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The challenge of Philemon is its shortness, as well as the main topic that it addresses. Both it and the letter of Jude are two of the shortest documents in the New Testament, each with 25 verses. For that reason, each stands at the end of the two sections of letters in the New Testament: Philemon at the end of the Pauline letters and Jude at the end of the general letters. Yet, the content and emphasis of these two letters is very different from one another.

In order to gain a more wholistic picture of the contents of Philemon, we're going to take a look at the entire letter, rather than just one segment of the body section as defined in the Smyth-Helwys Formations Sunday School lesson quarterly. Verses 8-16 in their lesson focus can not be fully understood unless the context of the entire letter is given some consideration. More particularly, these verses only consider one segment of the body section of the letter and ignore another important segment, vv. 17-21, which is essential context for verses 8-16. Additionally, the travel plans indicated in v. 22 also play an important role in understanding the appeal made to Philemon in vv. 8-16.

Helpful to our study is a quick survey of ancient letter writing patterns in the ancient world, since the evidence is clear that these were followed in the composition of the letter to Philemon. These patterns differ considerably from modern patterns, both in the mechanical process of composition and in the intended purpose. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see my *Lecture Notes on ancient letters* at <http://cranfordville.com/NT-Lec31-3229.html#3.1.2.2.1.3>. I will summarize that material here.

Various types of letters existed in the ancient world, ranging from very short informal personal letters to very lengthy formal letters intended for public reading. Inside the collection of Pauline letters in the NT beginning with Romans, the longest, ranging all the way down to Philemon, the shortest, one finds a considerable range of differing letter types. Romans is the most formal and Philemon is the most intimate.

Yet, even with this variety, the basic elements of letter form consistently show up in the Pauline letters and also in the genuinely-letter documents in the General Epistles section of the NT. Those elements begin with the identificational formulae known in the Latin as the **Praescriptio**. Three sub-elements typically show up inside this section: (1) the Superscriptio, identifying who the letter is from; (2) the Adscriptio, marking whom the letter is addressed to; and usually (3) the Salutatio, providing a bridge building greeting between the sender and the initial readers. Paul more consistently than in the General Letters includes all three elements. The second section is labeled the **Proem**, and contains normally a prayer of thanksgiving, and with Paul often a prayer of intercession as well. The **Body** of the letter follows and its contents can be arranged in various ways depending upon the situation being addressed by the letter as well as the writing style of the sender. Often, Travel Plans will be the signal of the closing of the letter Body and the transition into the **Conclusio** section.

The compositional process of ancient letters is another interesting aspect. Typically, and especially for the more formal letters, the designated sender or senders in the Superscriptio would dictate the contents of the letter to a writing secretary called in the Latin *amanuensis* or in the Greek γραμματεὺς (grammateus).

This could be done in detailed word-for-word dictation style, but more commonly the sender simply sketched out the general contents desired and the secretary fleshed out the details into full expression. According to ancient sources, the secretary would submit a draft back to the sender and it would be revised, and then re-written, before final approval was given. The re-writing of a letter might take place several times before the final draft was approved. Often the early drafts would be written on a piece of board with a thin layer of wax on one side. Corrections could be made rather easily. But the final draft would be written on a sheet of papyrus “paper” or on tanned leather called velum. On several occasions Paul indicates that he used the writing secretary for the composition of his letters. Tertius, who wrote Romans for Paul, identifies himself by name in [Rom. 16:22](#) (NRSV): “I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.” [2 Thess. 3:17](#) contains a statement that provides additional insight: “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.” (NRSV). Typically, when the letter had been dictated the sender would personally write out a part or all of the *Conclusio* in his own handwriting, which would be recognizable to the targeted readers. This served as a stamp of verification that the contents of the letter represented the sender’s ideas, even though they were not written in his handwriting. This is what Paul is indicating in 2 Thess. 3:17.

Additionally, in [many of the Pauline letters](#) an additional person or persons is listed along with Paul as the sender of the letter. The additional person(s) listed most likely did not contribute directly to the contents of the letter, but the addition of their names signals their support of the content of what Paul had dictated to the writing secretary. This is the role that Timothy plays as the second name in the Adscriptio of Philemon 1. This provided added weight to the power of the letter and any demands the sender might make upon the initial readers.

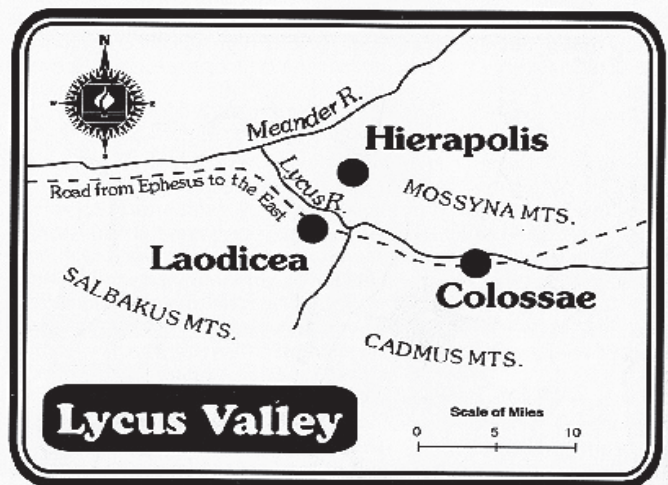
I. Context

Both the historical and literary settings of Philemon play important roles in understanding the contents of the letter itself.

a. Historical

In regard to the **external history** issue, this letter of Paul stands at the end of the Pauline collection of letters because of its short length. But it was not the last letter of Paul to be written. That spot belongs to 2 Timothy in the traditional view of authorship of the Pauline letters. The letter does belong to a sub-grouping of the Pauline letters known as the [Prison Letters](#). These letters include Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. The group label is derived from the indication in all four letters that Paul was a prisoner when each one was written. The last three of these are more closely connected to one another through common content and/or a common carrier of the letter to its designation. Since Philemon lived at Colossae in the Lycus Valley, less than a 100 miles east of the coastal city of Ephesus, most scholars believe that Colossians and Philemon were carried together to Colossae to be read to the congregation there, and possibly in the surrounding towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis. Very likely Ephesians was written and carried at the same time to be read first at Ephesus and then at these other towns. Onesimus and Epaphrus were likely the officially designated carriers of these letters to their destination.

