

Philemon

Πρὸς Φιλήμονι

A verse-by-verse study guide, as taught by
Pastor Robert L. Bolender at Austin Bible Church,
from August to November, 2021

Introduction to the Book

1. Written by Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy, the Brother (Phm. 1a).
Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς.
2. Addressed to the Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and to the church in your house (Phm. 1b,2).
Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν καὶ Ἀπφία τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ.
3. Written during an imprisonment (Phm. 1), and clearly related to Colossians.
 - a. Both Colossians and Philemon are written by Paul and Timothy (Col. 1:1; Philem. 1). Less of a link than the following three items. Timothy is a coauthor for six Pauline epistles and the recipient of two more.
 - b. Onesimus the slave is mentioned in both books (Col. 4:9; Philem. 10) and only these two books in the NT. He is a courier for the Colossian epistle and the primary subject matter for the epistle to Philemon.
 - c. Greetings are sent in both books from Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas & Luke (Col. 4:10-14; Philem. 23-24). Like Onesimus, the only references to Epaphras in the NT are in Colossians and Philemon.
 - d. Archippus' ministry is mentioned in both books (Col. 4:17; Philem. 2). Like Onesimus and Epaphras, the only references to Archippus in the NT are in Colossians and Philemon.
4. Paul's Acts 28 Roman imprisonment is the traditional origin, but one of the many implied Acts 19 Ephesian imprisonments is more likely (1st Cor. 15:30-32; 2nd Cor. 1:8-11; 6:4,5,9; 11:23).
5. The main subject of Philemon is the return of his runaway slave Onesimus. Lexham Bible Dictionary has a good article on [Slavery](#). Even more helpful is a discussion by Richard Melick detailing [slavery in the first century](#).
6. Philemon was a common Greek name for centuries. A good [entry](#) to read is in William Smith's Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology.
7. Outline:
 - a. Salutation (Phm. 1-3).
 - b. Thanksgiving and prayer (Phm. 4-7).
 - c. Appeal for Onesimus (Phm. 8-20).
 - d. Conclusion (Phm. 21-25).

