other slaves their food at the proper time (τοῦ δοῦναι αὐτοῖς τὴν τροφήν ἐν καιρῷ, Matt 24:45). Luther supposed this turn-of-phrase “food at the proper time” pertained directly to the preaching office, and in elaborating on it, he draws in several other New Testament passages that regard this activity in approximately the same way:

Scripture makes all of us equal priests, as has been said, but the churchly priesthood which we now separate from laymen in the whole world, and which alone we call priesthood, is called “ministry” [*ministerium*], “servitude” [*servitus*], “dispensation” [*dispensatio*], “episcopate” [*episcopatus*], and “presbytery” [*presbyterium*] in Scripture. Nowhere is it called “priesthood” [*sacerdotium* (sic)] or “spiritual” [*spiritualis*]. . . . St. Paul says to St. Timothy, “A servant of God [δοῦλον . . . κυρίου] must not be quarrelsome” [II Tim 2:24]. Here he calls Timothy a servant of God in the special sense of preaching and spiritually leading the people. Again, in II Corinthians [11:23], “If they are servants of Christ [διάκονοι Χριστοῦ] so am I.” And in I Corinthians 4[1], “Dear brethren, we do not want people to regard us as more than servants of Christ [ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ] and stewards [οἰκονόμους] of his spiritual goods.” And Christ, in Matthew 24[45–51] talks much about the same stewards.⁵⁴

I think it safe to say that while the underlying warning against faithlessness pertains to every Christian irrespective of vocation, the particular task of giving to the other slaves their “food at the proper time” holds implications for the office of the holy ministry especially. Luther perceived it thus, as has been shown, and so did Walther who relates the task of distribution to the distinctive law-gospel preaching that pastors are charged to do in Christian congregations.⁵⁵ Then consider the more

⁵⁴ Luther, “Answer to the Hyperchristian Book” (1521), AE 39:154; WA 7:630. Cited in Nordling, *Philemon*, 55n97.

⁵⁵ E.g., on Luke 12:42, (the faithful and wise steward) Walther states: “Two things are here required of a good householder. In the first place, he must at the proper time furnish the servants in his house and the children everything that they need; in the second place, he must give to each individual his due portion, exactly what he or she needs. If a steward were to do no more than bring out of his larder and cellar all that is in them and put it on a pile, he would not act wisely; the children, probably, would grab large portions, and the rest might not get anything. He must give

enterprising slaves to whom the talents/minas are entrusted (Matt 25:14–30; Luke 19:12–27). That a wealthy businessman, before leaving on a commercial venture, should entrust slaves with so much money and responsibility may seem strange to us; but “slaves could fill an enormous range of functions, including positions involving onerous duties, political influence, and relatively high social esteem.”⁵⁶ A moment’s reflection suggests that Beavis’s description could suit any number of modern pastors to a tee. Usually the master’s rewards go to quite humble slaves who, though faithful, otherwise have not much to commend them. Thus the master’s favorable response to the slave whose investment garnered two talents (“Well done, thou good and faithful slave [Εὖ, δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ καὶ πιστέ],” Matt 25:23) is exactly the same as the acclamation expended on the one whose investment added five talents (Matt 25:21). Compare the similar (though not completely identical) responses in the Lukan parallel (Luke 19:17, 19). In commenting on the latter, Just emphasizes that not the slaves themselves, but the gifts of the kingdom—God’s word and sacraments—produce the increase.⁵⁷ Both Luther⁵⁸ and Walther⁵⁹ supposed that the master’s commendation in Matt 25:21 pertains in a special way to those pastors who suffer in their ministries on account of their unflinching devotion to Christ and his word. So Luther opines,

If I were to write about the burdens of the preacher as I have experienced them and as I know them, I would scare everybody off. For a good preacher must be committed to this, that nothing is dearer to him than Christ and the life to

to each the right quantity, according to the amount of work that he has done. When children are at the table with adults, he would be foolish to set meat and wine before children and milk and light food before adults. But how difficult it is to perceive that these very mistakes are often made in sermons! A preacher must not throw all doctrines in a jumble before his hearers, just as they come into his mind, but cut for each of his hearers a portion such as he needs. He is to be like an apothecary, who must give that medicine to the sick which is for the *particular* ailment with which they are afflicted. In the same manner a preacher must give to each of his hearers his due: he must see to it that secure, care-free, and willful sinners hear the thunderings of the Law, contrite sinners, however, the sweet voice of the Savior’s grace. That is what it means to give to each hearer his due.” See C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), 33. (See also p. 52.)

⁵⁶ Beavis, “Ancient Slavery,” 40. Cited in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 405.

⁵⁷ Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 733.

⁵⁸ Luther, “Lectures on 1 Timothy” (1527–1528), AL: 28:282; “Lectures on Titus” (1527), AL: 29:64.

