

PHILEMON 21-25 | EXPOSITORY PREACHING WORKSHOP

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GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

- Personal letter of recommendation
- Paul follows the format prescribed by the Greco-Roman rhetoricians of the day:
 - 1. Begin by building rapport (ethos) and good will with the audience (v. 4-9)
 - 2. Present the facts in a way that will convince the mind (v. 10-19) including countering objections (v. 18-19)
 - 3. Finally, appeal to the emotions (v. 20) and include closing remarks (v. 21-22)¹
- There is no mention of Onesimus in the opening prologue (v. 1-9) or epilogue (v. 21-25).
- Compare Paul's closing thoughts in (v. 20-25) to those with which he opened the letter (v. 1-9):
 - (v. 20-21) with (v. 8-9)
 - (v. 22) with (v. 4-7)
 - (v. 23-25) with (v. 1-3)

EXEGETICAL OBSERVATIONS:

STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT:

Introduction: (1-7)

- Salutation (1-3)
- Thanksgiving and Prayer (4-7)

Body: (v. 8-20)

- Paul's appeal for Onesimus (v. 8-16)
- Paul's appeal for Onesimus is specified (v. 17-20)

Conclusion (v. 21-25)

- Closing comments and request (v. 21-22)
- Final Greetings and benediction (v. 23-25)

Four arguments for marking a division between (v. 20) and (v. 21).

1. The lack of an explicit connecting conjunction or particle in (v. 21). Suggests that Paul has paused for a breath.
2. The fact that (v. 20) makes an appropriate conclusion to the body of the letter

¹ John Banker, *A Semantic and Structural Analysis of Philemon* (Dallas: SIL, 1999), 13-14.

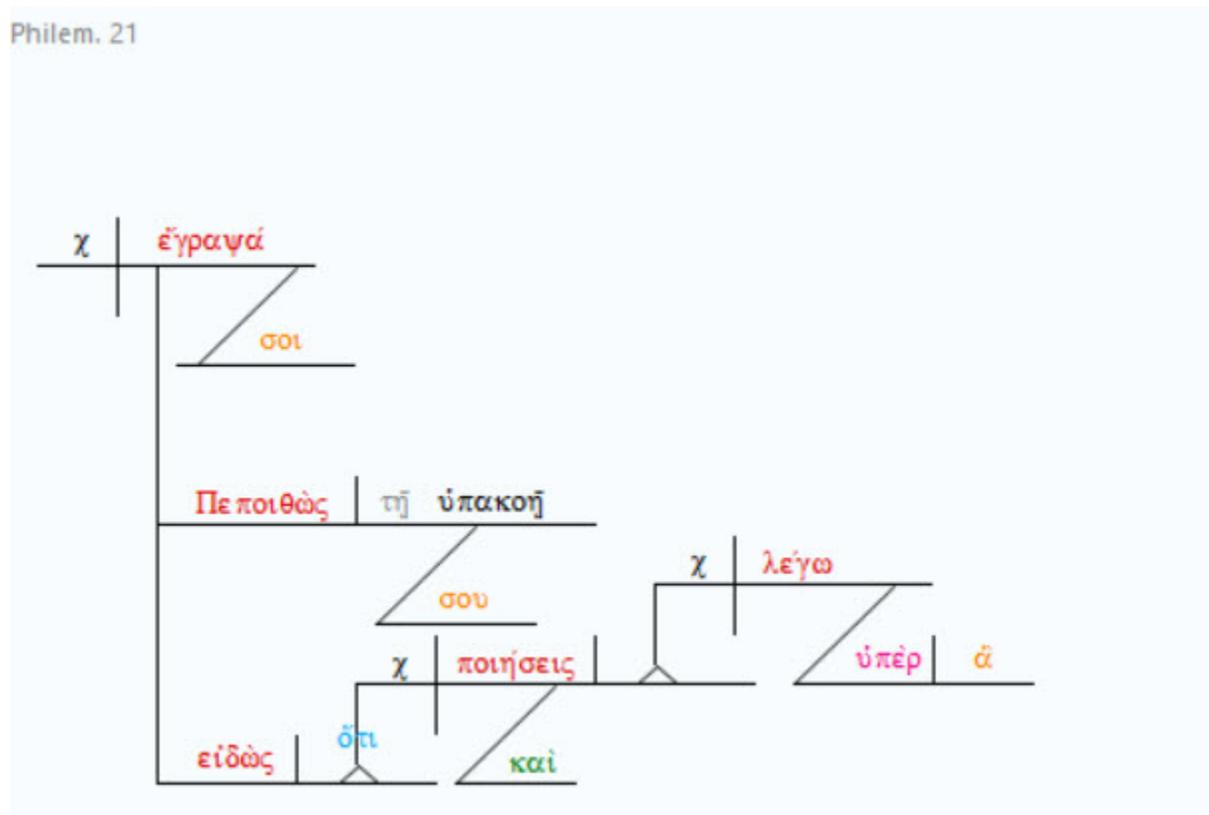
- 3. The transitional flavor of the opening of (v. 21) (having become confident)
- 4. 4. The close connection between (v. 21) and (v. 22)²

