

Philemon

Chapter 1:1-25

¹ Paul, *a prisoner of Christ Jesus*, and Timothy our brother, to *Philemon* our *beloved* brother and *fellow worker*,² and to *Apphia* our sister, and to *Archippus* our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Col. 4:6-9 > ⁶ which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth; ⁷ As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸ For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ and with him is **Onesimus**, our faithful and beloved brother, *who is one of your own*. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

Constable (comparing the names mentioned at the end of this chapter to the Epistle to the Colossians) > The same persons were with Paul when he wrote his letter to the Colossians, namely, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Luke, and Demas (vv. 23-24; cf. Col. 4:10, 12, 14).

A prisoner of Christ Jesus > Barclay > The beginning of the letter is unusual. Paul usually identifies himself as Paul an apostle; but on this occasion he is writing as a friend to a friend, and the official title is dropped. He is writing not as Paul the apostle but as Paul the prisoner of Christ. Here at the very beginning, Paul lays aside all appeal to authority and makes his appeal to sympathy and to love alone.

Hiebert > "As himself the Lord's bondsman he will plead for another bondsman whose story is the burden of this letter. In begging mercy for this bondsman he points to his own bonds."

Both J Vernon McGee and David Pao point out a significant emphasis in this phrase > It does NOT say, "*a prisoner of the Romans because of my allegiance to Jesus Christ*" ... and, again ... it does NOT say, "*a prisoner because the Jews trumped up a false charge against me.*" The inspired word says, "*A prisoner of Jesus Christ*". That changes the whole attitude!! He says he is where he is because God wants him there.

Philemon > MacArthur > Philemon, the recipient of this letter, was a prominent member of the church at Colosse (vv. 1–2; see **Col. 4:9**), which met in his house (v. 2). The letter was for him, his family, and the church.

Utley > Epaphras, not Paul, started the church in Colossae (cf. **Col. 1:6-7**), therefore, Paul must have met him earlier, possibly in Ephesus (**Phlm. 1:10, 19**). However, it is remotely possible that Paul did not know him personally (cf. **Phlm. 1:5**) and that Epaphras informed him about this man's ministry.

Philemon 1:10, 19 > ¹⁰*I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I fathered in my imprisonment, ...* ¹⁹*I, Paul, have written this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).*

Philemon 1:5 > ⁵*because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the ^lsaints;*

MacArthur > The earliest of New Testament canons, the Muratorian Canon (ca. AD 170), includes Philemon. Both Colossians and Philemon were written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome (Col. 4:3, 10, 18; Philem. 9–10, 13, 23).

Beloved > Pao > The adjective “beloved” has often been translated as “dear friend”, but in this context it is not simply a term of endearment that highlights the ties between the circle around Paul and Philemon.

Fellow worker > Pao > The title “coworker” (συνεργῶ) is also significant in Paul’s rhetorical strategy. This title points to Philemon’s participation in their common ministry. As they serve God together, Paul urges Philemon to recognize this identity and to continue to participate as his “partner” (v. 17) in fulfilling his request concerning the reception and treatment of Onesimus.

Pao > In other words, to emphasize that Paul and Philemon are “coworkers” is not to emphasize their cooperative effort in a gospel project; instead, it emphasizes their individual dependence on and obedience to the gospel ministry as they share the same vocation for Christ and his kingdom.

Apphia ... Archippus > MacArthur > Philemon’s wife and son, respectively

Vincent > The word is not the common Roman name Appia, but is a Phrygian name, occurring frequently in Phrygian inscriptions. It is also written Aphphia, and sometimes Aphia.

Max Lucado > In Paul’s day, it was the wives who held the day-to-day responsibilities of the slaves in the household. Why is this fact significant when you consider that Paul included her in his greeting?