⁵⁹ *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, 267, 307.

come, and that when this life is gone Christ will say to all, "Come to me, son. [You have been my dear and faithful servant]."⁶⁰

III. Postscript: On to Philippians!

I am now writing a commentary on Philippians. Though quite brief as Pauline epistles go, Philippians still is four times longer than Philemon and so reveals much more of the apostle's mind and struggle amid prevailing conditions that I am just beginning to understand.⁶¹ Of course, I have not yet had opportunity to review Luther's interactions with Philippians in any systematic way, so the single example provided here came about quite fortuitously—a shot in the dark, one might say.

After the epistolary thanksgiving (Phil 1:3–11), Paul sets about reassuring the Philippians that his imprisonment has in fact "advanced the gospel" (Phil 1:12), as he puts it, which could have been a tough sell since the Philippians were supporting the apostle's ministry financially (see Phil 1:5; 2:25, 30; 4:18) and would have been more than a little concerned about the imprisonment itself. There are those who believe the Philippians had "backed a bad horse" financially, in that, far from proclaiming good news, Paul was now languishing in prison and so prevented from preaching directly—a situation that could have violated Paul's partnership with the Philippians (see Phil 1:5).⁶² Nevertheless, Paul claims in this section that his imprisonment in Christ has become "manifest among the whole praetorian and to all the rest" (Phil 1:13), and that "more of the brethren—confident in [Paul's] imprisonment in the Lord—dare the more abundantly to speak the word without fear . . . some indeed . . . out of envy and strife, and some out of good will" (Phil 1:14–15).

What intrigues one about the latter passage is Paul's emphasis on the gospel's advance (in spite of many obstacles) and the christological preaching amid the imprisonment—to wit, that Christ was being proclaimed in the vicinity of Paul's imprisonment (Rome?) despite contentious proclaimers who had it out for Paul and were trying to "resurrect trouble" (*θλιψιν ἐγείρειν*) for him amid the imprisonment

⁶⁰ Luther, "Table Talk no. 453 recorded by Veit Dietrich" (1531–1533), AE 54:73–74. The text in brackets came from a later variant by John Aurifaber. Cited in Nordling, *Philemon*, 56.

⁶¹ Two recent contributions quite helpful in this regard are Hans Dieter Betz, *Studies in Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, vol. 343 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); and Joseph A. Marchal, ed., *The People beside Paul: The Philippian Assembly and History from Below*, Early Christianity and Its Literature (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

⁶² So, e.g., Brian J. Capper, "Paul's Dispute with Philippi: Understanding Paul's Argument in Phil 1–2 from His Thanks in 4:10–20," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 49.3 (1993): 209; G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2009), 67.

(Phil 1:17).⁶³ Paul seems to be saying in this section that his very imprisonment was a kind of christological sermon for the soldiers who guarded him, “all the rest” (including the friendly and rival preachers mentioned in Phil 1:13, 15–17), and particularly the Philippians to “hear,” if they had ears to hear. The letter claims repeatedly that suffering for Christ is at the heart of the Christian experience: first, the Philippians themselves have been granted the privilege “not only to believe in him [Christ] but also to suffer for his sake [καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν]” (Phil 1:29); second, the Christ hymn highlights Jesus’ humility and self-emptying even to the point of death, “even death on a cross [μέχρι . . . δὲ σταυροῦ]” (Phil 2:8); third, Paul writes of “losing everything [τὰ πάντα ἐζημιώθην]” (Phil 3:8), regarding everything as “dung [ἡγοῦμαι σκύβαλα]” (Phil 3:8), and “being conformed to [Jesus’] death [συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ]” (Phil 3:10); and finally, Paul maintains—with a touch of humor?—that he has “learned [ἔμαθον],” “knows how [οἶδα . . . οἶδα],” and has even “become an initiate [μεμύημαι]” at “being content and hungering [καὶ χορτάζεσθαι καὶ πεινᾶν]” and “abounding and being at a loss [καὶ περισσεύειν καὶ ὑστερεῖσθαι]” (Phil 4:11–12). Such snatches enable one to reconstruct with sufficient clarity the tremendous christological preaching that undoubtedly attended Paul’s imprisonment, both from Paul’s lips himself as he made a “defense and confirmation of the gospel [ἐν τῇ ἀπολογία καὶ βεβαιώσει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου]” (Phil 1:7) before the imperial authorities, and from those preachers—whether favorably disposed to him or not (Phil 1:15–18)—who “dare[d] the more abundantly to speak the word without fear” (Phil 1:14).

