
Επιστολή του Παύλου προς Φιλημονα † PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION

Paul's *Letter to Philemon* is actually addressed, in part, to many people, including those who met in Philemon's house for their church (1:1). However, one of the main theme's of the letter concerns Onesimus, a runaway slave belonging to Philemon, who had come to Paul for help and then converted to Christianity; Paul sends him back carrying this letter with him.

Philemon was a wealthy and leading Christian in Colossae (possibly even a bishop). He is regarded as a Saint by some churches, along with Apphia (v. 1), generally though to have been his wife.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

Tradition has long held that the *Letter to Philemon* was written by Paul (and this is still widely accepted), most likely composed during his imprisonment in Rome (61–63 CE, see 1:9) and at about the same time as his *Letter to the Colossians*.

Προς Φιλημονα Ι

¹ Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν ² καὶ Ἀπφία τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ· ³ χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ Θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

⁴ Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ Θεῷ μου πάντοτε μνησίαν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, ⁵ ἀκούων σου τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους, ⁶ ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργῆς γένηται ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν· ⁷ χαρὰν γὰρ πολλὴν ἔσχον καὶ παράκλησιν ἐπὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου, ὅτι τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἁγίων ἀναπέπαιται διὰ σοῦ, ἀδελφέ.

⁸ Διό, πολλὴν ἐν Χριστῷ παρρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν σοι τὸ ἀνῆκον, ⁹ διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μᾶλλον παρακαλῶ, τοιοῦτος

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

⁴ I always thank my God, making remembrance of you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of the love and the faith that you have for the Lord Jesus and for all the saints. ⁶ I pray that your fellowship in faith may come to expression in the full knowledge of all the good that we can do for Christ. ⁷ For, I have, indeed, received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

⁸ So, although in Christ I have confidence to tell you your duty, ⁹ I would rather appeal to your love – I, Paul, do this as an old

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¹ In place of 'fellow worker', the NRSV & NETB have 'friend'; the Greek text has no noun after 'dear'.

² In place of 'our sister', some MSS have 'our beloved' and others have 'our beloved sister'.

³ The NJB lacks 'to you'.

⁴ The pronouns, 'you', in vv. 4–21 are all singular.

⁵ The NJB has 'God's holy people' in place of 'the saints' (as also in v. 7).

⁶ In place of 'we', some MSS have 'you' (plural).

⁷ The NJB & NRSV omit the opening 'For'.

⁸ The NJB has 'no hesitations' in place of 'confidence'.

⁹ Another, conjectural reading for 'old man' is 'ambassador' (emending *πρεσβύτης* to *πρεσβευτής*).

ὡν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης, νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ – ¹⁰ παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς Ὀνήσιμον, ¹¹ τὸν ποτέ σοι ἄχρηστον νυνὶ δὲ [καί] σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ εὐχρηστον, ¹² ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι, αὐτόν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα. ¹³ ὃν ἐγὼ ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν κατέχειν, ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῇ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ¹⁴ χωρὶς δὲ τῆς σῆς γνώμης οὐδὲν ἠθέλησα ποιῆσαι, ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ἢ ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἐκούσιον. ¹⁵ τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὦραν ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχης, ¹⁶ οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν, μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσω δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ.

¹⁷ Εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτόν ὡς ἐμέ. ¹⁸ εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα. ¹⁹ ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω· ἵνα μὴ λέγω

man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became during my imprisonment. ¹¹ He was of no use to you before but now he is useful both to you and to me. ¹² I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. ¹³ I wanted to keep him with me; he could have taken your place, to help me while I am in the chains of the gospel, ¹⁴ but I did not want to act without your consent; it would have forced your good deed, which should be voluntary. ¹⁵ Perhaps you were deprived of Onesimus for a time, so you could have him back for ever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a dear brother, especially to me but even more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷ So, if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would me; ¹⁸ if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, PAUL, write this in my own hand: I shall

¹⁰ The NJB has 'while wearing these chains' in place of 'during my imprisonment'.

¹¹ Note the play on words: 'Onesimus' means 'useful' (cf. Ph 4:3).

¹² There are several variants in this verse involving the addition of προσλαβοῦ ('accept') at various places but all seem to be motivated by the harsh syntax without the verb: nowhere else in the NT is σπλάγχνα ('heart') used in apposition to people. Both the fact that some important MSS lack the verb and that its location floats in the various constructions that have it, suggest that the original text did not have προσλαβοῦ.

¹³ In place of 'taken your place', the NJB has 'been a substitute for you'.

¹⁴ The Greek text does not have the word, 'but', but it is clearly implied.

¹⁵ Onesimus was not to be Philemon's slave eternally but their relationship as brothers in Christ would transcend the structures of the age.

¹⁶ The NJB has 'on the natural plane' in place of 'in the flesh'.

¹⁷ For 'consider me a partner', the NJB has 'grant me any fellowship with yourself'.

¹⁸ The NJB has 'put it down to my account' in place of 'charge it to me'.

¹⁹ Paul may have considered this letter so delicate that he wrote the letter himself as opposed to using a secretary.

σοι ὅτι καὶ σεαυτὸν μοι προσοφείλεις. ²⁰ ναί, ἀδελφέ, ἐγώ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ· ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ. ²¹ πεποιθῶς τῇ ὑπακοῇ σου ἔγραψά σοι, εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω ποιήσεις. ²² ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἐτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν, ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν.

²³ Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ²⁴ Μάρκος, Ἀρίσταρχος, Δημᾶς, Λουκᾶς, οἱ συνεργοί μου.

²⁵ Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

repay it – I say nothing about you owing your very self to me! ²⁰ Yes, brother, I count on you, in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ I write with complete confidence in your compliance, sure that you will go beyond what I ask. ²² One more thing: will you get a place ready for me to stay in? I hope, through your prayers, to be restored to you.

²³ Epaphras, a prisoner with me in Christ Jesus, greets you; ²⁴ so do my fellow workers, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke.

²⁵ May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

²⁰ In place of ‘refresh my heart’, the NJB has ‘set my heart at rest’.

²¹ The NJB ends with, “do even more than I ask.”

²² For ‘I hope’, the NJB & NRSV have ‘I am hoping’.

²³ ‘Epaphras’ is probably a shortened form of the name Epaphroditus, the same man whom Paul spoke of in Ph 2:25 (cf. Ph 4:18); he is also mentioned in Col 1:7 & 4:12, where he is a founder of the church in Colossae.

²⁴ ‘Aristarchus’ accompanied Paul on his collection journey (Act 27:2); he is also mentioned as a fellow prisoner in Col 4:10. ‘Demas’ is most likely the same mentioned by Paul in 2Tm 4:12. ‘Mark’ and ‘Luke’ are no doubt the Evangelists.

²⁵ Some MSS add ‘Amen’ at the end of the letter (cf. Ph 4:23).