Wuest translation of verses 1-2 > *Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy the brother, to Philemon the beloved and our fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the assembly which meets in your home.*

⁴ *I thank my God always, making **mention** of you in my prayers, ⁵ **because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints**; ⁶ (and I pray) that the fellowship of your faith may become **effective** through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for the sake of Christ.*

Mention > Vincent > *Mνεία* primarily means remembrance, so that the phrase expresses the two ideas, mentioning thee when I call thee to mind.

Pao > In the present context, “when I remember you” can be literally translated as “when I make remembrance of you.” If this is not simply a periphrastic way to express Paul’s own remembrance of Philemon in his prayer, this can also mean either “when I ask God to remember you,” or “when I ask him [i.e., Philemon] to remember you.”

Because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints > Vincent > The clauses are arranged crosswise, love referring to saints, faith to Christ (A literary device sometimes represented by A-B-B-A)

The Wuest translation picks it up > *hearing constantly of your **love** (A) and **faith** (B), your **faith** (B) which you have in the Lord Jesus and the divine and self-sacrificial **love** (A) which you show towards all the saints*

Effective > Strong’s > *energés* > at work, active

HELPS > properly, *energized*, full-of-energy (operative)

⁷ *For I have had great joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been **refreshed** through you, brother.*

Refreshed > Strong’s > to give rest, give intermission from labor, by implication refresh

MacArthur > This comes from the Greek military term that describes an army at rest from a march.

Pao > They constitute a syllogism that is itself the touchstone of Paul’s argument: if Philemon refreshes the very hearts of the saints (v. 7); and, if Onesimus is Saint Paul’s very heart (v. 12); then, to refresh Paul’s very heart, Philemon must refresh Onesimus (v. 20).”

⁸ *Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper,* ⁹ *yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—*

Confidence > Strong's > *parresia* > freedom of speech, confidence

Constable > "The term *parresia* which literally means 'all speech' was used originally in the sphere of politics to signify the democratic right of a full citizen of a Greek city-state to speak out one's opinion freely. Later it was found as a characteristic of the relations between true friends in opposition to the feigned compliments of flatterers

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper > Do you see the beauty of this statement?!? It has the same final impact of saying just the opposite > "I am ordering you" without the edge.

Appeal > (Very familiar word) > Strong's > *parakaleo* > to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage (sometimes translated as "beg")

HELPS > from *pará*, "from close-beside" and *kaléō*, "to call

An old man > Barclay > The word which Paul uses of himself is *presbutēs*; and Hippocrates, the great Greek medical writer, says that a man is *presbutēs* from the age of forty-nine to the age of fifty-six. Between these years, he is what we might call senior; only after that does he become a *gerōn*, the Greek for an old man.

A prisoner of Christ Jesus > as above

¹⁰ *I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I fathered in my imprisonment,* ¹¹ *who previously was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.*

Appeal > as above

Onesimus > Barclay > Paul makes his request in verse 10, and it is for Onesimus. We notice how he delays using the name of Onesimus

Let me relay a story from Swindoll that gives us insight into why Paul wrote this sentence this way.

Barnes > Any other mode of bringing the case before the mind of Philemon might have repelled him. If he had simply said, "I beseech thee for Onesimus;" or, "I beseech thee for thy servant Onesimus," he would at once have reverted to his former conduct, and remembered all his ingratitude and disobedience.

J Vernon McGee > the word "Onesimus" is placed at the **end** of the sentence.

In my imprisonment > Utley > literally “in my bonds”

Useless > Weirsbe > The name Onesimus means “profitable,” so there is a play on words in Philemon 11. (The name Philemon means “affectionate” or “one who is kind.” If the slave was expected to live up to his name, then what about the master?)

¹² ***I have sent him back to you in person***, that is, sending my very heart, ¹³ whom I wanted to keep with me, ***so that in your behalf he might be at my service*** in my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴ but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion, but of your own free will.

I have sent him back to you in person > Barclay > Here again is a significant thing. Christianity is not trying to help people escape from their past and run away from it; it is aiming to enable them to face the past and rise above it.

