

PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION

TEXT

to about brother “both in the flesh and in the Lord” (v. 16)

1–3: Epistolary Prescript

1. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our beloved and fellow-worker, **2.** and to our beloved¹ Apphia and to Archippus, our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house: **3.** Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Exegetical Annotations

Paul and Timothy together (v. 1a) write to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and “the church in your house” (vv. 1b–2). **1:** *Timothy*, see 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1. **2:** *your house*, reference to Philemon in the second-person singular is only absent from vv. 1, 3, and 9. So, the church probably meets in the house of Philemon (the first-named and most prominent addressee) not that of Archippus (the nearest possible antecedent for “your”).

Patristic Annotations

1: *a prisoner of Christ Jesus*, Paul’s self-description is one implicitly undertaken on Philemon’s account; citing it prepares the groundwork for the forthcoming requests about Onesimus (Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.1). *and Timothy*, citing a co-author widens the social circle involved in the appeal for Onesimus, thereby increasing its likelihood of acceptance (Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.1). *Philemon, our beloved and fellow-worker*, the descriptions of Philemon highlight the senders’ affection for him (*beloved*), as well as his already sharing similar objectives to the senders in their work for the gospel, with which the request about Onesimus ultimately has to do (*fellow-worker*; Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.1). **2:** *Apphia* was probably Philemon’s wife (Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.2). *Archippus* is mentioned also in Col 4:17 (Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.2). *fellow-soldier* describes Archippus as “also one of the Clergy” (Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.2). *the church in your house* includes as addressees others who were slaves like Onesimus. Paul does not risk offending Philemon by naming specific slaves as co-recipients with him but

¹ **Textual Annotations**

NA: “sister.”

addresses Philemon in connection with the church, where the distinction between masters and slaves does not obtain (Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.2). *Apphia and ... Archippus... and ... the church in your house* Involving co-recipients widens the social circle involved in the correspondence. This widening both shows Paul's humility and makes it more likely that Philemon will grant Paul's request (Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.2). **3:** *Grace* reminds Philemon of the forgiveness he has received for his own sins (Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.3). *peace* between people should naturally accompany the experience of grace (cf. Matt. 18:21–35; see Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.3). *Grace and peace*, sinning against God is more serious than sinning against humans, inasmuch as God is greater than humans. Being forgiven by God, therefore, obliges those forgiven to readily extend forgiveness to other humans (cf. Matt 6:13; Luke 18:13; Eph 6:9; see Chrys., *hom. in Phlm.* 1.3).

4–7: Thanksgiving

4. I thank my God, always making mention of you in my prayers, **5.** as I hear about your love and the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints **6.** so that the fellowship of your faith may become active in the knowledge of every good thing that is in us for Christ Jesus.² **7.** For we have³ much grace⁴ and encouragement in your love, because the affections of the saints are refreshed through you, brother.

Exegetical Annotations

Despite the letter's multiple senders (v. 1a) and addressees (v. 1b–2), the text is mostly framed as Paul's (first-person singular) address to Philemon (second-person singular). In vv. 4–6, Paul ("I") describes how and why he thanks God for Philemon ("you"). In v. 7, Paul and Timothy ("we") note the "grace and encouragement" they have received from Philemon's behavior. **5:** *toward ... for*, the Greek prepositions have overlapping meanings. But their alternation here suggests different nuances. Philemon's allegiance to Jesus ("faith ... toward") has a history of proving beneficial to the saints ("faith ... for"). Paul frames Philemon's past behavior as consistent with agreement to the upcoming request about Onesimus (cf. vv. 7, 14–17, 21). **6:** *us* is the only first-person plural in the letter body (cf. vv. 1–3, 25). Paul and Timothy have in mind various good things that they would see done for Jesus's sake. Among these are Philemon's proper treatment of Onesimus. So, the faith that Philemon shares should move him to act according to this same mindset.

² NA: omits "Jesus."

³ NA: "I have had."

⁴ NA: "joy."

Patristic Annotations

8–22: Appeal to Philemon for Onesimus

8. So then, although I have in Christ the frankness to command the thing that is appropriate for you, **9.** because of love, I rather encourage—being such as I, Paul, am, an elder and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.⁵ **10.** I am encouraging you about my child, whom I have begotten in my⁶ times of imprisonment, Onesimus, **11.** who was once useless to you, but now he is useful to you and⁷ to me, whom I have sent again⁸ to you, **12.** and welcome⁹ him—that is, my own affections— **13.** whom I was wanting to have with me so that he might serve me¹⁰ on your behalf in my times of imprisonment for the good news. **14.** But without your awareness, I wanted to do nothing so that this good thing of yours might not be by necessity but by choice. **15.** For perhaps because of this he was separated from you for an hour so that you might have him forever, **16.** no longer as a slave but—more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me and by how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. **17.** Therefore, if you have fellowship with me, welcome him as you would me.