Salutation

1. The Epistle to Philemon is the only book of the New Testament written by Paul a Prisoner (Phm. 1a). Παῦλος Paulos #3972^{158x} “small.”
 - a. Most of Paul’s epistle salutations (9/13) are from Paul an Apostle (Gal. 1:1; 1st Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; 2nd Cor. 1:1; Rom. 1:1; 1st Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; 2nd Tim. 1:1).
 - b. The Thessalonian salutations are simply from Paul, Silvanus and Timothy (1st Th. 1:1; 2nd Th. 1:1).
 - c. The Philippian salutation is from Paul & Timothy, Slaves of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:1). Romans and Titus combine Slave and Apostle.
 - d. Paul uses the noun δέσμιος desmios #1198^{16x} in non-salutation verses (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2nd Tim. 1:8; Phm. 9). Other NT authors also use the term (Mt. 27:15,16; Mk. 15:6; Acts 16:25,27; 23:18; 25:14,27; 28:17; Heb. 10:34; 13:3).
2. Timothy the Brother (Phm. 1b cf. Col. 1:1; 2nd Cor. 1:1). Τιμόθεος Timotheos #5095^{24x} “honoring God.”
 - a. Timothy coauthored six of Paul’s epistles, in three of which he is called “the brother.” He is also called a brother in a non-salutation (1st Th. 3:2).
 - b. The plural “brethren” is a common NT term, but specific brothers referenced by Paul include Quartus (Rom. 16:23), Sosthenes (1st Cor. 1:1), Apollos (1st Cor. 16:12), Titus (2nd Cor. 2:13), various companions of Titus’ (2nd Cor. 8:18,22; 12:18), Tychicus (Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25). Onesimus (Col. 4:9; Phm. 16), and Philemon (Phm. 7,20).
3. Philemon is the Beloved One and our fellow worker (Phm. 1c). Φιλήμων Philēmōn #5371^{1x} “affectionate.”
 - a. Beloved ἀγαπητός agapētos #27^{61x}. A term God the Father applies to Jesus Christ (Mt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5), therefore a significant expression for Members of the Church (Acts 15:25; 1st Tim. 6:2).
 - b. In addition to Philemon, specific beloved ones referenced by Paul include Epaphroditus (Rom. 16:5), Ampliatius (Rom. 16:8), Stachys (Rom. 16:9), Persis (Rom. 16:12), Timothy (1st Cor. 4:17; 2nd Tim. 1:2), Epaphras (Col. 1:7), Tychicus (Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21), Onesimus (Col. 4:9; Phm. 16), & Luke (Col. 4:14).
 - c. Fellow worker συνεργός sunergos #4904^{13x}. In addition to Philemon, specific fellow workers referenced by Paul include Prisca & Aquila (Rom. 16:3), Urbanus (Rom. 16:9), Timothy (Rom. 16:21; 1st Th. 3:2), Titus (2nd Cor. 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Euodia, Syntyche & Clement (Phil. 4:2,3), John-Mark & Jesus called Justus (Col. 4:11), Mark, Aristarchus, Demas & Luke (Phm. 24).
 - d. Two additional συνεργός sunergos usages that should not be missed (1st Cor. 3:9; 3rd Jn. 8).
4. Apphia is addressed as the Sister (Phm. 2a). Ἀπφία Apphia #682^{1x} “fruitful.”
 - a. The plural “brethren” is a common NT term, comprising both brothers and sisters, but only Apphia and Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) are specifically referenced as sisters by Paul.
 - b. A believing wife is called a sister-wife (1st Cor. 9:5).
 - c. Bios life and zoe life are significantly bridged through the relational terms Father, brother, mother, sister (1st Tim. 5:1,2).
 - d. The masculine name Apphus is found in First Maccabees (1 Macc. 2:5). Jonathan called Apphus was the youngest of Mattathias’ five sons.
 - e. Appius Claudius Caecus was censor of Rome in 312BC. He is the namesake for the Appian Way as well as the Aqua Appia (the first Roman aqueduct).
5. Archippus is called a fellow soldier (Phm. 2b; Col. 4:17). Ἀρχιππος Archippos #751^{2x} “horse master.”
 - a. Fellow soldier συστρατιώτης sustratiōtēs #4961^{2x}. Only Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25) and Archippus are given this appellation by the Apostle Paul.
 - b. The scant information in Colossians and Philemon implies that the local church in Colossae was planted and ministered by Epaphras (Col. 1:7,8; 4:12,13; Phm. 23) and that ministry was carried on by Archippus (Col. 4:17).
6. After three named recipients, the epistle is also addressed to the church in Philemon’s house (Phm. 2c).
 - a. Other house churches in the NT include Prisca & Aquila (Rom. 16:5; 1st Cor. 16:19), and Nympha (Col. 4:15).
 - b. The overwhelming language of this epistle is in the second person singular personally addressing Philemon alone, but the two other named recipients and the entire congregation are included in the salutation for some good reason.
7. Grace and Peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Phm. 3). Paul’s standard greeting is a fundamental reality for the Body of Christ.
 - a. Typical oral or written greetings in the first century would be the Greek χαίρειν chairein (Jas. 1:1) or the Aramaic ܫܠܡܐ shēlām (Hebrew שָׁלוֹם shālōm) (Lk. 10:6; 24:36).
 - b. The Apostle Paul coined a salutation that brought Jew and Gentile together (as it were) with the combined Grace to you and peace. Even Peter and John employed forms of it (1st Pet. 1:2; 2nd Pet. 1:2; 2nd Jn. 3; Rev. 1:4).

- c. Grace and peace are common opening benedictions (Rom. 1:7; 1st Cor. 1:3; 2nd Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1st Thess. 1:1; 2nd Thess. 1:2; 1st Tim. 1:2; 2nd Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Phm. 3; 1st Pet. 1:2; 2nd Pet. 1:2; 2nd Jn. 3; Rev. 1:4), while grace alone is the most common closing benediction (Rom. 16:20; 1st Cor. 16:23; 2nd Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1st Thess. 5:8; 2nd Thess. 3:18; Rev. 22:21).
- d. Grace χάρις charis ^{#5485}_{154x}.
- 1) The grace of God is what saves us (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:5,8), sustains us (Rom. 5:2; 1st Cor. 15:10; 2nd Cor. 9:8; 12:9), and ultimately brings us into His glory (Eph. 2:7; 1st Pet. 1:13; 5:10).
 - 2) Grace rejects works or merit (Rom. 4:4,16; 11:6).
 - 3) Grace is the operating system for the Body of Christ, signifying a great freedom from Law (Rom. 6:14,15; Gal. 2:21; 5:4).
- e. Peace εἰρήνη eirēnē ^{#1515}_{91x}.
- 1) The finished work of Christ gives us peace with God (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20) and with one another (Rom. 14:19; Eph. 2:14-17; Col. 3:15).
 - 2) God's peace powerfully sustains us in every circumstance and detail of life (Jn. 16:33; Phil. 4:7; 2nd Thess. 3:16).
 - 3) God's peace is contrary to this fallen world's empty counterfeit form (Jn. 14:27).