Sent back > Strong’s > to send up. Usage > I send up (to a higher tribunal), send back.

HELPS > (from *ana* > as a preposition denotes upwards, up, as a prefix denotes up, again, back + *pempo* > to send)

Barclay > there is a double meaning in verse 12. ‘I am sending him back to you’, writes Paul. But the verb *anapempein* does not mean only *to send back*, it also means *to refer a case to*; and Paul is saying to Philemon: ‘I am referring this case of Onesimus to you, that you may give a verdict on it that will match the love you ought to have.’

So that in your behalf he might be at my service > (Very important statement >) Constable > The service that Paul probably had in mind for Onesimus was to proclaim the gospel, not to perform menial prison duties for Paul (In verse 1 Paul referred to him as a “fellow worker”. In verse 17 Paul will refer to him as a “partner”.)

Pao > In other words, Paul is not calling Philemon to be his personal associate; he is calling him to share in their common vocation as faithful servants of God.

¹⁵ For perhaps it was for this reason that ***he was separated*** from you ***for a while***, that you would have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Separated > Brilliant word! Not “he ran away” but, “he was separated”

He was separated > Utley > This is a passive voice verb > this phrase can be understood in two ways:

1. in the sense of God's predestined plan
2. that God used the inappropriate behavior of Onesimus as an opportunity for his salvation and for Philemon's service to Christ and friendship with Paul

Vincent > The A.V. misses the ingenious shading of Paul's expression. Not only does he avoid the word *ran away*, which might have irritated Philemon, but he also uses the passive voice, not the middle, *separated himself*, as an intimation that Onesimus' flight was divinely ordered for good.

For a while > Barnes > Greek, "for an hour"

¹⁷ **If** (1) *then you regard me as a partner, accept him as (you would) me.* ¹⁸ **But if** (2) *he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account;* ¹⁹ **I, Paul, have written this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).**

If (1) > Robertson > As I assume that you do, condition of the first class.

Regard > Strong's > to have, hold

Partner > Strong's > *koinonos* > a sharer. Usage > a sharer, partner, companion.

Accept him as you would me > Barclay > Christians must always welcome back those who have made a mistake. Too often, we regard with suspicion people who have taken the wrong turning and show that we are never prepared to trust them again.

If (2) > Utley > The implication of the grammar of verse 18 is that Onesimus did steal from Philemon ... that Onesimus did owe Philemon

Constable > Paul then hastened to remove a possible obstacle to the reconciliation that he had requested.

Owes you anything, charge that to my account > Barclay > Christianity never entitled anyone to default on debts.

I, Paul, have written this with my own hand > Vincent > The mention of his autograph here, rather than at the end of the letter, may indicate that he wrote the whole epistle with his own hand, contrary to his usual custom of employing an amanuensis.

Owe > Strong's > to owe besides

²⁰ **Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.**

Let me benefit from you > Barclay > In verses 19–20, we hear Paul speaking with a flash of humor. ‘Philemon,’ he says, ‘you owe your soul to me, for it was I who brought you to Christ. Won’t you let me make some profit out of you now?’ With an affectionate smile, Paul is saying: ‘Philemon, you got a lot out of me – let me get something out of you now!’

²¹ *Having confidence in your **obedience**, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.* ²² *At the same time also **prepare me a guest room**, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.*

Obedience > Strong’s > obedience

HELPS > (from *akoúō*, "to hear" and *hypó*, "beneath") – i.e. *obedience* – literally, "submission to what is heard"

In sales we would call this a hard “assumptive” close

Wuest > *Having come to a settled persuasion that you will grant my request, I am writing you, knowing that you will do even beyond the things I say.*

Prepare me a guest room > Utley > Paul was expecting to be released (cf. Phil. 1:25; 2:24). The Pastoral Letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) record this fourth missionary journey, while Acts ends with Paul still in prison after his third missionary journey.