Philemon 21-25

- 5 verses
- 4 Sentences
- 3 Structural Elements:
 - 1. Closing comments of encouragement and travel plans Philemon (v. 21-22)
 - 2. Greetings from fellow workers (v. 23-24)
 - 3. A grace benediction (v. 25)

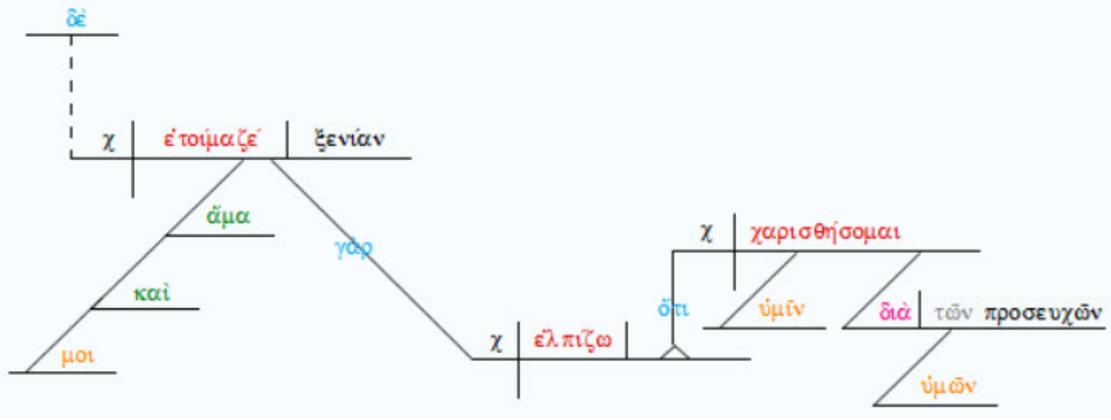
DIAGRAM:

Philem. 21

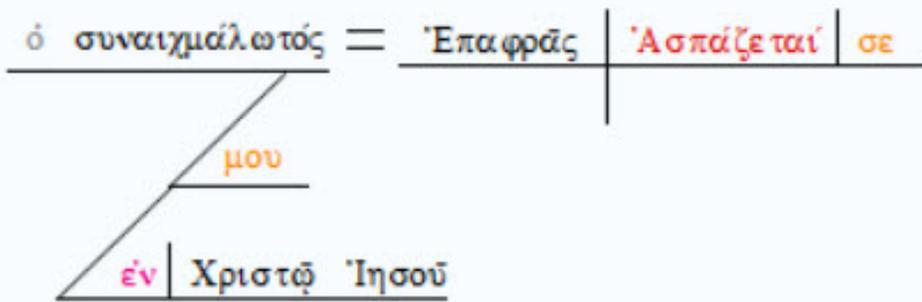


² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 433.

