

Philemon

The Epistle of Paul to **PHILEMON**¹

[Greeting]

1 Paul, a prisoner for Jesus Christ,² and brother Timothy, to the beloved Philemon, our fellow worker, 2 and to the beloved Apphia and our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the congregation at your (sg)³ house: 3 Grace to you (pl) and peace from God our Father and Sovereign Jesus Christ.

[Paul commends Philemon]

4 I always thank my God as I make mention of you (sg) in my prayers, 5 hearing of your love and faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus, and for all the saints, 6 so that the sharing of your (sg) faith may become powerful through a full understanding of every good thing that is among you (pl) who are in Christ Jesus;⁴ 7 yes, we have much thanksgiving and encouragement because of your (sg) love, in that the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

[Paul intercedes for Onesimus]

8 Now then, though I have all boldness in Christ to order you (sg) to do what is right,⁵ 9 I—being none other than Paul the old man and now also a prisoner for Jesus Christ—would rather appeal to you, for love’s sake. 10 I appeal to you on behalf of the son that I begot while in my chains, Onesimus, whom I am sending back 11—formerly he was unprofitable to you, but now he is profitable, both to you and to me.

12 So receive him, who is my very heart 13—I would have liked to keep him with me, so that he might minister to me in your place, while I’m in chains for the Gospel, 14 but I didn’t want to do anything without your consent, so that your contribution might be voluntary, not as an imposition. 15 Perhaps this is why he was removed⁶ for a while, so that you would have him forever 16—no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, very much to me but even more to you, both in flesh and in the Lord.⁷

[Paul asks for obedience]

17 So if you consider me a partner, receive him as if it were me.⁸ 18 If he wronged you or owes anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing with my own hand, “I will repay” (rather than say to you that you actually owe me your very self!).⁹ 20 Yes brother, let me have *this* benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

21 Being confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you (sg) will do even more than I say. 22 But meanwhile, do prepare a guest room for me, because I hope that through your (pl) prayers I will be graciously bestowed on you (pl).¹⁰

¹ Both the translation and the notes are the responsibility of Wilbur N. Pickering, ThM PhD, ©, being based on his edition of the Greek New Testament, according to the only significant line of transmission, both ancient and independent, that has a demonstrable archetypal form in all 27 books. The Greek Text of which this is a translation, and articles explaining the preference, may be downloaded free from www.walkinhiscommandments.com.

² Since Paul elsewhere calls himself a slave of Jesus, he would also be a prisoner of Jesus, but in this context I understand him to be saying that he is in prison because of Jesus.

³ Since English is ambiguous as to whether the second person personal pronoun is singular or plural, and since Paul mixes both in this letter, it becomes necessary to let the reader know which is which.

⁴ Verse 6 probably reads quite differently in your version of the Bible. Were you aware that the “your” refers to Philemon while the “you” refers to the congregation? [The MSS evidence is about evenly divided between ‘you’ and ‘us’, but I follow the best line of transmission, as in AV and NKJV.] The verse usually ends with “you/us in Christ Jesus”, but the preposition is properly “into”, which doesn’t make good English. The reference is to those who have believed into Jesus (as He Himself invariably said)—they were outside but have moved inside. So Paul is referring to a group of regenerated people and to the aggregate of ‘good things’ to be found among them; which I assume would certainly include the gifts of the Spirit, as well as His fruit. As Philemon’s understanding of these resources increases, the sharing of his faith will become more powerful, and for this Paul prays.

⁵ Paul starts out by asserting his authority, but softens it with an emotional appeal, appealing to Philemon’s emotions in various ways.

⁶ “Removed” is passive; Paul implies that God was behind the flight of Onesimus.

⁷ What does “both in flesh and in the Lord” mean? Onesimus is now a brother in the Lord, but was he also Philemon’s physical brother? But if a brother, how did he become his slave? I don’t know. If I had to guess I would imagine that Philemon’s father begot Onesimus of a slave woman. Whatever the messy consequences of people’s lives without Christ, this letter illustrates nicely how the Gospel can straighten things out.

⁸ Verses 17-19 are often used as an illustration of substitutionary atonement, wherein Philemon would represent the Father, Paul the Son, and Onesimus the sinner—what Onesimus owes is charged to Paul, so Onesimus can go free. (Of course the second half of verse 19 doesn’t fit; the Father doesn’t owe His life to the Son.)

⁹ Dear me, Paul builds such a strong case that there’s really no way that Philemon can refuse!

¹⁰ Might verse 22 be a veiled threat, that Paul could show up to check up on Philemon?

Philemon

[Farewell]

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner for Christ Jesus, greets you (sg), 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.¹

25 The grace of our Lord Jesus² be with your (pl) spirit.³ Amen.

¹ Evidently Epaphras was also in prison, but not the others. If Mark was there as a result of the request in 2 timothy 4:11, then this letter was written some time later.

² I follow the best line of transmission (albeit representing only some 20% of the Greek manuscripts here) in not adding 'Christ'. Being a very personal letter, Paul is less formal.

³ Since 'spirit' is singular, is it that of the congregation?—or does Paul mean the spirit of each one of the individuals? Even though regenerated we still need grace, and a congregation certainly needs it.