The one unclear aspect is where Paul was when these letters were composed. Traditionally, it has been thought that he was in Rome awaiting trial before the emperor as described in Acts 28. But increasingly over the past several decades alternative locations for Paul’s imprisonment have thought to provide a better explanation of the details. Although Ephesus is considered to be the spot by a few scholars, most are convinced that the lengthy stay of Paul at Caesarea Philippi before being shipped to Rome is a likely place for the writing of at least these last three prison letters. If accurate, this would place their writing in the



late 50s as opposed to an early 60s date for Rome and a middle 50s date for Ephesus. One cannot conclude much about how soon Paul expected to be released from prison by his statement in Philm. 22b: “for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you” (NRSV), although some would see this as favoring the Ephesian imprisonment which was very short term.

From the **internal history** aspect, one needs to identify the characters mentioned in the letter as well as give some consideration to Colossae as the geographical location of the initial readers of this letter.



The main characters in the events surrounding the writing of this letter include Paul, Philemon and Onesimus. Others are mentioned by name as well. First, let's take a look at Philemon (Φιλήμων). Only one mention of him surfaces in the New Testament, and it is in verse one where in the Adscriptio he is identified as “our beloved and fellow worker” (τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ σύεργῳ ἡμῶν). We know from the letter that he owned Onesimus as a slave. But beyond that not much else is affirmed about him in the New Testament. The online [Catholic Encyclopedia article](#) on “Philemon” lists a lot of the later church tradition about Philemon, and is interesting but isn't substantiated history:

A citizen of Colossae, to whom St. Paul addressed a private letter, unique in the New Testament, which bears his name. As appears from this epistle, Philemon was his dear and intimate friend (verses 1, 13, 17, 22), and had been converted most probably by him (verse 19) during his long residence at Ephesus (Acts, xix, 26; cf. xviii, 19), as St. Paul himself had not visited Colossae (Col., ii, 1). Rich and noble, he possessed slaves; his house was a place of meeting and worship for the Colossian converts (verse 2); he was kind, helpful, and charitable (verses 5,7), providing hospitality for his fellow Christians (verse 22). St. Paul calls him his fellow labourer (*synergos*, verse 1), so that he must have been earnest in his work for the Gospel, perhaps first at Ephesus and afterwards at Colossae. It is not plain whether he was ordained or not. Tradition represents him as Bishop of Colossae (*Const. Apost.*, VI, 46), and the *Menaia* of 22 November speak of him as a holy apostle who, in company with Appia, Archippus, and Onesimus had been martyred at Colossae during the first general persecution in the reign of Nero. In the address of the letter two other Christian converts, Appia and Archippus (Col., iv, 17) are mentioned; it is generally believed that Appia was Philemon's wife and Archippus their son. St. Paul, dealing exclusively in his letter with the domestic matter of a fugitive slave, Onesimus, regarded them both as deeply interested. Archippus, according to Col., iv, 17, was a minister in the Lord, and held a sacred office in the Church of Colossae or in the neighbouring Church of Laodicea.

As one can clearly see, where scriptural description leaves off early church tradition picks up with materials that normally stand as a mixture between factual history and legends. Sorting out the two elements often becomes impossible to do with certainty. Thus, how much of the above description of the subsequent activities of Philemon actually happened is anyone's guess. Very likely, most of them did not happen, and represent instead a romanticized portrayal of Philemon.

The second major character is the converted slave Onesimus. His name surfaces in two documents of the New Testament: (1) Philemon 10 (“I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment” NRSV, παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Ὀνήσιμον) and Col. 4:9 (“he [Tychicus] is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here” NRSV, σὺν Ὀνησίμῳ τῷ πιστῷ καὶ ἀγαπητῷ ἀδελφῷ, ὃς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν· πάντα ὑμῖν γνωρίσουσιν τὰ ὧδε). In Philemon he is identified as Paul's spiritual child, meaning that Paul won him to faith in Christ. In Colossians he is a part of the group traveling to Colossae to bring both the Colossians and Philemon letters to their destination. Paul identifies him as a faithful and beloved brother. The church tradition about Onesimus is more limited. In a document called the Apostolic Constitutions ([book 7; section 46](#)) we find this statement: “Now concerning those bishops which have been ordained in our lifetime, we let you know that they are these:...Of Borea in Macedonia, Onesimus, once the servant of Philemon.” The

claim is made that Onesimus became a spiritual leader of a Christian community in northern Greece west of Thessalonica. How much credibility should be given to this is very questionable. [This document](#) dated no later than the fourth century AD is prone to mix fact and legend with no distinction whatsoever.

