

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

30:15-18 – Life is full of choices; few carry eternal consequences. But this choice – do we follow our covenant God, or do we go away to follow other gods? – was as important as life itself. Trusting the Lord and living His way isn't just the only way to stay alive; it's the only way life can be rich, full, and productive – the way He created it to be. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because apart from Him there is no real happiness and peace. To reject God's mercy and to seek greater joy and satisfaction somewhere else is the surest way to personal and national ruin. (PBC)

Note from John 10:10 – LIFE AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL – This is the best kind of life: life lived in security and freedom, life with a purpose and goal, life with a capital "L." – Life is an important word in John (used 36 times; but only 14 times in the Synoptics). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

Justin Martyr says, "God spoke thus to the man first created." God's ways with humankind this always remain the same. Daniel would describe how Israel brought down on themselves the curse of death and evil by departing from God's Law – the whole Word of God (Daniel 9:11). (TLSB)

30:16 WAYS...COMMANDS...DECREEES...LAWS – Each suggests a different emphasis. (TLSB)

30:19 *I call heaven and earth as witnesses.* The typical ancient covenant outside the OT contained a list of gods who served as "witnesses" to its provisions. The covenant in Deuteronomy was "witnessed" by heaven and earth (see 31:28; 32:1; see also notes on Ps 50:1; Isa 1:2). (CSB)

God informed Israel that His whole creation was summoned to testify that He had told His people in advance what the results of their choice would be: it was a matter of life and death. (TLSB)

CHOOSE LIFE – Moses could be the Lord’s covenant mediator with Israel. He could urge them to do the right thing, but he couldn’t choose for them. They had to choose for themselves. (PBC)

On the basis that God had chosen them and established a covenant relationship with them based upon grace. See p 127. Chemnitz: “These statements must not be understood as applying only to the concerns of this life, for in Luke 10:25ff., when the scribe says, ‘What shall I do to gain eternal life?’ Christ replies, ‘What is written in the Law . . . this do and you shall live’ ” (*LTh* 2:620). (TLSB)

The most important question you and I will ever have to answer is, “What do you think of Jesus Christ?” Every other question – Where should I live? Whom should I marry? What school should I attend? What career should I pursue? – pales by comparison. There are only two alternatives: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36). (PBC)

30:20 *hold fast*. See note on 10:20. (CSB)

The Spirit of God, who breathed life-giving breath into Adam, breathes life-giving breath into His people through His Word. Cf Ezk 36:22–28. Irenaeus of Lyons: “Preparing man for this life, the Lord Himself did speak in His own person to all alike the words of the Decalogue [Ten Commandments]; and therefore, in like manner, do they remain permanently with us” (*ANF* 1:482). (TLSB)

the LORD is your life. When they chose the Lord, they chose life (v. 19). In 32:46–47 “all the words of this law” are said to be their life. The law, the Lord and life are bound together. “Life” in this context refers to all that makes life rich, full and productive—as God created it to be. (CSB)

We Christians also have life and death, everlasting salvation and eternal damnation, laid before us in the Word of God. He that believes the Gospel and trusts in the mercy of God in simple faith will have eternal life. He will also give evidence of his faith in his obedience to the Word and command of God. But he who does not believe the Gospel, preferring to live a life of sin and shame, will be lost forever. (Kretzmann)

EPISTLE – Philemon 1-21

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, ² to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1–2 Although Paul writes together with Timothy and although he addresses the entire church in Colosse, in this very personal letter to Philemon he uses “I” rather than “we,” and “you” (singular except in vv. 22, 25). (CSB)

1 *prisoner*. See notes on Eph 3:1; Php 1:13. (CSB)

desmios – Paul calls himself a prisoner rather than apostle. He does so also in Eph. 3:1; 4:1 and 2 Tim 1:8. This might be because he truly is a prisoner of the Roman Empire for his witness of Christ and it also might be an approach of humbleness as he writes Philemon. (CSB)

Timothy. See note on Col 1:1; see also Introduction to 1 Timothy: Recipient. (CSB)

Philemon. A Christian living in Colosse or nearby and the owner of the slave Onesimus. (CSB)

FELLOW WORKER – *sunwrgos* – It is generally thought that this refers to Philemon’s support of the preaching of the Gospel in the church.

