

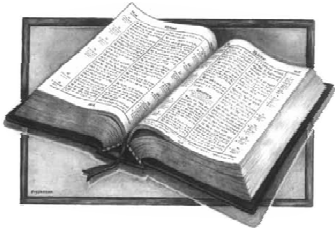
Diligently Seeking God (Hebrews 11:6)

PRAIRIE VILLAGE CHURCH OF CHRIST
4616 VALLEY STATION ROAD

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Scripture of the Week



Acts 26:24-25

"While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.' But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.'"

In Acts chapter 26, the Apostle Paul defended himself before King Herod Agrippa because of his wrongful imprisonment, and he also preached a Gospel sermon in order to try to save lost people. In verse 6 he said, *"I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers."* This hope and promise was resurrection to life eternal that Jesus secured for His followers when He arose from His own deathbed (verse 8). Paul went on to tell how he formerly did many hostile things toward Jesus. He arrested Christians and voted in favor of killing them. Furiously enraged at them, he pursued them to foreign cities in order to arrest them and force them to blaspheme. Paul also told of how Jesus appeared to him while travelling to

Damascus, engaged in the very act of pursuing Christ's disciples. He said he saw a brilliant light shining brighter than the sun, and Jesus himself spoke to him from heaven and completely turned his life around. As he was recounting these details, the governor of Judea, Porcius Festus, shouted loudly that Paul had gone mad and lost his mind. When Jesus lights up your life and turns your whole world around, some people are going to think you're crazy, and they won't mind telling you about it. That's okay so don't worry about it. When the worldly people around you start questioning your sanity, it's usually a fair indication that you're living your life the right way. You just focus on pleasing God—it's the only sane way to live.

Philemon

The book of Philemon is one of the shortest books in the Bible, and it is actually a letter to a brother in Christ that the Apostle Paul wrote while imprisoned in Rome. Philemon owned a slave named Onesimus who abandoned his duties and ran away from home. In this unique piece of inspired literature and personal correspondence, Paul appealed to Philemon to receive his brother back with open arms. At some point during Paul's imprisonment he had converted Onesimus to Christ and the Lord had turned his life around. The Apostle used his influence to vouch for the authenticity of his conversion and even went as far as to guarantee the repayment of any debt Onesimus

owed his master. Paul wrote in verses 17-19, *"If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it ..."* Paul's actions are a wonderful representation of the redemptive love of our Savior, Christ Jesus. Just like we did with God, Onesimus had rebelled against his master and he owed him a debt he was unable to pay. Paul, like Jesus, paid the price necessary to redeem his friend and reconcile his relationship with his master. This letter is a plea for love, forgiveness, and doing right by our brethren in Christ, regardless of our differences or the wrong

committed. One of the troubling aspects of this letter is that many people feel it teaches that the Bible condones slavery, but that couldn't be any farther from the truth. Slavery is wrong, but it was a reality in Paul's world that was unavoidable. It has been estimated that between 1/3 and 1/2 of the population of the Roman Empire was made up of slaves. Instead of aiming to change an entire culture over night, the Bible teaches that a person can be faithful to God whether he is a slave like Onesimus, a slave owner like Philemon, or a prisoner like Paul. We are all free men and women in Christ, but we're never free to treat others poorly. God expects us all to do what is right in His sight in every situation.