Numerous minor characters surface in the content of Philemon. They are Timothy, Apphia, and Archippus in the Praescriptio (v. 1), and several in the Conclusio Greetings statement (vv. 23-24): Epaphrus, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. They will be treated below in the Literary contextual discussion.

b. Literary

We will consider carefully the literary structure of the letter in order to develop a clear contextual setting for the closer examination of the contents of the Body section of the letter.

The **Praescriptio** is found in verses 1-3 and is [a typical Pauline praescriptio](#):

Superscriptio (v. 1a): “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother” NRSV, Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός. The letter is sent by [Paul](#) and [Timothy](#). These two personal names show up as the senders of the letter. The role of Timothy in the sending of the letter is most likely secondary, in light of the tendency of the letter to allude back to the sender in the first person singular, “I” more often than the plural “we.” And frequently the “I” is identified as Paul. See vv. 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24. In a secondary role, Timothy’s name becomes an affirmation of support of what Paul says in the letter, rather than a contributor to its contents. The naming of additional individuals in the Superscriptio is common in the Pauline letters. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Silas and Timothy are named. In 1 Corinthians Sosthenes is named, but Timothy is named in 2 Corinthians. Timothy is also named in Colossians and Philippians.

What is unusual about the Philemon Superscriptio is that Paul designates himself as a “prisoner of Christ Jesus” (δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ). This is the only Pauline letter to use this titular formula. [Much more common](#) is “apostle of...”; “servant of ...” or “apostle and servant of...”, whenever a title beyond the personal name Paul shows up. By so identifying himself this way at the outset of the letter, he identifies himself somewhat with the situation of the slave Onesimus.

Adscriptio (v. 1b-2): “To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house”, NRSV, Φιλίμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν 1:2 καὶ Ἀπφίᾳ τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ’ οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ, 1:3 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Interestingly, several individuals are named here beyond the principal recipient of the letter, Philemon. This is the only reference in the New Testament to Philemon; see [the above discussion](#) for details. Additionally mentioned are Apphia and Archippus and the church meeting in either Philemon’s or Archippus’ home. This is the only NT reference to Apphia, but she historically has been identified as Philemon’s wife. Archippus is mentioned here and in Col. 4:17, “[And say to Archippus, “See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.”](#)” In Philemon as a recipient of the letter, he is living in Colossae, which is confirmed by Col. 4:17. The broad nature of the admonition in Col. 4:17 leaves undefined the precise nature of the ministry (τὴν διακονίαν) that he is supposed to carry out. Most NT scholars deduce from the structure of this listing in Philemon that Archippus played a leadership role in the Christian community at Colossae, perhaps working with Philemon as co-leaders of the community of believers that met in Philemon’s home.

The inclusion of the entire community of faith in the list of recipients underscores that the letter was intended to be read to the entire community, and was not an exclusively personal letter just to Philemon. Implied in this is the ancient Christian principle that what an individual believer does, especially in dealing with others, has powerful implications for the community of faith that he/she is a part of. At some level the entire community needs to be involved in the actions and decisions of each member. Given our US cultural tendency toward intense individualism, applying such ancient NT patterns to today’s congregation poses substantial challenges. At least, the pattern here strongly reminds us that as a part of a community of believers, how we deal individually with people reflects back positively or negatively not just on our individual spiritual claims, but also upon the congregation that we belong to.

Salutatio (v. 3): “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” NRSV, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. This greeting is [very typical](#) to the [Pauline letters](#), and matches exactly the one found in Ephesians (1:2), Philippians (1:2), and 2 Thessalonians (1:2). The

typical Hellenistic greeting (χαίρειν;cf. [2 Jhn. 10-11](#)) is modified by Paul to χάρις (grace), reflecting his religious orientation. Similarly, the Hebrew greeting שלום (*shalom*) is brought over into the Greek εἰρήνη (peace). Both grace and peace originate with God the Father and with the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Paul affirms his Christian experience, even as he says ‘hello.’

The **Proem** is contained in verses 4-7, comprised of two sentences in the Greek text (Cf. the [Block Diagram](#) in the internet version of this study):

4 When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God 5 because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. 7 I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

[This section](#) in ancient letters typically was a prayer for divine blessing upon the recipient(s) of the letter. The prayer usually begins with an expression of thanksgiving to God for the letter recipients with elaboration of details. Often, but not always, the thanksgiving shades over into a prayer of intercession for God to bless the recipients in some specific way. The Proem in Philemon is very typical to [the majority of those in the Pauline letters](#), which reflect some variation in form and content. In Philemon, Paul expresses thanksgiving (Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε μνησθεῖς σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου) that grows out of hearing about Philemon’s love and faith. It is a favorite proem expression in the Pauline letters. The intent of Paul’s thanksgiving and prayers is stated in verse 6: ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργῆς γένηται ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν (“so that the sharing of your faith may be activated in the full understanding of the complete good among us for Christ.”). The basis for his thanksgiving and prayers is set forth in the causal declaration in verse 7: χαρὰν γὰρ πολλὴν ἔσχον καὶ παράκλησιν ἐπὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου (for I have had much joy and encouragement because of your love”). This then is grounded in ὅτι τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἁγίων ἀναπέπνυται διὰ σοῦ, ἀδελφέ (because the bowels of the saints are being refreshed by you, brother). In the ancient world the “bowels” were viewed as the seat of feeling in the association of body parts with various emotions. The rather blunt literal imagery is approximately the idea that Philemon’s love has functioned like a spiritual Elixir cleaning out the bowels of the saints, thus providing them relief. The idea is expressed well by the NLT: “because your kindness has so often refreshed the hearts of God’s people.”