In this intimate letter the apostle does not emphasize his apostolic commission, that being unnecessary in the case of a man who recognized the authority of his teacher: without reservation. Instead, he brings out another factor, namely, that of his being in prison for the sake of the Gospel: Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and brother Timothy, to Philemon, the beloved, and our fellow-laborer. It was a precious privilege which Paul enjoyed, that of bearing shackles and chains for the sake of his Lord and on behalf of the Gospel which he had proclaimed so fearlessly. Though he was a prisoner, he was still in the hand of the exalted Christ, the Lord of His Church, wherefore it was not necessary for him to apprehend any evil for himself except that which the Lord Himself permitted to come. He names Timothy, as in the case of the letter to the Colossians, not as coauthor, but as his associate in the great work of saving souls for Christ and as a brother, both in the faith and in the work of salvation. Philemon the apostle addresses as the beloved, the common love in Christ Jesus uniting them in bonds of such intimacy as exceed the closest earthly relationship in strength. Paul addresses Philemon as a friend, preferring to entreat through love rather than to use the lofty tone of command. And he puts a special distinction upon him by designating him a fellow-laborer, a term otherwise reserved chiefly for preachers of the Gospel, but applied to Priscilla and Aquila, Rom. 16, 3. Not only because Philemon had offered the use of his house, but also because he showed his interest in other ways and was actively engaged in spreading the Gospel by every means at his disposal was he thus honored by the apostle. The work of the Church is not confined to the pastors and teachers, but is entrusted to all Christians. (Kretzmann)

2 *Apphia*. Probably Philemon’s wife. (CSB)

Archippus. See Col 4:17. (CSB)

sustratotas – here fellow soldier is taken to mean a brother in the office of the ministry, a fellow pastor.

Paul includes also other members of the Colossian church in his address: And to Apphia, our sister, and Archippus, our fellow-soldier, and the congregation in thy house. Apphia, or Appia, was apparently the wife of Philemon, distinguished also by her interest in the work of the Lord, like other women whose names stand out in the history of the early Church, such as Nary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Priscilla, Euodia, Syntyche, Lydia. Archippus seems to have occupied an even more important position than Philemon in the congregation, Col. 4, 17, and is therefore believed by many to have been the bishop, or pastor, of the congregation at that time. A fellow-soldier Paul calls him, using the figure of speech which appealed to him very strongly. 2 Cor. 10, 3. 4; 1 Tim. 1, 18; 2 Tim. 2, 3. 4. In a general way. Paul addressed his letter to the entire house-congregation of which Archippus was the head. It is by no means improbable that the entire congregation at Colossae was housed in the inner court of Philemon's dwelling, since this afforded considerable space, if built after the manner of Greek or Roman houses. (Kretzmann)

3 GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD – When grace is offered, it will lead to peace.

The greeting is that of most Pauline epistles: Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. By the grace of God as it was revealed and manifested in Jesus Christ the right relationship between God and man has been reestablished. The Father having been reconciled to lost and condemned mankind through the blood of His Son, peace between the two contending parties had been established, or rather, the righteous and holy God, for the sake of Christ's merits, has again accepted the children that had left Him in disobedience. Thus to us, as believers, God is our Father; we have been restored to sonship through the vicarious satisfaction of Christ, and we are united in fellowship under the banner of our exalted Lord. Jesus Christ, these two persons of the Godhead being equal in majesty and deity. (Kretzmann)

Thanksgiving and Prayer

⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. ⁶ I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. ⁷ Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

4 *thank ... remember you in my prayers.* See note on Php 1:3–4. (CSB)

It is an excellent way to begin one's prayers and greetings of others. Paul uses it a great deal.

Paul's may of finding reasons for thankfulness to God is illuminating as to his character and may well serve as an example to all Christians: I thank my God, always making mention of thee in my prayers. The fact that the apostle found so much to be thankful for in the life of Philemon as he knew it, would be sure to make a strong impression upon the latter and incline his heart all the more readily to grant Paul's request, especially since this appeal was intended to stimulate a further evidence of the proper condition of mind. The apostle was united with his God, with Him whom he knew to be his highest gift, in daily prayer. This prayer included, above all: also thanksgiving for the gifts of grace which had been bestowed upon Philemon, which he could not help but mention. Note: It is a fine and laudable thing for all church-members to live such lives as will stimulate similar prayers of thanksgiving in the hearts of their pastors, just as it is a praiseworthy custom for a pastor to make daily mention of his parishioners in his prayers to his God. (Kretzmann)

5 BECAUSE I HEAR ABOUT YOUR FAITH – This phrase helps the person(s) know that it not just empty flattery that is being shared. It also gives credit to the Lord for his work.

† Comparing Col 1:4, the NIV has interpreted “your love and your faith, which you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints” (lit.) as an example of the literary device called “chiasm,” in which the thought is structured like the Greek letter *chi* (*x*): Paul often employs “chiasm,” also called “chiasmus”—parallel words or phrases in reverse order—usually symbolized by the formula *a b b a*. An example is in Paul's frequent phrase: “God [a—name] our Father [b—relationship] and the Lord [b—relationship] Jesus Christ [a—name]” (v. 3; Gal 1:3). A double chiasmus occurs in Gal 2:7–9: “the uncircumcised” (a); “the circumcised” (b); “the circumcised” (b); “the Gentiles” (a); “the Gentiles” (a); “the circumcised” (b). Some examples are in the Greek text but are lost in the English translation, as in Gal 3:3, where the word order in Greek is: “Are you so foolish? After beginning (a) with the Spirit (b), by human effort (b) are you now trying to attain your goal (a)?” (CSB)