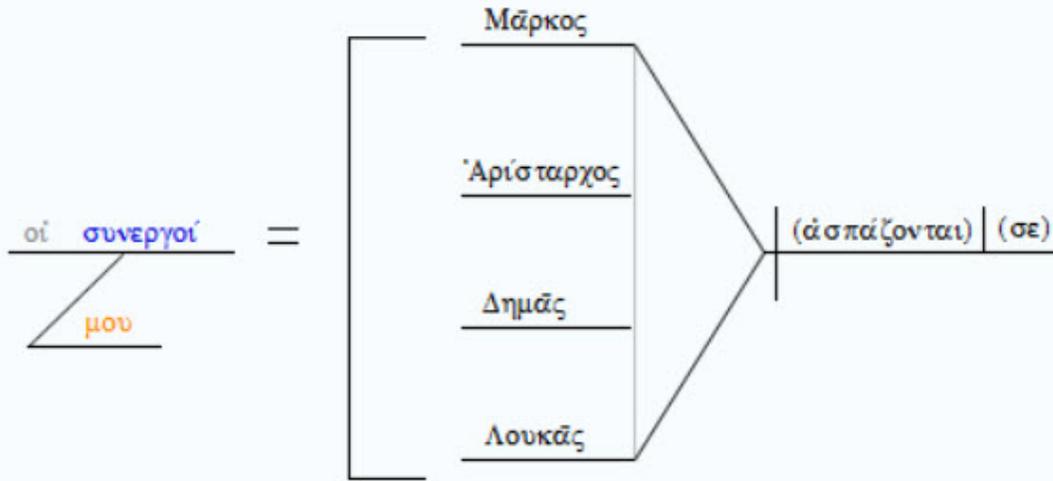
Philem. 22



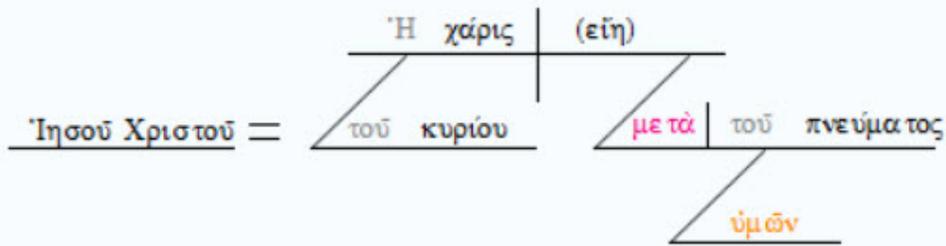
Philem. 23



Philem. 24



Philem. 25



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³ GNT-T.diagram. Diagram of Greek New Testament (Complete). Diagrams prepared by Steven LoVullo, Brian Baxter, Rodney Decker and team, and Rex A. Koivisto. Edited by Rex A. Koivisto, Multnomah University, Portland, Oregon USA. Copyright © 2016 OakTree Software, Inc. Version 4.1.

[Philemon 21]

Confident of your obedience

I write to you

knowing that you will do even more than I say.

[Philemon 22]

At the same time

(You) prepare a guest room for me

for I hope . . . I will be graciously given to you
that by your prayers

[Philemon 23]

Epaphras . . . greets you

my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus

[Philemon 24]

(and) Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke . . . (greet you)

my fellow workers

[Philemon 25]

The grace . . . be with your spirit.

of the Lord Jesus Christ.

SEMANTIC STRUCTURE:

The centerpiece and main appeal of the entire letter is (v. 17) . . . “*So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.*” (v. 20) essentially echoes the appeal with “*refresh my heart in Christ*” creating an *inclusio* of sorts to begin and end the previous paragraph.