18. Now, if he has done you any injustice or owes anything, charge this to me.

19. I, Paul, have written with my hand, “I will pay you back,” so that I might not say to you that you are still indebted to me even for yourself. **20.** Yes, brother, I would have joy from you in the Lord. Refresh my affections in the Lord.¹¹

21. Since I am persuaded about your obedience, I have written to you, because I know that you will do even more than what¹² I say. **22.** As soon as this, also prepare for me a guest room, for I hope that, through your prayers, I will be given to you.

Exegetical Annotations

Paul’s appeal to Philemon for kindness toward Onesimus has three main sections. In vv. 8–17, Paul structures the appeal around his relationships (to Jesus in vv. 8–9, to Onesimus in vv. 10, 12–14, 17) and Philemon’s (to Onesimus in vv. 11, 15–16). In vv. 18–20, Paul offers to personally make up for any harm Onesimus has caused Philemon. By doing so, Paul removes a possible barrier to Philemon’s welcome of Onesimus. In vv. 21–22, Paul expresses his confidence that Philemon will treat Onesimus as requested (v. 21) and expresses his hope to visit Philemon soon (v. 22). This request (v. 22), the alignment of its fulfillment with Philemon’s prior behavior (v. 20; cf. v. 7), and Paul’s offer to make up for any harm Onesimus has done (vv. 18–19) each press

⁵ NA: “Christ Jesus.”

⁶ NA: omits “my.”

⁷ NA: prefers “and also,” although with some uncertainty.

⁸ NA: places “whom I have sent again” in v. 12.

⁹ NA: omits “and welcome” and reads “you (welcome)” with “sent” (thus, not implicitly but explicitly “sent ... to you”).

¹⁰ NA: “me he might serve.”

¹¹ NA: “in Christ.”

¹² NA: “the things that” instead of “the thing that,” or “what.”

Philemon to behave with Onesimus as Paul describes. **13:** *have*, here reflects the technical sense of the kind of possession that would have resulted from procurement (e.g., of Onesimus a slave; cf. 1 Cor 7:30). Onesimus may have come to Paul voluntarily; in any case, there is no indication that Paul purchased Onesimus. But for Paul “to have” Onesimus in this sense makes Paul’s rights toward Onesimus at least equal to Philemon’s (cf. v. 11). **15:** *was separated*, Paul does not describe how Onesimus “was separated” from Philemon, nor does this separation necessarily imply that Onesimus had run away. *have*, this Greek term (unlike “have” in v. 13) often suggests some kind of separation (e.g., see Phil 4:18; 1 Thess 4:3; 5:22; 1 Tim 4:3). Neither Philemon’s separation from Onesimus (v. 15a) nor the kind of relationship they have had to this point is meant to continue (v. 15b–16).

Patristic Annotations

23–24: Greetings

23. Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, **24.** and Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my coworkers, greet you.¹³

Exegetical Annotations

In vv. 23–24, Paul conveys greetings to Philemon from five individuals specifically related to Paul. These relationships and greetings suggest that these individuals would support Paul’s assessment of how Philemon should behave toward Onesimus. These individuals’ involvement, in addition to those cited in vv. 1b–2, presses Philemon to behave as Paul describes.

Patristic Annotations

25: Benediction

25. May the grace of our¹⁴ Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.¹⁵

Exegetical Annotations

In v. 25, Paul and Timothy (“our”) conclude the letter with a benediction. **25:** *your* refers both to Philemon and the other addressees in vv. 1b–2. *spirit* here has the sense of “attitude.” The benediction expresses the authors’ wish for Jesus’s grace to determine how the addressees feel and behave, especially—though implicitly—toward Onesimus.

¹³ NA: “Epaphras ... greets you, as also do ...”

¹⁴ NA: omits “our” (thus, “the Lord”).

¹⁵ NA: omits “Amen.”

Patristic Annotations

GLOSSARY

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- Pelagius's exposition of Philemon¹⁷
- Ambrose, Letters
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- [Ambrosiaster, Philemon](#)
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- Clean up the Swete, Souter notes' formatting.

¹⁶ H. B. Swete, ed. *Theodori episcopi Mopsuesteni: In epistolas b. Pauli commentarii*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1880, 1882. pp. 2:269ff

¹⁷ A. Souter, ed. *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul. Texts and Studies 9.1–3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922–1931.