The reason for this grateful prayer Paul now mentions: Hearing of thy love and the faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints. Whether Onesimus, after his conversion, had come to see many things in a different light than before and accordingly had related these facts to the apostle, or whether the latter had other sources of information, he knew, at any rate, that the report was true. There was evidence before the eyes of all that cared to investigate that Philemon bore in his heart a fervent love toward his Lord Jesus Christ and, in consequence of this, also toward all the brethren, the believers, or saints, as Paul calls them by reason of the fact that they have been consecrated to God by faith and are serving Him in lives of sanctification. This love was the result or outgrowth of faith, in itself a proof of the faith which had been wrought in his heart by the Gospel. The love which lives in the Christian's heart and finds expression in his life is a proof both to himself and to others that faith has been enkindled in him by God, a fact which should, in turn, prove an incentive to him to nourish this flame with all carefulness. (Kretzmann)

6 ACTIVE IN SHARING YOUR FAITH – koinonia – Here is the sharing in the Lord’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper.

Having registered the reason for his thankfulness, the apostle now states the content of his prayer: That the communication of thy faith may become effective by the knowledge of every good thing in you toward Christ Jesus. That is Paul’s intercession, that the same faith which lived in Philemon might be communicated to all the other Christians that heard of his example and that the effect of this transmission or communication might serve or help them all to understand all that was good in them toward Jesus Christ. A complete and accurate knowledge, an ever-growing and better understanding of the capabilities for good which faith in Jesus Christ works in the hearts of all believers gives them a calm reliance upon the power of God in them, a cheerful confidence to furnish to the world the outward proof of the faith which lives in them. All this, of course, contributes to the promotion of the cause and work of the Lord here on earth. Even here the apostle’s tactful diplomacy directs the attention of Philemon toward the fulfillment of the appeal which he was about to broach. (Kretzmann)

7 hearts.† The English equivalent of the Greek for “intestines”—the part of the body that is figurative for the emotions of pity and love (see vv. 12, 20). The Greeks made little distinction between the internal organs above and below the diaphragm. (CSB)

To this the apostle adds another ground for his attitude of thanksgiving as noted above: For I had great joy and encouragement on the basis of thy love, because the hearts of the saints are refreshed through thee, brother. The report regarding the excellent state of Philemon’s faith and love filled the apostle with great joy, it gave him much consolation and encouragement, just as similar accounts of their parishioners or experiences in which they figure serve to lighten the burden of faithful pastors in our days. The evidences of the love which lived in the heart of Philemon and was the motive in his work in the congregation were of a nature to relieve, to refresh the hearts of the saints. St. Paul probably has reference to everything that Philemon did for the Colossian Christians that met in his house, in dispensing both temporal and spiritual goods. The appreciation of the great apostle is most strongly brought out in the emphasis upon the word “brother,” placed at the end of the sentence. It is by no means an objectionable ruse or a sordid trick to introduce a request to a Christian brother in this manner, provided always the statements that are made are in conformity with the truth. There ought to be more of this frank appeal to the love which lives in the hearts of the Christians by faith. (Kretzmann)

Paul’s Plea for Onesimus

⁸ Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹ yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. ¹² I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me so that he

could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. ¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. ¹⁵ Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good— ¹⁶ 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 man and as a brother in the Lord. ¹⁷ So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

8 I COULD BE BOLD AND ORDER YOU – Paul does not use his power to get his way. He uses a gentle servant approach to urge Philemon to do the right thing.

Having prepared the way for his request with all gentle delicacy, the apostle now voices his intercession; and yet not abruptly, but with its own little introduction: Therefore, though I might have great boldness in Christ to command thee that which should be done, yet for love's sake I rather beseech, being in such a condition, Paul, the old man, but now also the prisoner of Christ Jesus. Since Paul was sure in advance of the heart and mind of the man to whom he was addressing this letter, he had no hesitation about voicing his request. He might even have been quite bold and frank about the matter, he might have made use of the joyous confidence which he had in the Lord, based upon his apostolic authority and upon the fact of his inward personal communion with Him through faith; he might simply have called Philemon's attention to a duty which he should perform in agreement with God's will, of a moral obligation which rested upon him by virtue of his Christian profession. (Kretzmann)

9 A PRISONER – This once again emphasizes the fact that Paul is approaching Philemon in a most humble fashion.

Instead of that, however, and for the sake of the love which he bore him, he preferred this method of beseeching Philemon, of making an appeal to him. This made the granting of his request on Philemon's part a matter of piety. The persuasive, the appealing character of the entire letter is apparent especially in Paul's reference to himself as the aged Paul and now also the prisoner of Christ Jesus. The authoritative teacher steps back to make way for the warmhearted, affectionate friend interceding with an absent friend for a beloved convert. Paul was at this time an elderly man and bore the designation which he applied to himself properly. And he was feeling the weight of his age especially in his imprisonment, in which he was bearing the reproach of his Master, since it was for His sake that he had been arrested and brought before the emperor's court. Thus Paul brought his own person as concretely and as vividly as possible before the eyes of Philemon, in order to screen the figure of Onesimus from the anger of his master. (Kretzmann)

10 Onesimus. See NIV text note; see also Introduction: Recipient, Background and Purpose. His name means useful. (CSB)

my son. See note on 1Ti 1:2. (CSB)

It seems that Onesimus was not a Christian when he ran away.