Thanksgiving and Prayer

1. Thanksgiving is another common element near the beginning of every Pauline epistle (Rom. 1:8; 1st Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:15,16; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1st Thess. 1:2; 2nd Thess. 1:3; 2:13).
 - a. Joyful, prayerful thanksgiving is the absolute will of God for every believer in Christ (1st Thess. 5:16-18).
 - b. The “giving” of thanks is our grace response to the grace Giver (Col. 3:15,17; Eph. 5:20).
 - c. Thanksgiving is to accompany petitions and intercessions (Phil. 4:6; Col. 2:7; 4:2; 1st Tim. 2:1).
 - d. The NT usages of εὐχαριστεῶ eucharisteō #2168_{38x} & εὐχαριστία eucharistia #2169_{15x} are significantly not taken from the LXX translations of OT thankfulness (יָדָהּ yādāh #3034 & תִּדְבֹּר towdāh #8426 cf. Ps. 100), illustrated well in Heb. 13:5.
2. Making mention creates a memorial both for God and for the prayer warrior. μνεία mneia #3417_{7x}: *remembrance, memory, mention* (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3; 1st Thess. 1:2; 3:6; 2nd Tim. 1:3; Phm. 4).
3. At the time of writing Paul was continuing to hear of Philemon’s love and faith (Phm. 5 cf. Col. 1:4; Eph. 1:15).
 - a. Present active participle ἀκούω akouō #191 rather than the aorist participles in Col. 1:4 & Eph. 1:15.
 - b. Love (ἀγάπη agapē #20) first then faith (πίστις pīstis #102) presently having.
 - c. Toward the Lord Jesus πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν pros ton kurion Iēsoun.
 - d. Toward all the saints εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους eis pantas tous hagiou.
 - e. The “reversed” order of love and faith as well as the “stylistic variation” of prepositions receives tremendous commentary; all of which becomes rather unnecessary in light of how love/faith (faith/love) are symbiotically effectual (Gal. 5:6; 1st Cor. 13:7).
4. Symbiotic love/faith (faith/love) is a spiritual–life possession that can be fellowship–shared with all saints (Phm. 6).
 - a. Faith is not only possessed, but fellowship shared (κοινωνία koinōnia #2842) among others with like faith (2nd Pet. 1:1) or presently without faith (Rom. 14:2; 15:1). The spiritual gift of faith is huge in such applications (1st Cor. 12:4-11).
 - b. Paul’s prayer was for Philemon’s faith fellowship to become effectual. ἐνεργής energeis #1756_{3x}: *effective, active* (1st Cor. 16:9; Phm. 6; Heb. 4:12).
 - c. Paul specifically states the criterion for effective fellowship: epignōsis of every good thing in y’all for Christ’s sake.
 - 1) Christ in you the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).
 - 2) The wealth of Christ, hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:2,3).
 - 3) Not the Old Sin Nature! (Rom. 7:18).
 - d. Effectual faith fellowship bears fruit near and far, in the present, in the future and forever (Phm. 7a; Heb. 11:4).
5. Among Philemon’s many spiritual achievements in Colossae was the ministry and effects of emotional refreshment (Phm. 7b).
 - a. σπλάγχνον splanchnon #4698_{11x}: *intestines* (Acts 1:18), *heart* (Col. 3:12; Phm. 7,12,20; 1st Jn. 3:17), *affection* (2nd Cor. 6:12; 7:15; Php. 1:8; 2:1).
 - b. ἀναπαύω anapauiō #373_{12x}: *rest, refresh*. Also ἀνάπαυσις anapausis #372_{5x}: *rest* (Mt. 11:28,29; 12:43; 26:45; 1st Cor. 16:18; 2nd Cor. 7:13; Phm. 7,20).
 - c. All of this splanchnon anapausis gave the Apostle Paul much joy and comfort (Phm. 7 cf. 2nd Cor. 7:4,13).
 - 1) χαρά chara #5479_{59x}: *joy*.
 - 2) παράκλησις paraklēsis #3874_{29x}: *comfort, exhortation, encouragement*.