Often in the Proems of the Pauline letters the expansion elements (here vv. 4b-7) provide hints at the topics to surface in more detailed discussion in the Body section of the letter. In that role, the Pauline proem turns into something like an ancient [Exordium](#), summarizing what is to follow. This happens to some extent here in the Proem in Philemon.

The **Body** of the letter was the major section. The content and its arrangement depended entirely upon the situation that prompted the writing of the letter, since these documents were occasional writings, i.e., a specific circumstance prompted their writing and they were attempts to address that circumstance as a substitute for the personal visit of the letter sender. The flow of thought in the body section of the letters of Paul reflects his indebtedness to both his Hebrew and Greek heritages and training. Both lines of reasoning and thought development will surface in the bodies of the Pauline letters. Thus the serious Bible student must develop some awareness of how one thought and expressed himself in the ancient world both as a Jew and as a Greek. That is, if he or she wants to understand the ideas of the apostle Paul.

Since our study is going to focus on the Body section of Philemon (vv. 23-25), we will move to the last segment of an ancient letter, the [Conclusio](#). This letter section was fluid in its content. Typically, one major signal of the ending part of the Body of the letter was the mentioning of travel plans, which occurs in verse 22: “At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you” (NRSV). [Various items](#) surface in the Pauline letters and have antecedents in ancient letters generally. These include, but are not limited to: (1) Greetings, (2) Sender Verifications, (3) Doxologies, and (4) Benedictions. Two of these four items surface in Philemon:

Greetings, vv. 23-24: “23 **Epaphras**, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do **Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke**, my fellow workers” (NRSV). Of note is the similarity of the Greeting segment of Philemon to its counterpart in Colossians (4:10-15), particularly in the names of the individuals sending greetings: “10 **Aristarchus** my fellow prisoner greets you, as does **Mark** the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him. 11 And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a

comfort to me. 12 **Epaphras**, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. 13 For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 **Luke**, the beloved physician, and **Demas** greet you. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.” (NRSV) All of the names in Philemon are mentioned in Colossians, thus tying these two letters close together. Plus, these two letters become the main source of knowing about most of these individuals, since they are not mentioned often, if at all, elsewhere in the New Testament. **Epaphras** was a faithful associate of Paul who had close connection to the church at Colossae and is mentioned three times in the NT (Col. 2x; Philm 1x). **Mark** was Barnabas’ cousin who messed up on the first missionary journey, caused the split between Paul and Barnabas at the beginning of the second missionary journey, but redeemed himself to Paul toward the end of Paul’s career. He is the traditionally understood author of the second gospel, and is mentioned by name eight times in the NT (Acts 4x; Col. 1x; Philm 1x; 2 Tim. 1x; 1 Pet. 1x). **Aristarchus** was from Thessalonica, accompanied Paul on the third missionary journey and is mentioned five times in the NT (Acts 3x; Col. 1x; Philm. 1x). **Demas** was an associate of Paul who is mentioned positively in Col. (1x) and Philem. (1x), but by the time of 2 Tim (1x) he has deserted Paul and gone to Thessalonica. **Luke** is the slave physician who joined Paul’s missionary group in Macedonia on the second missionary journey and remained true to the end. He is mentioned by name three times in the NT (Col. 1x; Philm. 1x; 2 Tim. 1x), and is credited with having written both the third gospel and Acts. These individuals represent a variety of Christians from differing backgrounds but with a common commitment to serve the Lord along side the apostle Paul.

Benedictio, v. 25: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit,” NRSV, Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν. Most all of Paul’s letters conclude with a prayer of benediction, thus modeling early patterns of Christian worship that initially were based upon Jewish synagogue patterns. **This one** is exactly like the one in Philippians (4:23), and both are generally similar to the others in the Pauline letters. Thus at the end of the reading of these letters before congregations, they concluded with a prayer from Paul for God’s blessings upon the congregation.

II. Message

The body of the Philemon letter naturally divides into two sections: Appeal to Philemon (vv. 8-21) and Travel Plans (v. 22). For a detailed development of this structural understanding, see the **Semantic Diagram** and the **Exegetical Outline** in the internet version of this study, both of which are based upon the **Block Diagram** of the Greek text of Philemon.

a. Appeal to Philemon, vv. 8-21

GNT	NASB	NRSV	NLT
1·8 Διό, πολλήν ἐν Χριστῷ παρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν σοι τὸ ἀνῆκον 1·9 διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μᾶλλον παρακαλῶ, τοιοῦτος ὢν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ· 1·10 παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Ὀνήσιμον, 1·11 τόν ποτέ σοι ἄχρηστον νυνὶ δὲ καὶ σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ εὐχρηστον, 1·12 ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι,	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, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- 10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my	8 For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, 9 yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. 10 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him,	8 That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do, 9 but because of our love, I prefer just to ask you. So take this as a request from your friend Paul, an old man, now in prison for the sake of Christ Jesus. 10 My plea is that you show kindness to Onesimus. I think of him as my own son because he became a believer as a result of my ministry

αὐτόν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ
σπλάγχχνα· 1·13 ὃν ἐγὼ
ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν
κατέχειν, ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ
μοι διακονῇ ἐν τοῖς
δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου,
1·14 χωρὶς δὲ τῆς σῆς
γνώμης οὐδὲν ἠθέλησα
ποιῆσαι, ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ
ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ἦ
ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἐκούσιον.
1·15 τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο
ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν, ἵνα
αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς,
1·16 οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον
ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον,
ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν,
μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσω δὲ
μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ
καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ.