As one commentator wrote, “One could hardly find an appeal based on more varied grounds.”⁴

- Love (v. 8-9)
- Divine overruling (v. 15-16)
- Sense of partnership between Paul and Philemon (v. 17)
- An offer to make up financial loss (v. 18-19)
- A reminder of Philemon’s indebtedness to the apostle (v. 19b)
- The desire for a friend’s help in relieving anxiety (v. 20)
- Now (v. 21) an expression of confidence in Philemon’s obedience

⁴ Curtis Vaughn, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 132 citing Harold K. Moulton, “Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians” in *Epworth Preacher’s Commentaries* (London: Epworth Press, n.d.), 75.

Confident (being confident) of your obedience . . .

“I write” . . .

Knowing that you will do even more than I say . . .

Paul’s point here is not that he is writing. The point is that he is confident that Philemon will not only do what he has asked, but even more than he has asked.

SUBSTANCE OF THE TEXT:

(v. 21) *Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.*

Confident of your obedience

- *Confident*: (Perfect, Active, Participle)
- *Obedience*: (ὕπακοή) “a state of being in compliance, obedience (one listens and follows instructions)” BDAG (Obedience to God - Rom. 6:16; Christ’s obedience to God- Heb. 5:8; every thought obedient to Christ- 2 Cor. 10:5)

knowing that you will do even more than I say.

- It is an amplification of “confident of your obedience”
- *knowing* (perfective, active, participle)
- What does Paul have in mind with this undefined and climactic “more”?
 - 1. An overgenerous reception for Onesimus that Paul has proposed (v. 17) or more specifically . . .
 - 2. Forgiveness and reinstatement of Onesimus in Philemon’s household or . . .
 - 3. Liberation of Onesimus for Christian service either at Colossae or at Rome with Paul.

I write to you

- As Lightfoot puts it, “It is the entreaty of a brother to a brother on behalf of a brother.”⁵

(v. 22) *At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.*

- ἅμα (adverb) (together, at the same time)
- “*prepare*” (present, active, imperative)
- Notice the plural pronouns at the end of this verse! The first ones used since (v. 3).
- “Paul did not believe that prayer is a means whereby we get God to do what we want, but whereby we get to know and are moved to do what God wills.”⁶

⁵ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 342.

- “graciously given” (1st person, singular, future, passive, indicative)

(v. 23) *Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,*

(v. 24) *and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.*

- Here Paul reveals he is not laboring for the Lord alone.
- These greetings are from men that Philemon would have at least recognized in name if not by true friendship.
- Even the greetings lend their weight to the ultimate goal of the letter.
- *Epaphras:*
 - The most prominent in the list –mentioned first. “*He greets*” is singular and the greeting from the others is only implied.
 - *my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus*
 - Paul either means one who has been arrested and shares prison with him for the cause of Christ or one who is at least closely associated as a companion with his imprisonment.
 - We are told the following things about him in Colossians:
 - Col. 1:7-8
 - He was Paul’s beloved fellow-servant and the one from whom the Colossians heard the Gospel (Col. 1:7)
 - Epaphras, himself a Colossian (Col. 4:12), was probably converted under the ministry of Paul in Ephesus and became the founder of the church at Colossae and also at least assisted in the work of establishing churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13)
 - He was a faithful minister of Christ on Paul’s behalf and had communicated the fact of the Colossian’s love (1:7b-8)
 - Col. 4:12-13
 - Servant of Christ Jesus
 - Devoted to prayer – “Always struggling on your behalf in his prayers”
 - Pastorally working for the spiritual maturity of his people –“that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God”
 - A hard worker
- *Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke:*
 - These final four Paul gives only the collective description of “*my fellow workers.*”
 - Paul used this term to describe Philemon already. These men were engaged in the task of proclaiming Christ. They had labored together with Paul in the joint work of preaching the gospel, especially to Gentiles.

⁶ W. Graham Scroggie, *Studies in Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 94.