Appeal for Onesimus

1. The joy and comfort Paul experienced motivated an appeal rather than an order for propriety (Phm. 8,9).
 - a. Confidence in Christ. παρρησία *parresia* ^{#3954}_{31x}: *confidence* (9x Jn., 5x Acts, 4x Heb., 4x 1st Jn.).
 - b. Order. ἐπιτάσσω *epitassō* ^{#2004}_{10x}: *command, order* (Huge τάσσω *tassō* family).
 - c. Proper. ἀνήκω *anēkō* ^{#433}_{3x}: *fitting, proper* (14x Bible Sense: to be proper).
2. Paul's appeal is for ἀγάπη *agapē* ^{#26}_{116x} love sake (Phm. 9; Gal. 5:6,13; 1st Cor. 8:1; 13:1-8; 16:14; Col. 3:14; Eph. 5:2; 2nd Cor. 5:14; Rom. 14:15).
3. Paul's appeal is for "my child Onesimus" (Phm. 10). Ὀνήσιμος *Onesimus* ^{#3682}_{4x} "profitable/useful." fr. ὀνίνημι *oninēmi* ^{#3685}_{1x}: *benefit, enjoy* (Phm. 20). [Lightfoot](#) references two later Onesimuses (Onesimi?).
 - a. "My child" indicates Paul's evangelistic role in leading Onesimus to salvation (cf. 1st Cor. 4:14-15; 1st Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; see also Phm. 19).
 - b. "Begotten in my imprisonment" demonstrates the ministry of the Word of God that takes place regardless of every circumstance and detail of life (Phil. 1:12-14 cf. Acts 16:19-40; 2nd Tim. 2:9; 4:17).
4. Paul calls Onesimus the formerly useless one, now doubly useful (Phm. 11).
 - a. Useless ἄχρηστος *achrēstos* ^{#890}_{1x}: *useless* (Phm. 11 + LXX Hos. 8:8). Pertaining to not serving any beneficial purpose. In Gr-Rom. society generally pertaining to lack of responsibility within the larger social structure. [BDAG](#) links to a few interesting secular usages.
 - b. Useful εὐχρηστος *euchrēstos* ^{#2173}_{3x}: *useful* (2nd Tim. 2:21; 4:11; Phm. 11). Pertaining to being helpful or beneficial, useful, serviceable (a common term in Gr-Rom. lit. in description of service that has special social value).
 - c. The useless/useful contrast has both a temporal (then/now) and personal (to you/to you and me) context. Note: personal usefulness is not the carnal basis for appreciation. The spiritual appreciation comes from how such usefulness magnifies the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - d. The contrast between unsaved and saved is a then versus now transformation of being (Gal. 4:8,9; 1st Cor. 6:11; Eph. 2:1-10,11-13; 4:17-24; 5:8).
5. Onesimus was so tender to Paul, sending him back to Philemon was not what he wished he could do (Phm. 12,13). Faithfulness to do the will of God will test us when our personal desires are at variance with the race that is set before us (Mt. 26:39,42; Heb. 12:1).
6. Volitional participation must include fully-informed consent or else it becomes tantamount to compulsion (Phm. 14; 2nd Cor. 9:5,7; 1st Pet. 5:2). The issue of consent impacted the church Fathers as well (see IPol. 4:1; 5:2).
7. Consider God's reasons and purposes for the circumstances and details of life He permits you to encounter (Phm. 15-16).
 - a. Perhaps (τάχα *tacha* ^{#5029}_{2x}) means we can speculate until the cows come home but until God reveals His purposes we abide in faith, trusting God's omnibenevolence and omnisapience (Job 38:2; 40:1,2; Isa. 40:13,14; 2nd Cor. 4:18; 5:7).
 - b. The passive voice ("was separated") demonstrates that God Himself is also an active agent in what He directs and permits alongside our volitional choices (Job 2:3).
8. Partner acceptance (Phm. 17) and vicarious penal substitution (Phm. 18-19) are fundamental doctrines pertaining to the plan of God for humanity.
 - a. Partner acceptance is grounded in God the Father's and God the Son's unity partnership (Prov. 8:30,31; Ps. 2:7; 8:4-6; 89:5-10; Isa. 42:1; Zech. 13:7; Mt. 3:17; Jn. 10:30; 17:21).
 - b. Every wrong and every debt owed by the first Adam is charged to the account of the last Adam (Isa. 53:1-12; Jn. 1:29; 2nd Cor. 5:21; 1st Pet. 3:18; 1st Jn. 2:1,2).
9. The appeal for Onesimus is followed by an [optative](#) and imperative for Paul: benefit and refreshment (Phm. 20).