1·17 Εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις
κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ
αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ. 1·18 εἰ δέ
τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει,
τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα. 1·19
ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ
ἐμῇ χειρὶ, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω·
ἵνα μὴ λέγω σοι ὅτι καὶ
σεαυτὸν μοι
προσοφείλεις. 1·20 ναί,
ἀδελφέ, ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην
ἐν κυρίῳ· ἀνάπαντόν μου
τὰ σπλάγχχνα ἐν Χριστῷ.

1·21 Πεποιθὼς τῇ
ὑπακοῇ σου ἔγραψά σοι,
εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω
ποιήσεις.

very heart, 13 whom I
wished to keep with me,
so that on your behalf he
might minister to me in
my imprisonment for the
gospel; 14 but without
your consent I did not
want to do anything, so
that your goodness
would not be, in effect, by
compulsion but of your
own free will. 15 For per-
haps he was for this rea-
son separated from you
for a while, that you
would have him back for-
ever, 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. 17 If then you re-
gard me a partner, ac-
cept him as you would
me. 18 But if he has
wronged you in any way
or owes you anything,
charge that to my ac-
count; 19 I, Paul, am writ-
ing 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). 20 Yes,
brother, let me benefit
from you in the Lord; re-
fresh my heart in Christ.
21 Having confidence in
your obedience, I write to
you, since I know that
you will do even more
than what I say.

that is, my own heart,
back to you. 13 I wanted
to keep him with me, so
that he might be of ser-
vice to me in your place
during my imprisonment
for the gospel; 14 but I
preferred to do nothing
without your consent, in
order that your good
deed might be voluntary
and not something
forced. 15 Perhaps this
is the reason he was
separated from you for a
while, so that you might
have him back forever, 16
no longer as a slave but
more than a slave, a be-
loved brother—espe-
cially to me but how
much more to you, both
in the flesh and in the
Lord. 17 So if you con-
sider me your partner,
welcome him as you
would welcome me. 18
If he has wronged you in
any way, or owes you
anything, charge that to
my account. 19 I, Paul,
am writing this with my
own hand: I will repay it. I
say nothing about your
owing me even your own
self. 20 Yes, brother, let
me have this benefit
from you in the Lord!
Refresh my heart in
Christ. 21 Confident of
your obedience, I am
writing to you, knowing
that you will do even more
than I say.

here in prison. 11
Onesimus F1 hasn't
been of much use to you
in the past, but now he is
very useful to both of us.
12 I am sending him
back to you, and with him
comes my own heart. 13
I really wanted to keep
him here with me while I
am in these chains for
preaching the Good
News, and he would
have helped me on your
behalf. 14 But I didn't
want to do anything with-
out your consent. And I
didn't want you to help
because you were
forced to do it but be-
cause you wanted to. 15
Perhaps you could think
of it this way: Onesimus
ran away for a little while
so you could have him
back forever. 16 He is no
longer just a slave; he is
a beloved brother, espe-
cially to me. Now he will
mean much more to you,
both as a slave and as a
brother in the Lord. 17 So
if you consider me your
partner, give him the
same welcome you
would give me if I were
coming. 18 If he has
harmed you in any way
or stolen anything from
you, charge me for it. 19
I, Paul, write this in my
own handwriting: "I will
repay it." And I won't men-
tion that you owe me your
very soul! 20 Yes, dear
brother, please do me
this favor for the Lord's
sake. Give me this en-
couragement in Christ.
21 I am confident as I
write this letter that you
will do what I ask and
even more!

Notes:

The situation being addressed in the letter is this. Onesimus was a slave who belonged to Philemon in Colossae. At some point the slave had run away from his master. In an unexplained circumstance he came in contact with Paul where the apostle was in prison. Through that contact Onesimus became a

Christian, and had spent some time with Paul to the extent that he became a helpful associate of the apostle. Paul is now writing to Philemon a letter that will accompany Onesimus who is going back to Colossae and to his master Philemon. Tychicus and some others will also be in this group traveling to Colossae along with Onesimus (cf. Col. 4:7-8): “7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; 9 he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here” (NRSV).

The social backdrop to this is important to understanding the nature of Paul’s appeal. Almost two-thirds of the population of the Roman Empire at this time were slaves. Slavery came about mostly through military conquest by the Romans and was not based on race etc. like in the American experience. Run-away slaves were a big problem during the era of the Empire, since most had been uprooted from their homeland and to escape meant the possibility of returning home and living undetected. The Roman legal system gave the slave owner almost unlimited authority to punish the captured runaway slave, even to executing him. It also made liable for heavy monetary fines anyone who took the slave in and used his services while he belonged to someone else. Thus Paul, himself, could have been in real legal trouble had Philemon not been a close Christian brother to the apostle.

Paul made his appeal to Philemon to take back Onesimus without inflicting punishment on him. Since he had become a Christian, Philemon is asked to take Onesimus back as a brother in Christ now.

The basis of Paul’s appeal revolves around two emphases: (1) how God had worked in Onesimus’ life (vv. 8-16) and (2) the bond of friendship between Paul and Philemon (vv. 17-21).