The apostle now states his request: I beseech thee with regard to my son, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus, who formerly was useless to thee, now, however, is very useful both to thee and to me, whom I have returned to thee. The very words are here chosen with such careful regard for the situation that they cry out their appeal. Thus the repetition of the word “beseech” stands out strongly in opposition to Paul’s right to command. Then, also, he does not refer to Onesimus as the runaway slave, but as his son, whom he has begotten in his bonds, his spiritual child, whom the Lord led to him in Rome, and whose heart had been renewed by the power of the Gospel as proclaimed by Paul. It certainly was a strange dispensation of the Lord according to which the slave from Colossae met the imprisoned apostle at Rome. (Kretzmann)

11 useless ... useful. A play on the meaning of Onesimus’s name (see NIV text note on v. 10). (CSB)

After his baptism by Paul he truly lives up to his name both in a physical sense as a slave to Philemon and as a Christian helper to Paul.

In a fine play upon the meaning of the word Onesimus, which is “profitable.” St. Paul tells his friend that his slave has indeed, since leaving his service in such an unceremonious manner, been unprofitable, useless, to him; now, however, he was useful, very valuable, not only to Philemon, but also to Paul, who was sending him back to his master. Onesimus had been of great service to the apostle, trying to further his convenience and happiness in many ways. But having, under Paul’s faithful instruction, realized his wrong, he was ready, more than ever, to serve his old master for conscience’ sake. (Kretzmann)

12 MY VERY HEART – This is very personal with Paul. It is at his very heart.

Paul, sending, or having sent, Onesimus with this letter, pleads for him as he might for himself: Thou, however, receive him, that is, mine own heart. Luther remarks: “Here we see how Paul takes to himself poor Onesimus, and makes his case his own, as if he himself were Onesimus.” He refers to the slave with an expression of the most tender love, as his own flesh, his own heart, with whom he is connected by the bonds of the most tender affection (Kretzmann)

14 WILL BE SPONTANEOUS – ekousious – Means willingness or to decide out of free will. Again, Paul emphasizes that he does not want to use his office or force.

And in order to remove all unwillingness, the last vestige of resentment, from the heart of Philemon, Paul adds: Whom I would have kept back in my own company, that in thy stead he might serve me in the bonds of the Gospel, but without thy knowledge I wanted to do nothing, lest that which is good for thee come from restraint rather than from thy own free will. It had really been the purpose of Paul to have Onesimus stay in Rome for a while, to take the place of his master in serving the apostle; for Philemon was deeply indebted to Paul for the spiritual blessings which he now enjoyed. It stood to reason, also, that, so long as the apostle was hindered in moving about freely, a service such as the slave had given him was in the interest of the Gospel. It was not only the fact that he could perform many little forms of ministry for Paul, whose place of lodging required some care and attention, but also that he could do many errands for him in keeping up the communication with the members of the congregation at Rome. Thus Paul had regarded Onesimus as Philemon's substitute. This inclination of Paul's mind was changed, however, when he considered the prior and weightier claims which the master had upon his slave; he wanted to do nothing without Philemon's knowledge and consent. Any service which the latter might undertake in his behalf, whether personally or through his slave, was to be a voluntary service, flowing from his own free will and desire, and not in any way forced upon him by a constraint suggested by Paul. (Kretzmann)

15 HAVE BACK – The apostle here adds a thought as though it had just occurred to him: For perhaps he for this reason departed for a while that thou mightest have him back for good, no longer as a slave, but above a slave, as a beloved brother, most of all to me, but how much more to thee, in the flesh as well as in the Lord! This is a reference to the dispensation of God, who thus arranged and directed matters that Onesimus was not only led to Rome, but there became personally known to Paul and thus received the knowledge of his salvation. Philemon was to consider the entire affair as though his slave had taken a journey of a few months, and had now returned for good, more closely connected with his master than before. (Kretzmann)

16 NO LONGER AS A SLAVE – Paul is not abolishing the institution of slavery or making a social commentary on slavery. Formerly Onesimus was merely a servant, but now he is a brother in Christ forever.

