



International Conference – Feb. 2023

General Theme: **Christ: The Connecting Center of God's Work**

Mess. 24: **Paul's Letter to Philemon: A Love Story**

Scripture Reading: Phm 1:25.

Link to this Message on the IVPT Channel

<https://youtu.be/vbd7ZbklwK>

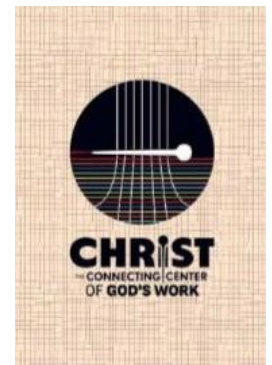


Offering Centre

<http://institutovidaparatodos.org.br/central-de-ofertas/>



Word given by brother **Pedro Dong**, transmitted by Instituto Vida para Todos directly from Natal-RN, Brasil, on **05/07/2023**. Text not revised by the author.



1. We are in Natal-RN, at the conference of churches in Region 4, and we see that many here practice making the word of Christ dwell in each one and **this has generated an indescribable joy**. We have seen the Lord raise up **our children** and they are praying for people, because children are without concepts, they act in a simple and pure way. And our **preteens and teenagers** are waging this war by immersing and transcribing the Word, as well as taking what they've enjoyed to the streets and into the schools, and are influencing parents and adults alike.

2. Like the teenagers, let's catch fire, let's open our hearts and surrender to the Lord, so that He may have a way among us. Are you unable to change the conventional way of church life in your city? **Plan to take the brothers from your church to spend a weekend at the nearest GPC**. This will change your life, see the supernatural happen! Going out into the streets, doing colporting, and even if you're not a colporteur, you can have that experience. **The pressure of preaching the gospel on the streets makes you depend more on the Lord!**

3. **Dear brother, buy a box of books (120 kits) from the Cooperative and place it on the couch at home and close to the television**. Your wife will complain: "Take that box away". Then, you'll say to her: "I'll take it out, but you're going to help me empty this box; let's go together to the streets". **This experience will change the whole church life**. We need a little pressure to get out of our conventional and experience the supernatural in the streets.

4. **Let's work with our teenagers**. The church in São Luís/MA had only two teenagers, so they went to look for their colleagues in the streets and, today, almost two months later, there must be 60 teenagers meeting. A famous person said: **"He who listens forgets; who sees imitates; who justifies does not do; who does learn"**. **If you've never done it, you have no right to criticize**. We're going to change the profile, we're going to set our teens on fire, and church meetings will never be the same.

5. Paul, at the end of the book of Colossians spoke of persevering in prayer and watching; to plead in favor of the speaker, because **the word of God does the work of God – it is an order**. It tells us to behave wisely towards outsiders and, every day, we have contact with people, whether at

work, or in the market, etc., especially when we do colporting work. **How to behave wisely?** Filling us with the Spirit and making the word of Christ dwell in us richly. **Immersion in the Word is a gift from God to each one of us.**

6. When I studied at the Faculty of Engineering, many colleagues asked me to teach them, because they did not understand the subject and, with that, I realized that when I taught them, I learned more. **We need to speak the word of God to each other.** For this, it is **important to write down the Word in a notebook.** As an example, I try to take notes like this: move the ruler to have a left and right margin on the page of the notebook. Then, in the middle I take my notes and after that, I listen to the message again. When we listen to the message a second time, we will realize that several things have been missed. Then, the second time you listen, in the margin field on the right, you put a summary, a keyword of each paragraph. And as I listen again, inspiration will come and this I place in the left margin. Brethren, it works! **I advise the youth to practice this.** Brother André Dong, even having difficulty with his hand, which often takes him one, two or three days to write down the messages, perseveres in this practice.

7. When going out into the streets, preaching the gospel, do not trust your ability, **use the prophetic word to pray for people.** **The end product of Paul's ministry produces a beautiful web of love.** In the concluding greetings of the letter to the Colossians mention is made of Aristarchus, a Macedonian who suffered in Paul's stead in the tumult at Ephesus and was imprisoned in Rome along with Paul. He also cites John Mark, cousin of Barnabas, who could not stand the pressure of Paul's first journey in the Lord's work and returned to his mother Mary's house in Jerusalem. **This is a lesson for us → never give up on a youth,** even if he has failed and let you down, because the Lord has a way of perfecting everyone. This John Mark became very useful towards the end of Paul's life and walked with the apostle Peter as well and, according to Peter's accounts, wrote the gospel of Mark.

8. Paul also mentions Jesus the Just, as well as Epaphras and at the end Luke, the physician who nursed Paul to health in his imprisonment. **Paul's ministry** was not a ministry of doctrines, but a ministry that produces life, relationships of love, does the will of God and weaves a fabric of love among the brethren of the church.