First, how God had worked in Onesimus’ life (vv. 8-16). Paul begins with a reminder that as an apostle he could have demanded that Philemon take Onesimus back or allow him to stay with Paul. But he chose instead to appeal to Philemon on the basis of love: “8 For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, 9 yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (NRSV). Paul then indicates his love for Onesimus: “10 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you.” (NRSV) Actually, Paul would have preferred to keep Onesimus with him, but he couldn’t do that either legally or morally without Philemon’s consent: “13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.” (NRSV) Paul hints that allowing Onesimus to return to Paul would be wonderful, but we don’t know whether such ever took place or not. Next, Paul suggests that divine providence was involved in the situation, in that the runaway slave became a brother in Christ after having escaped his master. Now he was coming back a changed person who would serve Philemon with integrity and trustworthiness: “15 Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might 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. (NRSV)

Second, the bond of friendship between Paul and Philemon (vv. 17-21). Paul appealed to Philemon to welcome Onesimus back as if he were welcoming Paul himself: “17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.” Then Paul offered to pay restitution to Philemon -- something he was legally responsible for under Roman law: “18 If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. 20 Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.” (NRSV)

Several aspects of this merit consideration. (1) Paul is careful to not ignore Roman legal responsibility. As one who had earlier declared “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, NRSV), he could have been tempted to ignore the legal system, keep Onesimus with him, and say nothing to anyone about the situation in order to protect Onesimus from possible harm. But Paul was a sincere Christian who respected human laws and had no desire to become an abolitionist rebel against the Roman government. Such would have put the Christian movement itself in jeopardy, not to mention his own life. (2) The fortunate thing was that Onesimus’ master was a Christian and a close friend of Paul himself. This made appealing to Philemon much easier

since it provided a common bond between the two men for the appeal. (3) To interpret Paul's actions here as his endorsement of slavery is to woefully misunderstand the situation. His earlier declaration in Galatians makes clear the principle that slavery is utterly inconsistent with the values taught by the gospel of Christ. (4) The powerful basis of Paul's appeal is love. This includes love for Onesimus now as a fellow Christian both to Paul and to Philemon. All three men now shared a common love for Christ. This love was a leveler that brought them into close relationship in ways that transcended cultural norms and traditions. Paul expected that love in Philemon to motivate him to do more than asked regarding his slave. (5) The episode is a powerful demonstration of the challenge to Christians to live in the world but to function differently from the world. By values that rise above human tendencies and establish deeper, more profound relationships with one another than is possible out of mere human commitments.

Although at first glance, this situation may seem irrelevant to a modern western culture where slavery no longer is present. But upon deeper examination we discover a powerful story to inspire us to reach out to other people in Christian love that goes way beyond the ordinary.

b. Travel Plans, v. 22

GNT

ἄμα δὲ καὶ ἐτοίμαζε
μοι ξενίαν· ἐλπίζω γὰρ
ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν
ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν.

NASB

At the same time
also prepare me a lodg-
ing, for I hope that through
your prayers I will be
given to you.

NRSV

One thing more—
prepare a guest room for
me, for I am hoping
through your prayers to
be restored to you.

NLT

Please keep a guest
room ready for me, for I
am hoping that God will
answer your prayers and
let me return to you soon.

Notes:

This second major emphasis in the body of the letter has to do with travel plans. Paul asks Philemon to have a guest room available for him in as much as he expected to be released from his imprisonment and to come to Colossae. As Rodney Duke ("Hospitality," [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)) points out, "hospitality plays no small role in the realm of biblical ethics. Biblical admonitions exhorted the Israelites and the early Christians to practice this virtue. Its practice characterized Abraham (Gen 18:2-8) and the church leaders (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8). And, as hospitality is an attribute of God, one finds its images in the biblical proclamation of the relationship between God and the covenant people." Christians traveling from one place to another either in mission work or through business activity depended upon being able to stay with fellow Christians in their travels. The community of faith included fellow Christians living in other places and brought them into a common bond with one another.

Paul's request of Philemon reflects the depth of his friendship with Philemon. When he came to Colossae he expected to be able to stay with Philemon. He was also convinced that his coming to Colossae would be the direct result of Philemon's prayers to God in behalf of Paul. This reflects an amazing situation for the first century world. No other religion in the first century would have even advocated this kind of friendship and boldness between two men regarding a slave. Roman legal guidelines and tradition suggested that Philemon should have taken Paul to court and squeezed every possible penny out of him. What we find instead is the apostle sending the runaway slave back home and then saying to his master, "I'm coming too; get ready for me."

What is uncertain -- actually unlikely -- is whether Paul ever traveled to Colossae. The biblical records do not indicate such, and in fact point the other way. Certainly from Acts and the Pauline letters one would conclude from an imprisonment either in Ephesus or in Caesarea Philippi that Paul could not have visited Colossae. The Pastoral Epistles seem to suggest that Paul was released from imprisonment in Rome the first time (the described in Acts 28) about 62 AD, and resumed traveling in the Aegean Sea area briefly before being re-arrested and ultimately executed by Nero in Rome in the mid-60s. This would provide a possible slot for a visit to Colossae, but early church tradition is silent at this point.

But regardless of whether Paul's expectation was realized, his letter to Philemon and the church at Colossae stand as a powerful witness of the transforming dynamic of the Christian faith. A runaway slave was changed; two men could deal with a delicate issue in the power of their love for Christ and one another; the community of faith provided the atmosphere to rise above mere human attitudes and actions to others. May we experience that power in our lives!

ΠΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΗΜΟΝΑ

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

1·4 Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε μνησίαν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, 1·5 ἀκούων σου τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν, ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους, 1·6 ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργῆς γένηται ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν. 1·7 χάραν γὰρ πολλὴν ἔσχον καὶ παράκλησιν ἐπὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου, ὅτι τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἁγίων ἀναπέπνυται διὰ σοῦ, ἀδελφέ.