²³ **Epaphras**, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

Epaphras > Utley > Epaphras was a believer from Asia Minor and the founder of the Churches in the Lycus River Valley (Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis). He brought word to Paul in prison about the heresy in Colossae and about Philemon's faithfulness.

Barnes > The same persons who are here mentioned as greeting Philemon, are mentioned in the close of the Epistle to the Colossians - furnishing a high degree of evidence that Philemon resided at Colosse. Epaphras was a member of the church there; the notes at **Colossians 4:12**.

Colossians 4:12 > ¹² *Epaphras, who is one of your own, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings, always striving earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.*

Constable > Epaphras was the evangelist of the Lycus Valley and a leading man in the church at Colosse. He may have been the leading pastor (Col. 1:7; cf. Phil. 2:25).

²⁴ as do **Mark**, **Aristarchus**, **Demas**, and **Luke**, my fellow workers.

Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke > Constable (comparing the end of this chapter to the Epistle to the Colossians) > The same persons were with Paul when he wrote his letter to the Colossians, namely, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Luke, and Demas (vv. 23-24; cf. Col. 4:10, 12, 14).

Mark > Utley > He was also known as John Mark. His home may have been the site of the Lord's Supper and Upper Room appearances (cf. Acts 12:12). He was Barnabas' cousin. He was the writer of the Gospel of Mark and a scribe for Peter (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13). He was the cause of a great fight between Barnabas and Paul (cf. Acts 12:25; 13:5; 15:36-39). Later, however, Paul forgave and affirmed him (cf. 2 Tim. 4:11).

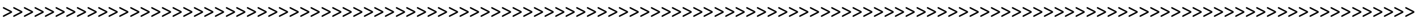
Aristarchus > Vincent > A Thessalonian. Alluded to Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4; Acts 27:2. He was Paul's companion for a part of the way on the journey to Rome.

Demas > Utley > Demas was one of Paul's confidants and co-workers. He was mentioned along with Epaphras, Luke, Aristarchus, and Mark in Col. 4:10-14. 2 Timothy 4:9 lists two of these same co-workers, Luke and Mark. Scripture states that "Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me."

Luke > Utley > He was Paul's faithful traveling friend, co-worker, and physician (cf. Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11). He was with Paul during many of his preaching stops in Acts. This is confirmed by the "we" statements in Acts (cf. Acts 16:11,16; 20:6,7,13; 21:1,5, 7, 10, 12, 15,17,25; 27:1,18,26,27).

²⁵ *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with **your** spirit.*

Your > Constable > The word translated *your* is plural in the Greek text and refers to the whole church in Philemon's house.



Pao > In light of the prevalent individualism in the West, household language is seldom evoked outside of one's "nuclear" family. In ethnic churches, however, such language often becomes meaningful in creating a bond among various members; moreover, it also provides a vehicle through which intergenerational conflicts are resolved so that a new sense of identity can grow when filial piety is transformed through the biblical lens that focuses on the lordship of Christ. Within such communities, an individual has multiple adopted parents and aunts/uncles who nurture them as they grow in that affirming community. Mutual respect, submission, and accountability testify to the transformative power of the cross.

Perhaps churches in the modern Western world can learn from these smaller ethnic Christian communities, who model in a better way the kind of interdependent household of God that Philemon describes.

We should acknowledge that size can affect the degree to which a church functions like a familial unit with accountability and other more intimate practices, but larger churches would do well to implement smaller communal units within the greater church to model such behaviors. One of the main hindrances to this intervenient household of faith is the Western ideal of individualism and self-sufficiency, both of which are challenged by this letter.

The connection between the love of God and the love of others was already noted by the earthly Jesus when he responded to the question about the most important commandment. After quoting from Deut 6:4–5, Jesus added Lev 19:18: “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31; cf. Matt 22:39–40; Luke 10:27).