- *Mark:*
 - John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas and author of the Gospel that bears his name. By now an obvious change has occurred in his heart after his desertion during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:13).
 - Paul's final words on Mark are 2 Tim. 4:11 . . . "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry."

- *Aristarchus:*
 - Native of Thessalonica (Acts 20:4; 27:2)
 - Jewish believer (Col. 4:11)
 - Arrested at the time of the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29), accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4) and later was with the apostle on the journey from Caesarea to Rome that included a shipwreck (Acts. 27:2, 4).
 - He is described as a fellow prisoner of Paul (Col. 4:10)

- *Demas:*
 - 2 Timothy 4:10 Paul writes, "For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."
 - At this time, he is with Paul as a fellow-worker, but he ends up fitting the description of 1 John 2:15, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

- *Luke:*
 - The author of Luke and Acts
 - Paul calls him the beloved physician in Col. 4:14.
 - Dear friend and one of Paul's closest companions who apparently was with Paul throughout his two year imprisonment in Caesarea and then in his two year Roman imprisonment.
 - Luke alone was with Paul in his final days (2 Tim. 4:11)

(v. 25) *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

- These words connect back with what Paul started the letter with in (v. 3) "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"
- By "grace" Paul means the whole sum of the unmerited blessings which are ours in Christ. "It is the unconditional, undeserved, spontaneous, eternal, stooping, pardoning love of God."⁷
- "*with your spirit*" – "spirit" is singular, but the pronoun "your" is plural. Paul often uses spirit in the singular to refer to the spirits or inner beings of a plurality of people (Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Cor. 16:18; Rom. 8:16).

⁷ Scroggie, *Studies in Philemon*, 112.

HOMILETICAL OPTIONS:

- 5 verses
- 4 Sentences
- 3 Structural Elements:
 - 1. Closing comments of encouragement and travel plans (v. 21-22)
 - 2. Greetings from fellow workers (v. 23-24)
 - 3. A grace benediction (v. 25)

Exegetical Outline:

1. Final Remarks (v. 21-22)

- (a) Paul's confident expectation of:
 - (i) Philemon's compliance (v. 21a)
 - (ii) Philemon's exceeding Paul's requests (v. 21b)
- (b) Philemon's preparation for Paul's anticipated visit (v. 22)

2. Greetings (v. 23-24)

- (a) from a fellow prisoner: Epaphras (v. 23)
- (b) from four co-workers: Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke (v. 24)

3. Benediction (v. 25)⁸

Homiletical Outline:

Main idea: Accepting the Gospel Demands Obeying the Gospel.

- I. Gospel Obedience Needs Encouragement and Accountability (v. 21-22)
- II. Gospel Obedience Requires Individual and Collective Effort (v. 23-24)
- III. Gospel Obedience Depends on Grace (v. 25)

APPLICATION:

(v. 21-22) Closing Comments:

⁸ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 281.

Encouragement:

“Commands given in such a tone, where authority audibly trusts the subordinate are far more likely to be obeyed than if they are shouted with the hoarse voice of a drill-sergeant. A will which mere authority could not bend, like iron when cold, may be made flexible when warmed by this gentle heat. If parents oftener let their children feel that they had confidence in their obedience, they would seldomer have to complain of their disobedience. Obedience beyond the strict limits of command will always be given by love. A heart truly touched by the love of Jesus Christ will not seek to know the lowest limit of duty, but the highest possibility of service.”⁹

“True courtesy is the natural outgrowth of the lowliness of mind in which each esteems the other better than himself” (Phil. 2:3).¹⁰

Accountability:

We don’t know if Paul’s plan to visit were fulfilled, but the prospect of Philemon receiving Paul in person certainly helped enhance his obedience! Hear Maclaren again: “Nor are Christians without an analogous motive to give weight to their obligations to their Lord! So Christ quickens His servant’s diligence by the thought that before very many days He will come, or they will go, at any rate, they will be with Him—and He will see what they have been doing in His absence. The mark of true Christians is that they love his ‘appearing.’ Hearts should glow at the hope of meeting! The Church should be drawn to large, cheerful service, by the hope of spreading her work before her returning Lord.”¹¹