1·8 Διό, πολλὴν ἐν Χριστῷ παρρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν σοι τὸ ἀνῆκον 1·9 διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μᾶλλον παρακαλῶ, τοιοῦτος ὢν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. 1·10 παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Ὀνήσιμον, 1·11 τὸν ποτὲ σοι ἄχρηστον νυνὶ δὲ καὶ σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ εὐχρηστον, 1·12 ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι, αὐτόν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα. 1·13 ὃν ἐγὼ ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν κατέχειν, ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῇ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, 1·14 χωρὶς δὲ τῆς σῆς γνώμης οὐδὲν ἠθέλησα ποιῆσαι, ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ᾗ ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἐκούσιον. 1·15 τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν, ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς, 1·16 οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν, μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσω δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ.

1·17 Εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτόν ὡς ἐμέ. 1·18 εἰ δέ τι ἡδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα. 1·19 ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω· ἵνα μὴ λέγω σοι ὅτι καὶ σεαυτὸν μοι προσοφείλεις. 1·20 ναί, ἀδελφέ, ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ· ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ.

1·21 Πεποιθὼς τῇ ὑπακοῇ σου ἔγραψά σοι, εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω ποιήσεις. 1·22 ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἐτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν· ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν.

1·23 Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 1·24 Μάρκος, Ἀρίσταρχος, Δημᾶς, Λουκᾶς, οἱ συνεργοί μου. 1·25 Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

NASB

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.

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 Christ's sake. 7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

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, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- 10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. 15 For perhaps he was for this reason 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. 17 If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, Paul, am writing 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). 20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 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 lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

NRSV

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, 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.

4 When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God 5 because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. 7 I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

8 For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, 9 yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. 10 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed 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, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. 15 Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might 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. 17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. 20 Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

22 One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you. 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

NLT

1 This letter is from Paul, in prison for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy. It is written to Philemon, our much loved co-worker, 2 and to our sister Apphia and to Archippus, a fellow soldier of the cross. I am also writing to the church that meets in your house. 3 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

4 I always thank God when I pray for you, Philemon, 5 because I keep hearing of your trust in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. 6 You are generous because of your faith. And I am praying that you will really put your generosity to work, for in so doing you will come to an understanding of all the good things we can do for Christ. 7 I myself have gained much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because your kindness has so often refreshed the hearts of God's people.

8 That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do, 9 but because of our love, I prefer just to ask you. So take this as a request from your friend Paul, an old man, now in prison for the sake of Christ Jesus. 10 My plea is that you show kindness to Onesimus. I think of him as my own son because he became a believer as a result of my ministry here in prison. 11 Onesimus F1 hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. 12 I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart. 13 I really wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. 14 But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. And I didn't want you to help because you were forced to do it but because you wanted to. 15 Perhaps you could think of it this way: Onesimus ran away for a little while so you could have him back forever. 16 He is no longer just a slave; he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a slave and as a brother in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me your partner, give him the same welcome you would give me if I were coming. 18 If he has harmed you in any way or stolen anything from you, charge me for it. 19 I, Paul, write this in my own handwriting: "I will repay it." And I won't mention that you owe me your very soul!

20 Yes, dear brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ. 21 I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more! 22 Please keep a guest room ready for me, for I am hoping that God will answer your prayers and let me return to you soon. 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings. 24 So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my co-workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Greek Text Diagram

Praescriptio:

Superscriptio:

1

Παῦλος

δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
καὶ

Τιμόθεος

ὁ ἀδελφός

Adscriptio:

Φιλίμονι

τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν
καὶ

2

Ἀπφία

τῇ ἀδελφῇ
καὶ

Ἀρχίππῳ

τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν
καὶ

τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ,

Salutatio:

3

χάρις ὑμῖν

καὶ

εἰρήνη (ἔστωσαν)

ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν
καὶ

κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Proem

1 4

Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου

πάντοτε

μνεΐαν 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

γὰρ

2

χαρὰν πολλὴν ἔσχον

καὶ

παράκλησιν

ἐπὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου,

ὅτι τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἁγίων ἀναπέπνυται

διὰ σοῦ, ἀδελφέ.

8 Διό,
πολλὴν ἐν Χριστῷ παρρησίαν ἔχων
ἐπιτάσσειν σοι τὸ ἀνῆκον
9 διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην
μᾶλλον
3 **παρακαλῶ,**
τοιούτος ὢν
ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης
νυνὶ
δὲ
καὶ
δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (ὢν) ·
4 **παρακαλῶ σε**
περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου,
ὃν ἐγέννησα
ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς,
ὀνήσιμον,
ποτέ
σοι
11 τόν... ἄχρηστον
δὲ
νυνὶ
καὶ σοὶ
καὶ ἐμοὶ
---... εὐχρηστον,
12 ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι,
αὐτόν,
13 τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα·
ὃν ἐγὼ ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν κατέχειν,
ὑπὲρ σοῦ
ἵνα... μοι διακονῇ
ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς
τοῦ εὐαγγελίου,
14 δὲ
χωρὶς τῆς σῆς γνώμης
5 **οὐδὲν ἠθέλησα ποιῆσαι,**
ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην
ἵνα μὴ... τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ᾗ
ἀλλὰ
--- (τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ᾗ)
κατὰ ἐκούσιον.