Though still a slave in his station, yet he no longer bore the character of a slave according to the world's acceptance of the term, The disgraceful, degrading element had vanished from the relation. He was now, so far as Paul was concerned, a dearly beloved brother, being the sharer of his bonds and his son in the faith. Much more closely should Philemon, then, consider himself united with his slave by the twofold bond of the material and the spiritual relation. Onesimus, the slave, served the temporal interests of his master, being employed in such work as was of use to his body; Onesimus, the Christian, was bound to him by the ties of a common faith, a much more intimate and cordial relationship than that afforded by any earthly connection. (Kretzmann)

17–19 Luther said, “Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus Paul also does for Onesimus with Philemon.” (CSB)

17 CONSIDER ME A PARTNER – *koinonon* – Partaker – This is how Christians receive one another, not for the sake of the person, but for the sake of Christ.

This being the true state of affairs, the circumstances of the slave's return being such as just pictured, the apostle could urge: If, then, thou considerest me a partner, receive him as myself. Paul here reminds Philemon that their own relationship was not merely that of friends or companions according to the manner of the world, but that of partakers of a common faith. This fact alone placed Philemon under obligation to Paul; for to deny his request was to declare the termination of the fellowship which united them in Christ. (Kretzmann)

18 CHARGE IT TO ME – This is what Jesus did for us; he took upon himself the debt of our sin and paid for it with his holy and precious blood.

Such a contingency, however, being unthinkable, the apostle pleads that Philemon accept Onesimus as though he himself were standing there. This included that he should not think of inflicting the penalty which the laws permitted him to inflict, namely, that of branding the fugitive and even putting him to death, but that he should make a free and unequivocal confession of Christian brotherhood by forgiving the wrong which he had suffered, and receiving Onesimus in that spirit. (Kretzmann)

19 I WILL PAY – Following up the advantage which this argument gave him with another, the apostle writes: But if he has done thee any wrong or owes anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, have written it with my own hand, I will repay; without mentioning the fact to thee that thou owest even thyself to me. Here St. Paul removes a possible difficulty that might stand in the way of a reconciliation such as he wished it. Undoubtedly the offense of Onesimus was that he had embezzled or stolen some of his master's goods before absconding. At the same time, of course, he had deprived Philemon of his services during his absence, a fact which naturally resulted in some damage to the master. But Paul, with characteristic energy, removed this difficulty. He personally guaranteed the payment of the money, if Philemon wanted to insist upon indemnity; let it be charged to his personal account: he pledged himself, with his own handwriting: to make good the shortage. (Kretzmann)

20 *I ... my.* Both pronouns are emphatic, making an obvious allusion to v. 7. (CSB)

benefit. The Greek for this word is another play on the name Onesimus. (CSB)

REFRESH MY HEART – This is the third time in this books that Paul is moved to such emotion to speak of his innermost self, his heart which is filled with joy, knowing that Philemon will do more than he asked.

At the same time, however, by a figure of speech which brought out the indebtedness of Philemon to himself in the strongest possible manner: he urged his Colossian friend to remember his obligation to him, namely, that it was due to his work in the Gospel that Philemon was now the possessor of the highest and greatest blessings in life, those guaranteed by the redemption of Christ. In reality St. Paul means to say, Philemon owed him far more than Onesimus stood in debt for, and could therefore well afford to overlook the transgression of the slave. Pleadingly, therefore, the apostle adds: Yes, brother, let me have profit of thee; refresh my heart in Christ. Here again there is a play on the name of Onesimus, as the apostle asks Philemon to accord him the filial services which he may well expect, and thus to refresh his heart which has been troubled on account of this matter. The real source of the relief afforded by such an action on the part of Philemon would, of course, be the Lord, who would make him willing to perform the duty that lay before him with a willing heart. (Kretzmann)

21 CONFIDENT OF YOUR OBEDIENCE – There is no doubt in Paul’s mind as to the satisfactory settlement of the matter which he has set forth with such persuasive pleading: Relying firmly upon thy obedience, I have written to thee, knowing that thou wilt also do beyond what I write. There is a hint here of the authority which the apostle might wield should he so choose, and of the obedience which Philemon must feel that he owes to the will of God at all times. There was no question in Paul’s mind: he was absolutely confident that the solution of the problem would be satisfactory in every way, that Philemon would probably find ways of showing Onesimus a kindness even beyond the suggestions which he ventured to make. For that is the way of true love flowing from faith: it seeks new ways and means of demonstrating its power always. (Kretzmann)

GOSPEL – Luke 14:25-35

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. ³⁴ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

14:25 LARGE CROWDS – ὄχλοι πολλοί—Luke provides an echo of 12:1, where the size of the crowds was accented. (CC p. 578)

The crowds stuck close to Jesus everywhere He traveled. (TLSB)

Although Jesus may not be popular with the Pharisees and lawyers, he still draws large crowds. This crowd is journeying with him to Jerusalem. Luke's travel narrative takes another turn with Jesus teaching in parables that are unique to Luke's gospel. There seems to be a large block of teaching from 14:25 to 17:10, which means that the parables of Luke 15–16 that center in God's mercy and compassion may be part of one extended discourse, which begins with 14:25–35. (CC p. 579)