#### **Rev 1:1; 2 Tim 2:2**

9. **Those who speak for God are very attacked by the enemy.** Paul was heavily attacked. Satan tried to confuse the only speaking of the Lord at that time for His church. We must realize that God has a mouth in His Body, but that mouth is collective and begins with a channel. This is revealed in Revelation 1:1. This group of servants are the collective mouth in the Body of Christ. God wants to reveal to a group of people who will be the prophets in the churches. This revelation is given by God to John alone. And through John God communicates to this group of servants what God wants them to convey to the churches. God does this so that **there is one mouth, one channel and one speaking through the many prophets in the church.** These prophets are the mouth of the Body of Christ. They do not speak their own word, but what God communicated to His servant John. They faithfully convey this revelation to the church.

10. Paul was this channel. Beloved brother, do not invent anything, do not filter, do not add, do not change. **You need to learn to be a faithful transmitter of the Word.** Paul spoke a prophetic word and Timothy heard it. Upon hearing the word, what do you do? Pass it on! We have a tendency to filter, to judge whether this is good or not. **The prophet faithfully conveys what he has heard from God's channel to also faithful and suitable brothers,** to those who also appreciate the prophetic word. In the church there are several prophets who serve as mouths, who follow one speech - faithfully transmit one speech. The gift of prophecy (Rom 12:6) is speaking for God inspired by the Holy Spirit. Whoever speaks for God does not speak his own word, he has to wait for God to put His word in his mouth.

11. In these last times, we need the prophetic word much more, because it will take us to the end. **I love the coming of the Lord, it is my motivation.** My motivation is that when the Lord returns, I will have a crown of righteousness reserved for me (the reward of reigning with Christ for a thousand years). **That Word is producing a product for God:** the reality of church building, a web of love that is taking away every empty space between us. Today there is still a certain distance between one brother and another and God needs to remove all that space, because the wires need to be well compacted. **God wants me to stay close to you, my brother!** Natural friendship is no guarantee, **only God's love unites us perfectly.** So let's use the love of God that comes through the Word, by immersing ourselves in it, making it dwell in us richly.

#### **Phm 1-3; Col 4:9; Col 3:11; Eph 3:8, 17-19**

12. In message 23 we finish the book of Colossians and in message 24 we are going to talk about the book of Philemon. Why? **The Letter of Philemon is an addendum to the letter of Colossians,** because at the end of this letter, Paul announces that Tychicus would carry the letter to the Colossians together with Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave who belonged to Philemon. It had run away from its owner after having done him some harm. At the time, slaves came from defeated peoples and were mere work tools that could be bought. Onesimus managed to flee to the great metropolis of Rome, where he met Paul who preached the gospel to him.

13. Therefore, when Paul wrote that Onesimus would be with Tychicus in taking the letter to the Colossians, this would create a problem: those in Colossae knew that Onesimus was a fugitive and he had to explain to his master why he was sending it back. The Colossians would question, "Paul, what are you doing? Such a slave has defrauded one of our brothers. Is he worthy of severe punishment and even death and now you bring him back with all honor?" **Paul called this runaway slave his "faithful and beloved brother"** (Col. 4:9). This raises a question among those of Colossae. There was, therefore, need for Paul to give further advice to Philemon.

14. Onesimus was wandering the streets of Rome and, by divine providence, found Paul and he preached the gospel to him. This runaway slave converted and became someone useful to Paul. **So strong was his conversion that Onesimus became a co-worker with Paul in prison.** But Paul would not do anything without Philemon's consent, since Onesimus was Philemon's property. First Onesimus had to return to Colossae to resolve his dispute with Philemon. Thus, **the reason for the letter** → was to better explain the situation and that it aims for Philemon to receive him no longer as a slave, but as a brother. Paul had to write this letter almost as a plea for Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother.

15. Paul does not preach against slavery, which was legal at the time, but manifests the compassion in Christ's perfect humanity. We do not get involved with politics, therefore, within each legal regime, we need to be fair, according to the Spirit and according to the Word. **Expressing compassion towards all people,** not looking at social classes, **as we are all brethren.** And Paul records that in the church, in the new man, there is neither bond nor free, but Christ is all in all (Col 3:11). God's intention is to fill the Body of Christ with Christ Himself - until Christ is all in all. He fills us through the Word.

16. In the letter he also mentions that if Onesimus has caused any damage to Philemon, **Paul places himself as a guarantor, willing to assume any damage.** What humanity Paul had! It is **a beautiful love story** that proves that by receiving the flow of the river of grace, we receive Christ as grace, as reality with all the divine attributes of righteousness, holiness and glory of God. We receive the essence of God: God is light and God is love. We receive the Spirit Himself. We have received the gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8). We receive Christ to dwell in our heart, **taking control of our soul (mind, emotion and will),** rooting ourselves in the love of God. If my life is not governed by Christ, I'm still a long way off. I want the Lord to dwell in my heart, so that I no longer have freedom to do what I want.

