PAUL’S LETTER TO PHILEMON

v. 1a Sender
Paul, a prisoner because I serve the Anointed Jesus, and Timothy my associate [adelphos, brother],

v.1b-2 Recipients
to Philemon our dear colleague, [beloved co-worker (synergos)] ² also to Apphia our sister, to Archippus who joined up with us [fellow-soldier (synstratiotos)] and to the Anointed’s people who meet [ekklesia (assembly)] in your house:

v. 3 – Greeting
May you have favor and peace from God, our creator and benefactor [pater (father)] and from our lord [kyrios (master/head of the household)] Jesus, God’s anointed.

v. 4-7 – Thanksgiving / Exordium
I always thank my God when I remember you, Philemon, in my prayers, ⁵ because I keep hearing about the confidence [pistis (relationship of fidelity/trust/loyalty/faith)] you have with regard to the lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people. ⁶ I pray that the sharing [koinonia (association/partnership)] of your confident trust [pistis] in God will result in a recognition of all the good that we are capable of in the service of the Anointed. ⁷ Your love has brought me great joy and encouragement because the hearts of God’s people have been refreshed because of you, my dear friend [adelphos (brother)].

vv. 8-20 Body
⁸ So, although in my capacity as an envoy of the Anointed I could order you to do what is fitting, ² I would rather appeal to you out of love ⁹ – just as I am, Paul, an old man and now even a prisoner because of the Anointed Jesus.

¹⁰ I appeal to you on behalf of my child [teknov], the one whose father I became [whom I begot] while I was in prison, Onesimus.

¹¹ At one time he was “Useless” to you, but now he has become “Useful” both to you and to me.

¹² In sending him back to you I am sending my own heart.
I really wanted to keep him with me, so that he could assist me on your behalf while I am in prison for proclaiming God’s world-transforming message; but I did not wish to do anything without your consent, so your good deed would not be done out of coercion but of your own free will.

Perhaps the reason that Onesimus was separated from you for a while is so that you could have him back forever, no longer as your slave but more than a slave, a beloved friend [adelphos, brother]. He is that special to me, but even more to you, both as a man [en sarki (in the flesh)] and as one who belongs to our Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, [(if you have koinonia with me)] welcome him as you would me.

And if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am putting this in my own handwriting: I will pay you back, in order to avoid saying to you that you owe me your life.

Yes, my friend [adelphos (brother)], I am asking you for something “useful” in the service of our lord. Refresh my heart as one who belongs to the Anointed. 

vv. 21-22 Closing

I am writing like this to you because I am confident that you will comply with my wishes. I know that you will do even more than I am asking. And, by the way, prepare a guest room for me, because I am hoping that, through your prayers, I will be restored to you.

vv. 23-25 Greetings and Farewell

Epaphras, who is imprisoned with me because of his service to the Anointed, sends greetings to you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. May all of you be conscious that the gracious favor of the lord Jesus, God’s Anointed, is present among you.

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1 The translation used here is the Scholar’s Version with insertions to indicate translation choices that mask familial and military metaphors as well as vocabulary for which no contemporary equivalent is readily available.

2 The translators have inferred here that Paul is claiming his authority as an “envoy” of the Anointed (Christ).

3 The use of this term in ancient letters indicates that “he went away” would be a more accurate translation.

4 καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ.

5 εἰ σὺν με ἔχεις κοινωνοῦν