WERE TRAVELING – συνεπορεύοντο δὲ αὐτῷ—Luke uses his journey vocabulary (συνεπορεύοντο) to remind the hearer that Jesus is still journeying to Jerusalem. This is the only indication until 17:11 of Jesus' ongoing journey. On συνεπορεύομαι, see 7:11; 24:15. (CC p. 578)

TURNING TO THEM HE SAID – Are the crowds who go along to inherit the same destiny as Jesus? In this passage, Jesus says *yes!* To be invited to the final, eschatological banquet has its consequences; to repent and receive the gift of the kingdom means to be baptized into Jesus' death. Lest the crowds look down on the Pharisees and lawyers as unwilling to count the cost, Jesus warns these crowds that to follow him entails great sacrifice. In fact there are three entailments of discipleship announced in this pericope: hating family (14:26), carrying the cross (14:27), and leaving possessions behind (14:33). The point is illustrated with three parables (14:28–30, 31–32, 34–35), the last of which raises the distinction between the hypocritical and the genuine. (CC pp. 579-580)

Since the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he has engaged in continual catechesis of the Twelve, the seventy (-two), and the crowds. As was clear in the Sermon on the Plain, not all disciples are called to be apostles, but all disciples are learners, students, catechumens. The same meaning for "disciple" obtains here. Much of what Jesus tells the crowds here is catechetical material they have heard before. He has already spoken of hating family (8:19–21; 9:59–62; 12:52–53), carrying a cross (9:23–27), and giving up possessions (5:11, 28; 12:33). But perhaps the loudest echo comes from the discourse in Luke 8 on the parable of the sower (8:4–8), the meaning of parables (8:9–10), the interpretation of the parable of the sower (8:11–15), the parables of seeing and hearing (8:16–18), and the new kinship (8:19–21). (CC p. 580)

14:26 *hate his father.* A vivid hyperbole, meaning that one must love Jesus even more than his immediate family (see Mal 1:2–3 for another use of the figure). See Mt 10:37. (CSB)

Hebrew idiom for hate. To love one thing and to hate another gives preference to the former. Cf Gn 29:30–31. God does not expect us to be cruel to the family He has given, but rather to love Him first. (TLSB)

Discipleship is an either/or situation. Either we love and hate everything that might possibly come between us and him, or else we cannot be his disciples. This phrase does not apply to Christian homes.

Both Luke 8 and Luke 14 describe barriers to true repentance and impediments to genuine discipleship. The parable of the sower told the disciples to expect a mixed reception with various responses to the Gospel they will preach. Here too are described the different reactions of hearers and catechumens, and the pitfalls they will encounter. The first type of catechumen (14:26) is one who comes to Jesus (ἔρχεται πρὸς με, “comes to me”) in the initial stage of inquiry when he first hears the Word and comes to hear more. The catechumen must be told what costs are involved in following Jesus, for there will be some who are unwilling to leave their human family for the sake of the kingdom. This corresponds to seed that fell on the road and was trampled and eaten by birds, as when the devil takes away the Word from the heart, in order that those who believe at first might not continue in faith and be saved (8:5, 12). These words jar our modern ears, where the human kinship of the nuclear family has such a lofty place, even within the church (see also the Fourth Commandment; Eph 6:1–4). Does Jesus really mean that we are to *hate* our father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, even our own soul? Matthew records the softer formulation that makes “hate” correspond to “not love more than” (Mt 10:37), i.e., we are not to love family “more than” Jesus and his kingdom. This is, in fact, the meaning of “hate” here, but Luke preserves the semitic expression in all its hardness. (CC pp. 580-581)

T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 229–30, has a helpful comment: “The term ‘hate’ (*misein*) is the opposite of ‘love’ (*agapao*; cf. 1:71; 6:[22], 27). The terms denote attitudes and modes of action, not emotions. The point is not how one feels toward parents and family but one’s effective attitude when it comes to a choice for the kingdom.” (CC p. 581)

This language of “hate” comes from the Torah,

Gen 29:30–31: “So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah and served Laban for another seven years. When Yahweh saw that Leah *was hated* [LXX—μισεῖται], he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.” Deut 21:15–17:

If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other hated, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the hated [μισουμένη], and if the firstborn son is of her who is hated [μισουμένη], then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved [wife] as the firstborn in preference to the son of the hated [wife; τὸν υἱὸν τῆς μισουμένης], who is the firstborn, but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the hated [wife; τὸν υἱὸν τῆς μισουμένης], by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the first issue of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

See also Ex 32:27–29, where Moses instructs the people “and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. ...

Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of Yahweh, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother that he [Yahweh] may bestow a blessing upon you this day.” (CC p. 581)

and it can only be understood in the context of Jesus’ overturning the Jewish laws of kinship and showing one’s true family is first and foremost the family of God, where membership is by grace through faith by means of catechesis and Baptism. If one sees this family as of first importance, then one can fear and love God and rightly love and honor fellow Christians and human family, in keeping with the Lord’s word: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it” (Lk 8:21). (CC p. 581)

False priorities crippled such a person’s discipleship. (TLSB)

14:27 *carry his cross*. See 9:23; Mt 10:38 and notes. (CSB)

οὐ βαστάζει τὸν σταυρὸν ἑαυτοῦ—The other reference to “taking up the cross” includes “daily” (9:23). Here to “carry” or “bear” the cross implies an ongoing situation. See comments at 9:23–27. (CC p. 578)

The second entailment of discipleship (Lk 14:27) clearly echoes an earlier call for the disciple to “deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (9:23). Now the crowd of catechumens are told to “carry [the] cross and come after me” (ἔρχεται ὀπίσω μου; 14:27). These are catechumens who have heard the Word, have left family, and understand the costs of discipleship. But as they travel with Jesus to Jerusalem, they begin to encounter rejection and persecution. This entailment of discipleship corresponds to the seed that fell on the rock and withered because of lack of moisture, like those who receive the Word with joy but have no roots and fall away in times of temptation (8:6, 13), which can include *persecution* (cf. 22:40–46). (CC p. 581)

Refers to Christ’s own death and His disciples’ willingness to follow in His sacrifice. (TLSB)

CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE – οὐ δύναται εἶναί μου μαθητής—Luke repeats this phrase (14:26, 33) and so emphasizes discipleship. At this point Matthew records “is not worthy of me” (10:38). On μαθητής in Luke-Acts, see comments at 6:20. (CC p. 578)

14:28-32 Jesus now interrupts the flow of his narrative with two parables, one that uses a building metaphor, and the other a metaphor about war. The theme of both is the same, namely that one is to *count the cost* before embarking on anything as serious as a huge building project or a full-scale war. This theme is signaled by the parallel language, i.e., that the builder/king must first sit down (14:28, 31; οὐχὶ πρῶτον καθίσας) and decide whether this is feasible. Eph 2:14–22 contains the same two motifs of the foundation and peace. Jesus is the one who makes peace between Jew and Gentile. All who are built on him and the foundation of his prophets and apostles are united as God’s holy temple. (CC pp. 581-582)

The two metaphors in Jesus' parables clearly illustrate the first two entailments of discipleship. The catechumen builds his life on the firm foundation of the catechetical teaching of Jesus and the church. Through Baptism he enters into a new family, the family of God (6:48), which is greater than one's human family. Such a catechumen is one who "hears my words and does them" (6:47). Baptized, he is crucified to the world and the world to him (Gal 6:14). The follower of Jesus loses the world and gains only a cross while in the world. One would never begin this new life without the resources to complete it, and these resources are supplied by Baptism and the Word. (CC p. 582)

Likewise the catechumen doesn't rush off into Christ's war thinking that he can win it himself. The enemy is fierce and the catechumen is outnumbered, and so the only way to win is to carry the cross Jesus carried and follow him, for he is the one who knows the terms for peace (τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην; 14:32). The same expression will be used by Jesus as he weeps over Jerusalem and asks, "If only you—even you—had known in this day the things that have to do with peace [τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην]! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (19:42). Will these same terms of peace be hidden from the catechumen's eyes, crowded out by temptations and persecutions that he, like his Lord, might be called to endure? In both parables, crowds who would journey with Jesus are warned to first sit down, count the cost, and know what they lose and what they attain when going with Him. Catechumens are warned of the consequences of joining Christ on the ongoing journey to the heavenly Jerusalem. Both parables are in fact a call to repentance and faith in the one whose first destiny is the earthly Jerusalem and the cross. (CC 582)

14:28 estimate the cost. Jesus did not want a blind, naive commitment that expected only blessings. As a builder estimates costs or a king evaluates military strength (v. 31), so a person must consider what Jesus expects of his followers. (CSB)

Substantial building, such as a fortress. (TLSB)

Either a man completes his building, or he becomes the object of ridicule for staring something he cannot finish. Jesus does not suggest he should consider erecting a less costly building or an alternate structure, because discipleship is not a half-way activity to be changed as we see fit. Its demands cannot be lessened; the level of our commitment is what must change.