Hospitality:

“What an unspeakable blessing a spare bedroom has been in some homes! How many of God’s saints, tired ministers, homeless missionaries, and others have slept there, until the very walls are fragrant with their prayers and the home is full of benediction which their grateful hearts have prayed down. Could not more of God’s people exercise this grace of entertainment? It is the testimony of many that in doing so they have received more than they gave. A whole world of Christian service lies open here to people who are in comfortable circumstances, and whose hearts are at leisure from themselves to soothe and sympathize.”¹²

Prayer

Finally don’t miss how Paul prays. It’s in the same spirit as Christ when he prayed, ‘not my will, but thine.’ “The prayer of faith is not forcing our wills on God, but bending our wills to God’s.”¹³

⁹ Alexander Maclaren, *Colossians and Philemon* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 486-88.

¹⁰ Scroggie, *Studies in Philemon*, 120.

¹¹ Maclaren, *Colossians and Philemon*, 490.

¹² Scroggie, *Studies in Philemon*, 98-99.

¹³ Maclaren, *Colossians and Philemon*, 489.

The church prayed for Peter and God delivered him. The church no doubt prayed for Stephen and he was stoned. In both cases, the will of God was done. However God chooses to answer, we can give no greater service to any than to pray for them.

(v. 23-24) Greetings:

- Greetings – a small courtesy, a gesture of love, and an expression/evidence true Christian friendship
- Names – people Philemon knew personally. Philemon’s decision will affect those around him. These men show their support and love to him in the midst of a difficult situation.
- Personal Descriptions – these galvanize our identity as Christ-followers and remind us of our ultimate mission while living the Christian life in the midst of ordinary affairs.
- Notice what is omitted! Paul never mentions the Roman rulers or the Emperor Nero who imprisoned him. Paul writes that he is a prisoner “for Christ” and “of Christ.” “How sublimely Paul ignores all secondary agencies and all material surroundings. It is Christ who has made him a prisoner, not Nero. What unspeakable peace to the soul such a view of our afflictions would bring, and what motive and power for endurance!”¹⁴

(v. 25) Benediction:

- Grace – to have the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is in some sense to have every blessing!
- The fullness of God dwells in Christ and is distributed in, from, and by the Lord Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION:

Martin Luther on Philemon:

“This epistle showeth a right noble lovely example of Christian love. Here we see how St. Paul layeth himself out for poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleadeth his causes with his master: and so setteth himself as if he were Onesimus, and had himself done wrong to Philemon. Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also doth St. Paul for Onesimus with Philemon . . . we are all his Onesimi, to my thinking!”¹⁵

Alexander Maclaren:

¹⁴ Scroggie, *Studies in Philemon*, 104.

¹⁵ Quoted by Lightfoot in *Colossians and to Philemon*, 317-18.

“In this letter, the central springs of Christian service are touched, and the motives used to sway Philemon are the echo of the motives which Christ uses to sway men . . . The keynote of all is love . . . He too prefers the tone of friendship to that of authority. To Him His servants owe themselves, and remain forever in his debt, after all payment of reverence and thankful self-surrender. He does not count constrained service as service at all, and has only volunteers in His army. He makes Himself one with the needy, and counts kindness to the least as done to Him. He binds Himself to repay and overpay all sacrifice in His service. He finds delight in His people’s work. He asks them to prepare an abode for Him in their own hearts, and in souls opened by their agency for His entrance. He has gone to prepare a mansion for them, and He comes to receive account of their obedience and to crown their poor deeds. It is impossible to suppose that Paul’s pleading for Philemon failed. How much less powerful is Christ’s, even with those who love Him best?”¹⁶

¹⁶ Maclaren, *Colossians and Philemon*, 490-91.