Conclusion

1. The aorist-active writing of this epistle was done per the perfect-active-participles of peithō & oida (Phm. 21).
 - a. πείθω peithō ^{#3982}_{52x}: *persuade, convince, confidence, trust, obey*. [Translation panel πείθω](#). Careful study of peithō in its own right as well as in its frequent connection to pisteuō provides a great value to the Church Age believer. Review the ABC Galatians [notebook](#) where such a study was done.
 - b. οἶδα oida ^{#1492}_{319x}: *to know*. The NT uses a rich variety of expressions for the things we know, frequently in ways this world would reject. Very often our evangelism and apologetic endeavors are philosophical engagements in the realm of epistemology. Greek Words panel [know](#).
2. Philemon's obedience will be above and beyond anything Paul said (Phm. 21).
 - a. Since Paul appealed rather than commanded (Phm. 8,9), Philemon's expected obedience is likely an obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5) to the truth (1st Pet. 1:22).
 - b. Useful to study obedience vocabulary and note the distinction between obedience and subjection. Logos demo.
3. Paul commanded a place of lodging be prepared based upon a hope (Phm. 22).
 - a. "At the same time also" ἅμα δὲ καὶ hama de kai. Adv. ἅμα hama ^{#260}_{10x} (Acts 24:26; 27:40; Col. 4:3; 1st Th. 4:17; 5:10; 1st Tim. 5:13).
 - b. "Prepare me a lodging" ετοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν hetoimaze moi xenian.
 - 1) Pres.act.imper. ετοίμαζέω hetoimazō ^{#2090}_{40x}: (Mt. 20:23; 22:4; 25:34,41; 26:17,19; Lk. 1:76; 2:31; 12:20; 17:8; 22:8,9,12,13; 23:56; 24:1; Jn. 14:3; 1st Cor. 2:9; 2nd Tim. 2:21; Heb. 11:16).
 - 2) Acc.sing.fem. ξενία xenia ^{#3578}_{2x}: *hospitality, entertainment, lodging place, guest room* (Acts 28:23; Phm. 22). Remember φιλοξενία philoxenia ^{#5381}_{2x}: *hospitality* (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2). Ukrainian Ксенія.
 - c. "For I hope" pres.act.ind. ἐλπίζω γὰρ elpizō gar ^{#1679}_{31x}: *hope* (Rom. 5:2,4,5; 8:24,25; 12:12; 15:13; 1st Cor. 13:7,13; 15:19; Col. 1:5,23,27; 1st Thess. 4:13; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 3:6; 6:11,18; 7:19; 10:23; 11:1; 1st Pet. 1:3,13).
 - d. "Through your prayers" διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν dia tōn proseuchōn humōn. Notice how the multiplied prayers are instrumental conduits for God's action (2nd Cor. 1:11; Phil. 1:19; Jas. 5:16).
 - e. "I will be given to you" χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν fut.pass.ind. χαρίζομαι charizomai ^{#5483}_{23x}: *forgive* (Lk. 7:42,43; 2nd Cor. 2:7,10_{x3}; 12:13; Eph. 4:32_{x2}; Col. 2:13; 3:13_{x2}), *freely give* (Rom. 8:32; 1st Cor. 2:12; Gal. 3:18; Php. 1:29; 2:9).
4. The extended greetings are notably parallel to those given in Colossians (Phm. 23,24 cp. Col. 4:10-14). Five out of the six names mentioned in Colossians are repeated here.
5. Grace be with your spirit (Phm. 25 cf. Gal. 6:18; Php. 4:23 & also 2nd Tim. 4:22).