14:29 WILL RIDICULE HIM – As an unfinished builder may be ridiculed, so those who falter in their discipleship dishonor themselves and the Gospel. (TLSB)

14:30 FINISH – Complete the course and keep the faith. (TLSB)

2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

14:31-32 Same point is reinforced with a second comparison. (TLSB)

14:31 KING IS ABOUT TO GO TO WAR – Often, Christians feel outnumbered by the forces of the world. (TLSB)

14:32 TERMS OF PEACE – τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην—“The things for peace,” in which πρὸς means “belonging to” or “necessary for” peace, i.e., “the terms of peace.” Cf. Lk 19:42; also 2 Pet 1:3; BAGD πρὸς, III, 5, b. (CC p. 578)

Jesus advises not mere compromise, but a sober look at reality and evaluation of the cost. (TLSB)

14:33 *give up everything he has*. The cost, Jesus warned, is complete surrender to him. (CSB)

ἀποτάσσεται—In 9:61, a would-be disciple asks to “take leave of” (BAGD, 1) his family; here Jesus uses the same verb as he instructs disciples to be prepared to “renounce, give up” (BAGD, 2) their possessions, echoing 12:33 and anticipating 18:22. (CC pp. 578-579)

τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχουσιν—This is a common Lukan expression for possessions, one’s worldly goods. (Cf. Lk 8:3; 11:21; 12:15, 33, 44; 16:1; 19:8) (CC p. 579)

Possessions, along with hypocrisy, are stumbling blocks for the Pharisees. This is one of the major themes of Jesus’ long discourse of 12:1–13:21. (CC p. 582)

There are echoes also here from the Sermon on the Plain (6:20–49), and this theme concerning possessions will be picked up again in chapter 16. Throughout Jesus’ catechesis of his disciples, the proper use of possessions has been a major theme, since possessions are one of the greatest threats to discipleship. Could this entailment of discipleship correspond to the third kind of seed that falls among the thorns and as it grows up is choked with thorns? These are people who hear the Word but are choked by the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life (8:7, 14). (CC p. 582)

Being a disciple entails the readiness to give up anything if duty to God calls for it. (TLSB)

14:25–33 Jesus illustrates the unconditional nature of discipleship. Consider well the radical demands of following Jesus, and be ready to meet them. Yet, count also the demands our salvation placed on the Son of God, who gave up all things for us. He is your tower and refuge of strength. • “Take myself, and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee.” Amen. (LSB 783:6). (TLSB)

14:34 *Salt is good*. See note on Mk 9:50. (CSB)

Ancient salt was made of several chemicals dried from seawater. Sodium chloride, true salt, could leach out, leaving other worthless minerals. So the Christian whose faith has eroded is no longer a Christian. (TLSB)

Jesus summarizes his teaching about discipleship with an enigmatic saying about salt. (There is a similar saying in Mt 5:13 in the Sermon on the Mount and in Mk 9:49–50.) Luke’s version of this saying accents the value of genuine salt. Salt is critical in a world that lacks other means for preserving food. Food that tastes bad might be redeemed by seasoning with salt. If salt were to lose its ability to preserve and season food, it would be useless, for there is no way to restore these qualities to salt (Lk 14:34). It would lose its purpose and would not even be suitable for other uses such as enhancing the soil or aiding decomposition in a rubbish pile (14:35). It should be thrown out, like those who came to the final banquet of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob without faith in Jesus as the Lord of the banquet (13:28). In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:13), Jesus called the disciples “the salt of the earth” because through their presence in the world, Jesus is present. But if family ties, the burden of Jesus’ cross, and possessions hinder hearers from becoming believing disciples, then they will be like tasteless salt, worthless and deserving of being thrown out. They are like the first three groups of seed that fell on the road, on the rocks, and among the thorns. They begin by hearing the Word, but eventually the entanglements of life cause them to fall away. (CC p. 583)

BUT – οὐν—The RSV leaves this untranslated, but the conjunction shows that these final verses are connected to the previous teaching about discipleship. (CC p. 579)

14:35 IS THROWN OUT – The partly desalinated compound could still harm the soil; therefore, it must be thrown away like a worthless servant into the outer darkness (Mt 25:30). (TLSB)

LET HIM HEAR – The follower of Jesus needs to listen to everything He (Jesus) has to say, not only what one wants to hear. (PBC)

ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω—Jesus issued this declaration earlier at 8:8; see textual note and comments there. On ἀκούω as a term for hearers/catechumens, see comments at 5:1; the Sermon on the Plain (6:27, 47, 49); the parable of the sower (8:8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18); and Jesus’ discussion of the new kinship (8:21). (CC p. 579)

The seriousness of these entailments of discipleship is summed up by Jesus’ final words: “The one having ears to hear, let him hear” (Lk 14:35). The catechumen has heard these words before, at the conclusion of the parable of the sower (8:8). Not all are given ears to hear and eyes to see. The doctrine of election is involved here; see comments on 8:8, 9–10, 15. Once again, Jesus is calling the crowds to become hearers of the Word, that is, catechumens who follow him to Jerusalem, to the cross, and beyond that to the empty tomb and the heavenly “exodus” (9:31). But to be hearers of the Word they must take seriously the nature of Jesus’ call into a new family, carry their cross, and renounce their possessions. The road to heaven leads through Calvary. (CC p. 583)

14:34–35 Christ’s people are “the salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13), purifying and seasoning it, because Christ is within them. He makes us Christians through God’s Word. • Spare us, O

Christ, from a weak and insipid faith, that the world may taste and see that You are good. Amen.
(TLSB)