Hence, what must have been impressed on Paul more than almost anything else amid the bleak imprisonment was a sense of his own weakness and passivity—something many pastors feel still today. Rather than get down in the dumps or yield to despair, however, Paul seems to have trusted God’s word more than anything else and been in relatively high spirits. Paul’s attitude would seem to suggest that he was possessed of Luther’s insight that a preacher of the word holds the *ius verbi* (right to speak) if not the *executio* (power to accomplish) thereof.⁶⁴ Preachers amid difficult situations, therefore, are at some liberty to adopt an air of lighthearted nonchalance while waiting patiently for the word to do its work in the manner God intends. While

⁶³ The verb *ἐγείρω* (“to raise”) is associated with the resurrection of the dead, especially Jesus’ resurrection (John 12:1, 9, 17; Acts 3:15; 4:10; 13:30; Rom 4:24; 8:11 [twice]; 10:9; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; 1 Thess 1:10; Heb 11:19; 1 Pet 1:21; see BDAG 6, s.v. *ἐγείρω*). If *ἐγείρω* possesses this technical meaning here (BDAG does not classify this passage), Paul makes a light-hearted witticism at the expense of the rival preachers: “They are *resurrecting* trouble for me in my bonds!” Paul was not above resorting to “dumb jokes” or occasional crudities (see Nordling, “Some Matters Favoring,” 111, on 1 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 11:19–20; Gal 4:15, 19; 5:12; Phil 3:2). The play would be an indication of the apostle’s high spirits amid the imprisonment.

⁶⁴ Luther, “Eight Sermons at Wittenberg” (1522), AE 51:76.

having to deal with the idolatrous mass at Wittenberg, Luther realized that he could not simply abolish it by force, for a change in the hearts of the people had to come about freely without compulsion. Still, he could preach the word vigorously under the circumstances, teach it, write it, and trust everything to its effect. Here Luther uses himself as an object lesson, a tactic Paul resorts to more than once:⁶⁵

Take myself as an example[, exclaims Luther]. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark 4:26–29], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip [Melanchthon] and [Nicholas von] Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.⁶⁶

Then Luther elaborates on the “folly” of fomenting trouble and of bringing “great bloodshed upon Germany.”⁶⁷ He could, indeed, have “started such a game” that not even the emperor would have been safe. But such would have gone against the word of God. My sense is that the imprisoned Paul found himself amid circumstances that were greatly straitened when compared to Luther's.⁶⁸ Like Luther, however—and, indeed, like many preachers still today—Paul was in a position to wield the word potently (as evidenced by his very writing of the letter) and to represent Christ mightily before the imperial authorities and those soldiers who oversaw his imprisonment. Paul may, indeed, have been enchained, “But the word of God is not bound [ἀλλὰ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ οὐ δέδεται]!” (2 Tim 2:9 ESV).

IV. Conclusion

This article could have focused on those passages in my Philemon commentary that feature Luther's insights on prayer,⁶⁹ the blessed holy cross,⁷⁰ the doctrine of

⁶⁵ See 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:7, 9.

⁶⁶ Luther, “Eight Sermons at Wittenberg” (1522), AE 51:77.

⁶⁷ Luther, “Eight Sermons at Wittenberg” (1522), AE 51:77–78.

⁶⁸ For physical descriptions of Paul's imprisonment at Rome (where I believe Paul was located when he wrote Philippians [see Acts 28:16–31]), see J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, rev. ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913), 7–19; and Brian M. Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*, vol. 3 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 177–189.

⁶⁹ Luther, “Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount” (1532), AE 21:142–143; “Concerning the Ministry” (1523), 40:31. Cited in Nordling, *Philemon*, 195n53; and 294n56, respectively.

⁷⁰ Large Catechism, Lord's Prayer, 65. Cited in Nordling, *Philemon*, 109–110n5.

vocation,⁷¹ the office of the keys,⁷² the estate of marriage,⁷³ or any of a number of other topics my commentary takes up. However, focusing attention on how Luther helped resolve a difficult exegetical issue in Philemon and his insights on the pastoral office in Paul's shortest letter provided more than enough material for what appears here, with plenty left over for another day.

With respect to the one Luther citation that pertains to Philippians, I know there will be much more to cite as I get deeper into the project.⁷⁴ It was gratifying to use Luther's frustrations in dealing with the idolatrous mass at Wittenberg to explicate better the sense of weakness Paul undoubtedly felt during his own imprisonment while awaiting an audience with the emperor's representative in Rome, I believe, sometime in the mid- first century AD—an audience that would determine the apostle's living or dying (Phil 1:21). And so I hope Paul and Luther's good humor in preaching Christ crucified, risen, and ascended amid difficult circumstances will encourage pastors still today who do the same in their respective ministries under the cross.

⁷¹ Luther, "Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount" (1532)AE 21:32. Cited in Nordling, *Philemon*, 137n188.

⁷² *A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), 18. Cited in Nordling, *Philemon*, 104n406.

⁷³ Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John 14–16" (1537–1540), AE 24:377. Cited in Nordling, *Philemon*, 138n199.

⁷⁴ Thanks go to Scott Bruzek and John Pless who directed me to the location of the passage regarding Wittenberg beer.