17. And thus intertwining ourselves in love with all the saints, we can understand the real dimensions of Christ and know the love of Christ that surpasses all understanding, in order to be filled completely with the fullness of God (Ef 3:17 -19). The distance between you and your brother is a void. **Let's let Christ fill this void until all the distance between us is gone.**

#### **Eph 4:12, 15-16**

18. **Our ministry is the building up of the Body of Christ.** We are full of voids and lies, as Satan has disconnected us from God. Therefore, we need to follow the truth in order not to be fake Christians. The church cannot be a church of only theory; it needs to have spiritual reality. **Following the truth in love we will grow from the Head.** The Head sends the word and what do we do? Immersion in the Word, speaking to each other and filling us with the Spirit. "Everybody" is me and you. The expression "adjusted and consolidated" refers to the word **coalesce**, in Portuguese – which is to **unite intensely forming a single piece**, and gives the idea of a fabric with its warp threads (vertical) and weft threads (horizontal), but all the threads intertwined.

19. In **the loom**, we have the odd and even warp threads that are separated. Then comes the shuttle and pulls a thread from the weft. **The shuttle is Christ - the connecting center of God's work.** The shuttle pulls the horizontal thread to one end, and then those longitudinal threads (which have the even numbers on one side and the odd numbers on the other) are reversed. When they invert, that horizontal thread that passed through became intertwined. From there, the shuttle returns again and throws it to the top knot and when it finishes passing, it reverses again and thus intertwines the threads.

20. Christ, as the shuttle, is doing this work by His indwelling Word. A good loom has to **have high quality threads**, because for the threads to be well adjusted and compacted, they need to be very taut. If the threads are not of good quality, when stretched, it breaks. **And the threads also need to be thin**, since the thinner a thread is, the less empty it is when it starts to adjust to one another. That is, the more we follow the truth in love growing in Christ, the more we are adjusted, consolidated, compacted and serving together.

21. Some leaders who are here at this conference recently went to the PAC, in order to be perfected. They all went through the same sufferings, but they had wonderful, supernatural experiences. And the best thing about it is that, after those three days at the PAC, **their love grew between them**. They began to look at each other in a different way than when they arrived at the PAC. **Practicing immersion together, going outside together, love grows.** If we want the love of God to grow in us, we need to leave the conventional church life. In the old days, we had our natural life during the week, and at meeting time, we were spiritual. After the meeting we went back to our usual natural life. That was our church life. Thus, the time God had to coalesce us was the time of the church meeting. Not today! Now, with immersion in the Word, preaching the gospel together, husband and wife making the word of Christ richly dwell, **not only at meeting time are we coalesced, but also in our daily lives.** **Today we are charged by our children to immerse ourselves in the Word.** In this way, we are weaving this fabric of love every day, and in this way the Lord will return sooner. Today, spiritual reality is increasing faster among us.

#### **Col 2:2; 3:14**

22. **The object of Paul's word** was that the hearts of the saints should be comforted and bound (interwoven, coalesced) together in love (Col 2:2). The Lord wants to bring us together, connect us, unite us in an intense way, something more than usual. Above all this, put on love, which unites all things perfectly (Col 3:14 - JB version). **Love is the only one capable of uniting us perfectly, throwing away all indifference and enmity.**



### Phm 1-7

23. Since it is a personal letter from Paul to Philemon, we can deduce that Apphia was the wife of Philemon and Archippus, his son. Archippus must exercise some spiritual leadership, possibly in the absence of Epaphras, since the latter was with Paul in prison. **Paul emphasizes Philemon's love and faith for the Lord Jesus and all the saints.** Love appears first, as **this letter is written within the sphere of love.** Paul expects Philemon to receive this letter in that sphere.

24. Paul's prayer was that Philemon's fellowship of faith would bring about a full knowledge of all the good we have in union with Christ. **Faith aims at gaining access to spiritual goods in Christ,** which results in knowing the love of Christ that surpasses all understanding (Eph. 3:19). When by faith you have access to all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, you receive a flowing stream of grace. And when the river of grace flows to you, what remains in you? Love. **Christ is the love of God,** and so you will know the love of Christ that surpasses all understanding and be filled to the full. Philemon's love has given Paul great joy and encouragement, for it has revived the hearts of the saints.

