

# PHILEMON

## Salutation

**A** **TK** Grk "Paul." The word "from" is not in the Greek text, but has been supplied to indicate the sender of the letter.

**B** **SN** The phrase a prisoner of Christ Jesus implies that Paul was being held prisoner because of his testimony for Christ Jesus. Paul's imprisonment was due to his service to Christ, in the same manner as John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos because of his testimony (Rev 1:9).

**C** **TK** The word "our" is not present in the Greek text, but was supplied to bring out the sense in English.

**D** **TK** Grk "dear." The adjective is functioning as a substantive, i.e., "dear one" or "dear friend."

**E** **SN** Apphia is thought to be the wife of Philemon.

**F** **TC** Most witnesses (D<sup>2</sup> Ψ 1241 1505 30) here read τῆ ἀγαπητῆ (tē agapētē, "beloved, dear"), a reading that appears to have been motivated by the masculine form of the same adjective in v. 1. Further, the earliest and best witnesses, along with a few others (κ A D\* F G I P 048 0278 33 81 104 1739 1881), have ἀδελφῆ (adelphē, "sister"). This on internal and external grounds, ἀδελφῆ is the strongly preferred reading.

**G** **TK** Though the word "our" does not appear in the Greek text it is inserted to bring out the sense of the passage.

**H** **TK** Grk "Grace to you and peace."

**I** **SN** I always thank my God. An offer of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία, *eucharistia*) to God is a customary formula for Paul in many of his epistles (cf. Rom 1:8, 1 Cor 1:4, Eph 1:16, Col 1:3, 1 Thess 1:2, 2 Thess 1:3). The content of the thanksgiving typically points to the work of God in the salvation of the believers to whom he [Paul] writes.

**J** **TK** Grk "making remembrance (or "mention") of you in my prayers."

**K** **TK** The Greek present participle ἀκούων (*akouōn*, "hearing") is an adverbial participle of cause relating to εὐχαριστώ (*eucharistō*, "I give thanks").

**L** **SN** Your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. In accord with Paul, John also advocates this combination of "faith in Christ and love for the saints." The believers' invisible faith becomes visible in the demonstration of love for others. This, of course, is not only desired,

1 From Paul,<sup>A</sup> a prisoner of Christ Jesus,<sup>B</sup> and Timothy our<sup>C</sup> brother, to Philemon, our dear friend<sup>D</sup> and collaborer,<sup>2</sup> to Apphia<sup>E</sup> our sister,<sup>F</sup> to Archippus our<sup>G</sup> fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your house. <sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you<sup>H</sup> from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

## Thanks for Philemon's Love and Faith

<sup>4</sup>I always thank my God<sup>I</sup> as I remember you in my prayers,<sup>J</sup> <sup>5</sup>because I hear<sup>K</sup> of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love<sup>L</sup> for all the saints.<sup>M</sup> <sup>6</sup>I pray<sup>N</sup> that the faith you share with us may deepen your understanding of every blessing<sup>O</sup> that be-  
longs to you<sup>P</sup> in Christ.<sup>Q</sup>

but commanded (1 John 3:23). Although Paul's comment here may appear as a stock expression to the casual reader, praising Philemon for his track record of faithfulness to Christ demonstrated in love for the saints is actually integral to the author's argument in this short but pithy letter. Paul will soon ask Philemon to demonstrate this love toward Onesimus, his runaway slave.

**M** **TK** The Greek is somewhat awkward here. It appears as though the text reads "...the love and faith which you have for the Lord Jesus and for all the saints." In other Pauline letters the emphasis seems to be "faith in Christ Jesus and love for all of the saints." Some ancient mss have altered the wording to produce a smoother reading; scribes changed the wording to resemble the more readable versions in Eph 1:15 and Col 1:4, "your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints."

**N** **TK** The term ἰακω (iakov) refers back to the idea of prayer (μνησάν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, *mneian sou poioumenos epi ton proseuchon mou*) in 1:4. See BDAG 718 s.v. 2.b; P. T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC), 279. The indicative "I pray that" was supplied in the English in order to make this connection clear.

**O** **TK** Grk "everything good."

**P** **TC** † ὑμῶν (*humin*, "you") is found in many valuable witnesses (Ψ<sup>61</sup> κ F G P 0278 33 1505 1739 1881 *al sy co*). The witnesses for ἡμῶν (*hēmin*, "us") are not as strong (A C D K L P Ψ 048<sup>vid</sup> 1241 30), but nevertheless represent a broad base. Internally, ἡμῶν could be favored because of second person pronouns surrounding it, making it the harder reading. On the other hand, the last second person plural pronoun was in v. 3, and the next one will not show up until v. 22, a fact which tends to counter the internal argument on behalf of ἡμῶν. Although a decision is difficult, with the internal evidence being

capable of favoring either reading, our preference is based on the external evidence; ὑμῶν is thus slightly preferred.

**Q** **TK** Grk "that the fellowship of your faith might become effective in the knowledge of everything good that is in us in Christ." There are numerous difficulties with the translation and interpretation of

this verse: (1) What is the meaning of ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως σου (*hē koinōnia tēs pisteōs sou*, "the fellowship of your faith")? Several suggestions are noted: (a) taking κοινωνία as a reference to "monetary support" and τῆς πίστεως as a genitive of source, the phrase could refer to Philemon's financial giving which he has done according to his faith; (b) taking κοινωνία as a reference to "sharing" or "communicating" and the genitive τῆς πίστεως as an objective genitive, then the meaning would be "sharing the faith" as a reference to evangelistic activity; (c) taking κοινωνία in a distributive sense referring to fellowship with other believers, and τῆς πίστεως as a reference to the common trust all Christians have in Jesus, then the meaning is Christian fellowship centered on faith in Jesus; (d) taking κοινωνία as a reference to "participation" and the genitive τῆς πίστεως as a reference to the thing participated in, the meaning would then be Philemon's "participation in the faith"; (2) what is the meaning of ἐνεργῆς (*energēs*; Does it mean "active" or "effective"?) and ἐπιγνώσει (*epignōsei*; Does it refer to simply understanding? Or "experiencing" as well?); (3) what is the meaning of the phrase παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ (*pantos agathou*)? and (4) what is the force of εἰς Χριστόν (*eis Christon*)? It is difficult to arrive at an interpretation that deals adequately with all these questions, but given the fact that Paul stresses what Philemon has done for the brothers (cf. the γάρ [gar] in v. 7), it seems that his concern in v. 6 is with Philemon's fellowship with other believers and how he has worked hard to refresh them. In this interpretation: (1) the phrase ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως σου is taken to refer to fellowship with other believers; (2) ἐνεργῆς is taken to mean "effective" (i.e., more effective) and ἐπιγνώσει involves both understanding and experience; (3) the phrase παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ refers to every spiritual blessing