15 γὰρ
τάχα
διὰ τοῦτο
6 **ἐχωρίσθη**
πρὸς ὥραν,
αἰώνιον
ἵνα... αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς,
16 οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον
ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον,
ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν,
μάλιστα ἐμοί,
δὲ
πόσῳ μᾶλλον σοὶ
καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ
καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ.
17 οὖν
Εἰ με ἔχεις κοινωνόν,
7 **προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν**
ὡς ἐμέ.
18 δὲ
εἰ τι ἡδίκησέν σε
ἢ
-- ὀφείλει --,
8 **τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα.**
9 19 **ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα**
τῇ ἐμῇ χειρί,
10 **ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω·**
ἵνα μὴ λέγω σοι
ὅτι καὶ σεαυτὸν μοι προσοφείλεις.
20 ναί,
ἀδελφέ,
11 **ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην**
ἐν κυρίῳ·
12 **ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα**
ἐν Χριστῷ.
21 Πεποιθώς τῇ ὑπακοῇ σου
13 **ἔγραψά σοι,**
εἰδώς
καὶ
ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω
ὅτι ποιήσεις.
22 δὲ
ᾧμα
καὶ
14 **ἐτοιμάζε μοι ξενίαν·**

15 γὰρ
ἐλπίζω

διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν
ὅτι...χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν.

Conclusio

16 ²³ **Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφῶς**

²⁴

ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,
Μάρκος,
Ἀρίσταρχος,
Δημᾶς,
Λουκᾶς,
οἱ συνεργοί μου.

17 ²⁵ **Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (ἔστω)**

μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

Semantic Diagram											
Proem											
I.	----- [vv.4-6] -- (Thanksgiving) -----				1	Pres	Ind	1	S ἐγώ		
						γὰρ					
II.	----- [v.7] -----				2	Impf	Ind	1	S ἐγώ		
Body						Διό					
	a.	----- [vv.8-9] -----			3	Pres	Ind	1	S ἐγώ		
	1.					δε					
		b.	----- [vv.10-13] -----			4	Pres	Ind	1	S ἐγώ	
A.						δε					
	a.	----- [v.14] -----			5	1 Aor	Ind	1	S ἐγώ		
	2.					γὰρ					
		b.	----- [vv.15-16] -----			6	1 Aor	Ind	3	S αὐτός	
						οὖν					
	1.	----- [v.17] -----			7	2 Aor	Imp	2	S σύ		
I.						δε					
	a.	----- [v.18a] -----			8	Pres	Imp	2	S σύ		
	2.					---					
		i.	----- [v.18b] -----			9	1 Aor	Ind	1	S ἐγώ	
		b.				---					
B.						10	Fut	Ind	1	S ἐγώ	
		ii.				ναί, ἀδελφέ					
			(i)	----- [v.20a] -----			11	2 Aor	Opt	1	S ἐγώ
			b)				---				
			(ii)	----- [v.20b] -----			12	1 Aor	Imp	2	S σύ

	3.	----- [v.21] -----			13	1 Aor	Ind	1	S ἐγώ		
						δε					
A.	----- [v.22a] -----				14	Pres	Imp	2	S σύ		
II.						γὰρ					
	B.	----- [v.22b] -----			15	Pres	Ind	1	S ἐγώ		

Conclusio											
I.	----- (Greetings) -- [vv.23-24] -----				16	Pres	Ind	3	S Ἐπαφρᾶς		

II.	----- (Benedictio) - [v.25] -----				17	Pres	Imp	3	S ἡ χάρις		

Exegetical Outline

Proem

- I. (1) Paul gave thanks to God for Philemon's love and faith
- II. (2) Paul experienced much joy and comfort from Philemon's love for the saints

Body

- I. (3-13) Paul was convinced the God had turned a bad situation for good with Onesimus
 - A. (3-6) Paul reached out to Philemon to consider how God had worked in Onesimus' life.
 - 1. (3-4) Paul made an appeal to Philemon regarding his runaway slave Onesimus
 - a. (3) Paul chose to encourage rather than command Philemon
 - b. (4) Paul appealed to Philemon regarding Onesimus
 - 2. (5-6) Paul saw God's hand at work in the situation with Onesimus
 - a. (5) Paul chose to not keep Onesimus with him without Philemon's consent.
 - b. (6) Paul felt that Onesimus' running away had been providential.
 - B. (7-13) Paul's appeal to Philemon was based on a strong bond of friendship with Philemon
 - 1. (7) Paul appealed to Philemon to take Onesimus back on the basis of Paul's friendship.
 - 2. (8-12) Paul stood in strong support of Onesimus
 - a. (8) Paul told Philemon to charge any damages done by Onesimus to Paul.
 - b. (9-12) Paul was willing to do the right thing by Onesimus with Philemon.
 - i. (9) Paul affirmed his promise with an oath.
 - ii. (10-12) Paul felt freedom in his relationship with Philemon
 - a) (10) Paul promised to pay in full from any charges.
 - b) (11-12) Paul expressed confidence in his relationship with Philemon.
 - (i) (11) Paul reminded Philemon of how he had benefited from Paul's ministry
 - (ii) (12) Paul appealed to Philemon to reciprocate in his reaction to Paul's offer
 - 3. (13) Paul wrote in the confidence that Philemon would do the right thing.
 - II. (14-15) Paul expressed his travel plans to Philemon
 - A. (14) Paul asked Philemon to prepare guest quarters for his anticipated visit
 - B. (15) This was based on Paul's expectation to being able to visit Philemon

Conclusio

- I. (16) Various associates of Paul sent greetings to Philemon
- II. (17) Paul closed the letter with the traditional benedictio prayer.