### Phm 8-10

25. **Paul intercedes on behalf of Onesimus.** Even if Paul had full freedom to order, he prefers to ask in the name of love in favor of Onesimus. Paul solicits him in the position of an old man and a prisoner of Christ Jesus. **He humbled himself so that Philemon would grant his request in the name of love.** Paul, by the gospel, begat Onesimus and took care of him like a son. This proves that what happens when someone full of God's love preaches the gospel and cares for someone out of love, **a fabric of love is woven that interweaves God, Paul and Onesimus.** And this occurred while Paul was in handcuffs, which further intensifies the feelings involved. Paul did not act on mere emotion, but supplied the word, which was interweaving God, Paul, and Onesimus.

### Phm 11-12

26. **The name Onesimus in Greek means "useful" or "profitable".** Here Paul plays on words with his name. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with pain in his heart, it was as if he was sending his own heart. We see how Paul loved this runaway slave. **We perceive the intensity and veracity of the love generated in this spiritual relationship.** This is what must happen in the church life. Despite many wrong things committed in the past, today we can generate this intense relationship of love in the church. But this is only generated, if we follow the truth in love in the Head Christ, immersed in His Word.

### Phm 13-14

27. Paul wanted to keep him with him so that Onesimus could serve him in chains, but he didn't want to do anything without Philemon's consent, so that nothing was done as an obligation, but of his own free will. Onesimus was to serve Paul in response to the love relationship that arose between the two. **It is a beautiful picture that only happens in church.** In the concept of the time, Onesimus was a slave of Philemon, therefore he was his master's property. Paul respected his right of ownership, but he wanted to show Philemon how useful and dear Onesimus had become to him.

### Phm 15-20

28. Even wanting to stay with Onesimus, Paul thought it best that he remains definitively with Philemon, but not as a slave, although Philemon had every right to make him return to his previous status, or even punish him for having caused damage to him and fled. Paul asked Philemon to receive him far above a slave, **as a dear brother from Paul,** both in the flesh and in the Lord. In the flesh, it must refer to the human sphere; in the Lord, in the spiritual realm. **God's love produces a perfect and beautiful humanity.**

29. What a letter! Paul wrote all this because of a slave. We have never seen Paul insist, so humbly beg one person to receive another! This all shows this fabric of love that God is making

among us. **God is bringing us together, not only in the flesh, but also in the Lord.** It is easy for us to say: "brother, I love you in the Lord". But it's hard for us to say, "brother, I love you in the flesh". But whether in the spiritual sphere or in the human sphere, we must love the brethren with the love of Christ.

30. Usually, Paul asked someone to write him his letters, but in v. 19, we see the record of Paul writing in his own hand the expression: "I will pay", like a promissory note. In fact, Philemon owes his life to Paul, for he saved him. But Paul was not collecting that debt. **Paul asked Philemon: revive my heart in Christ. Make me happy!**

#### **Phm 21-22**

31. It seems even an exaggeration to receive a slave like to receive Paul, but this is the end result of what the Lord is doing with us in building the church. Even though there is a more special natural relationship between us, it doesn't compare to the union that God is making between us. He is weaving a veritable fabric of love, so tightly knit and tightly knit with one another and with God that **the bonds between the members of the Body far surpass the bonds of nature**. Paul reiterates with so much insistence and humility that Philemon fulfill his request, which would revive his heart. Here is a small sample of the bond of love that is created between members in building the church.

#### **Phm 23-25; 2 Tim 4:10-11; 1:15-18**

32. **We see the closing greetings of Paul's co-workers:** Epaphras, prisoner with Paul; Mark, cousin of Barnabas; Aristarchus, Macedonian of Thessalonica; **Demas, who afterwards forsook Paul**, having loved the world (2Ti 4:10). This is evidence that we can still fall into the devil's trap. Therefore, dear brother, **do not love the world or the things in the world**, because the world passes away, but the word of God abides forever and ever (1 John 2:15-17); Finally, we see the quote from Luke, the physician who stayed with Paul until the end (2 Tim. 4:11).

33. In 2Tim 1:15 we read that **all of Asia forsook Paul**. What a sadness! Paul suffered all kinds of persecution and the brethren received so much help from him and still abandoned him. Therefore, I believe that our natural heroism will not hold us together until the end. When Jesus said that one of them would betray Him, Peter said that he would never deny Jesus. But we know that Peter denied it (Matt 26:31-35, 69-75). **When your life is in danger, the survival instinct speaks louder and you deny**. When Paul was imprisoned by Emperor Nero, anyone who claimed to be a friend of Paul, who claimed to be part of the church, was at risk. But Onesiphorus, Timothy and Luke did not abandon Paul. Onesiphorus solicitously searched until he found Paul in prison.

34. We can't be trusted, even in the face of our survival instincts. But if we have the vision of the Body, that is, if we see that we are organic members of the Body, this vision holds us, keeps us firm in the Lord. **Let's be inseparable not for heroism, but for this vision**. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen!