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**Word Pictures in
the New Testament -
Philemon**

A. T. Robertson





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Description: A. T. Robertson was a renowned Greek New Testament scholar. His work on the Greek language is still consulted today. *Word Pictures in the New Testament* is his insightful treatment of that book. In the Greek New Testament, there are a variety of meaningful pictorial nuances implicit in the Greek constructions. These nuances are often lost in translation. *Word Pictures in the New Testament* explains them. Robertson examines Greek constructions from many different Testament passages. He provides background to many of the Greek words and their connotations in the original Greek, thereby shedding new light on the meaning of passages. Many readers have gained a new, richer understanding of the New Testament by studying *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. And although no technical knowledge is required to study this work, familiarity with the Greek language makes this work much easier to digest. Consequently, it is ideal for pastors, theologians, and students of the New Testament.

Tim Perrine

CCEL Staff Writer

Subjects: The Bible
New Testament
Works about the New Testament

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Word Pictures in the New Testament

Philemon

A.T. Robertson

1:1 **A prisoner of Christ Jesus** [*desmios Christou Iēsou*]. As verse 9 and in [Eph 3:1; 4:1](#). Old adjective from [*desmos*] (bond, [*deō*], to bind). Apparently used here on purpose rather than [*apostolos*] as more effective with Philemon and a more touching occasion of pride as Paul writes with his manacled right hand. **Timothy** [*Timotheos*]. With Paul in Ephesus ([Acts 19:22](#)) and probably known to Philemon. Associated with Paul also in I and II Thess., II Cor., Philipp., Col. **To Philemon** [*Philēmoni*]. A resident of Colossae and a convert of Paul's ([verse 19](#)), perhaps coming to Ephesus while Paul was there when his ministry had so much influence over the province of Asia ([Acts 19:9 f., 26; 1 Corinthians 16:19](#)). The name Philemon occurs in the legend of Baucis and Philemon (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), but with no connection with the brother here. He was active in the church in Colossae ("our co-worker," [*sunergōi hēmōn*] and was beloved [*agapētōi*] by Paul.

1:2 **To Apphia our sister** [*Apphiāi tēi adelphēi*]. Dative case in address. A common name in Phrygian inscriptions and apparently the wife of Philemon. "Sister" is in the Christian sense. **To Archippus** [*Archippōi*]. Dative case in address. It is uncertain whether he is the son of Philemon or not. Apparently he is prominent in the church in Colossae, possibly even pastor, probably not in Laodicea as some understand [Col 4:17](#) to imply. **Fellow-soldier** [*sunstratiōtēi*]. Old word, only here and [Phil. 2:25](#) in N.T. In metaphorical sense. Perhaps while Paul was in Ephesus. **To the church in thy house** [*tēi kat' oikon sou ekklesiāi*]. The church that met in the house of Philemon. In large cities there would be several meeting-places. Before the third century there is no certain evidence of special church buildings for worship (White, *Exp. Grk. T.*). See [Acts 12:12](#) for Mary's house in Jerusalem, [1Co 16:19](#) for the house of Aquila and Prisca in Ephesus, [Ro 16:5](#) for the house of Prisca and Aquila in Rome, [Col 4:15](#) for the house of Nympha in Laodicea.

1:4 **Always** [*pantote*]. Goes with [*eucharistō*] though so far away in the Greek sentence. **Making mention of thee** [*mneian sou poioumenos*]. See [1Th 1:2](#) for this phrase. **In** [*epi*]. Upon the occasion of.

1:5 **Hearing** [*akouōn*]. Through Epaphras ([Col 1:7, 8; 4:12](#)), possibly from Onesimus also. **And towards all the saints** [*kai eis pantas tous hagiōus*]. He spoke of "thy love and faith" [*sou tēn agapēn kai tēn pistin*] "towards the Lord Jesus" [*pros ton Kurion Iēsoun*] and by a sort of momentum (Vincent) he carries both words over to the saints, though it can be explained as chiasm ([Ga 4:4](#)) also.

1:6 **That** [*hopōs*]. Rather than the more common final particle [*hina*]. Connected with [*mneian poioumenos*]. **The fellowship of thy faith** [*hē koinōnia tēs pisteōs sou*]. Partnership like [Php 1:5 in](#) (objective genitive, [*pisteōs*]). **Effectual** [*energēs*]. Common adjective, like [*energōs*] (at work), in N.T. only here, [I Cor. 16:9; Heb 4:12](#). Papyri use [*energōs*] of a mill in working order, of ploughed land, etc. **In you** [*en humin*]. Some MSS. have [*en hēmin*] (in us), itacism and common.

1:7 **I had** [*eschon*]. Ingressive second aorist active indicative of [*echō*], not [*eichomēn*] as the Textus Receptus has it. Paul refers to his joy when he first heard the good news about Philemon's activity (verse 5). **The hearts** [*ta splagchna*]. See [Php 1:8](#) for this use of this word for the nobler viscera (heart, lungs, liver) and here for the emotional nature. **Have been refreshed** [*anapepautai*]. Perfect passive indicative of old compound verb [*anapauō*] as in [Mt 11:28](#), a relief and refreshment whether temporary ([Mr 6:31](#)) or eternal ([Re 14:13](#)).

1:8 **Though I have** [*echōn*]. Concessive participle (present active). **That which is befitting** [*to anēkon*]. Neuter singular accusative of the articular participle (present active) of [*anēkō*], to come up to requirements and so to be befitting. For idea in [*anēkō*], see [Col 3:18](#); [Eph 5:4](#). This idiom is in later writers. **I rather beseech** [*māllon parakalō*]. Rather than command [*epitassō*] which he has a perfect right to do.

1:9 **Paul the aged** [*Paulos presbutēs*]. Paul is called [*neanias*] (a young man) at the stoning of Stephen ([Acts 7:58](#)). He was perhaps a bit under sixty now. Hippocrates calls a man [*presbutēs*] from 49 to 56 and [*gerōn*] after that. The papyri use [*presbutēs*] for old man as in [Lu 1:18](#) of Zacharias and in [Tit 2:2](#). But in [Eph 6:20](#) Paul says [*presbeuō en halusei*] (I am an ambassador in a chain). Hence Lightfoot holds that here [*presbutēs*] = [*presbeutēs*] because of common confusion by the scribes between [*u*] and [*eu*]. In the LXX four times the two words are used interchangeably. There is some confusion also in the papyri and the inscriptions. Undoubtedly ambassador [*presbeutēs*] is possible here as in [Eph 6:20](#) [*presbeuō*] though there is no real reason why Paul should not term himself properly "Paul the aged."

1:10 **For my child** [*peri tou emou teknou*]. Tender and affectionate reference to Onesimus as his spiritual child. **Whom I have begotten in my bonds** [*hon egennēsa en tois desmois*]. First aorist active indicative of [*gennaō*], to beget. See [I Cor. 4:15](#) for this figurative sense. Paul is evidently proud of winning Onesimus to Christ though a prisoner himself.

1:11 **Onesimus** [*Onēsimon*]. A common name among slaves and made like Chresimus, Chrestus. The word is from [*onēsis*] (profit) and that from [*oninēmi*], to profit, to help. **Who was aforetime unprofitable to thee** [*ton pote soi achrēston*]. "The once to thee useless one." Play (pun) on the meaning of the name Onesimus [*onēsimos*], useful) as once "useless" [*achrēstos*], verbal adjective, [*a*] privative and [*chraomai*], to use). **But now is profitable to thee and to me** [*nuni de soi kai emoi euchrēston*]. "But now to thee and to me useful." Still further play on the name Onesimus by [*euchrēston*] (verbal adjective from [*eu*] and [*chraomai*], to use). Ethical dative here [*soi, emoi*].

1:12 **I have sent back** [*anepempsa*]. Epistolary aorist. As it will look when Onesimus arrives. **In his own person** [*auton*]. "Himself," intensive pronoun with [*hon*] (whom). **My very heart** [*ta ema splagchna*]. As in [verse 7](#). He almost loves Onesimus as his own son.

1:13 **I would fain have kept** [*eboulomēn katechein*]. Imperfect middle and present infinitive, "I was wishing to hold back." Again from the standpoint of the arrival of Onesimus.

In thy behalf [*huper sou*]. So “in thy stead,” “in place of thee.” **He might minister** [*diakonēi*]. Present active subjunctive (retained after [*eboulomēn*] with [*hina*], purpose continued, “that he might keep on ministering.”

1:14 **Without thy mind** [*chōris tēs sēs gnōmēs*]. Judgment, purpose (I Cor. 1:10; 7:25). Ablative case with [*chōris*] (apart from). I would do nothing [*ouden ēthelēsa poiēsai*]. First aorist active indicative of [*thelō*], I decided, I wished, decision reached (cf. [*eboulomēn*] in verse 13). Thy goodness [*to agathon sou*]. Neuter articular adjective (thy good deed). As of necessity [*hōs kata anagkēn*]. “As if according to compulsion.” See 2Co 9:7. But of free will [*alla kata hekousion*]. According to what is voluntary (Nu 15:3). Perhaps [*tropon*] (way, manner) is to be understood with the adjective [*hekousios*] (old word, here alone in N.T.), from [*hekōn*] (I Cor. 9:17; Ro 8:20).

1:15 Perhaps [*tacha*]. Old adverb, in N.T. only here and Ro 5:7. That thou shouldst have him [*hina auton apechēis*]. Final clause with [*hina*] and present active subjunctive of [*apechō*], to have back, “that thou might keep on having him back.” For ever [*aiōnion*]. “Eternal,” here and hereafter. Surely a noble thing for Paul to say and a word that would touch the best in Philemon.

1:16 No longer as a servant [*ouketi hōs doulon*]. “No longer as a slave.” So it has to be here. So it should be always. Paul sends Onesimus, the converted runaway slave, back to his legal master, but shows that he expects Philemon the Christian to treat Onesimus as a brother in Christ, not as a slave. But more than a servant [*all’ huper doulon*]. “But beyond a slave.” A brother beloved [*adelphon agapēton*]. A brother in Christ. How much rather to thee [*posōi de mallon soi*]. “By how much more to thee,” because of Philemon’s legal ownership of this now Christian slave. “In the flesh Philemon had the brother for a slave; in the Lord he had the slave for a brother” (Meyer).

1:17 If then thou countest me a partner [*ei oun me echeis koinōnon*]. As I assume that you do, condition of the first class. Receive him as myself [*proslabou auton hōs eme*]. “Take him to thyself (indirect second aorist middle of [*proslambanō*] as in Acts 18:26) as myself.” Surpassing delicacy and consummate tact. These words sound the death-knell of human slavery wherever the spirit of Christ is allowed to have its way. It has been a long and hard fight to break the shackles of human bondage even in Christian countries and there are still millions of slaves in pagan and Mohammedan lands. Paul wrote these words with wisdom and courage and sincerity.

1:18 But if he hath wronged thee at all [*ei de ti ēdikēse se*]. Condition of the first class, assumed to be true. Onesimus did wrong [*ēdikēse*], first aorist active indicative of [*adikēō*], to wrong, without justice). He had probably robbed Philemon before he ran away. Or oweth [*ē opheilei*]. Delicate way of putting the stealing. Put that to mine account [*touto emoi ellogā*]. Present active imperative of [*ellogāō*]. In the *Koinē* verbs in [-eō] often appear in [-aō] like

[*eleeō, eleaō*]. So with [*ellegeō*] as [*ellogaō*], late verb in inscriptions and papyri (Deissmann, *Light, etc.*, p. 84), though in N.T. only here and [Ro 5:13](#). It means to set to one's account.

1:19 Write [*egrapsa*]. Epistolary aorist. With mine hand [*tēi emēi cheiri*]. Instrumental case and a note of hand that can be collected. See [2Th 3:17](#); [I Cor. 16:21](#); [Col 4:18](#). I will repay it [*egō apotisō*]. Future active indicative of [*apotinō*] [*apotiō*] to pay back, to pay off. The more usual word was [*apodōsō*]. This is Paul's promissory note. Deissmann (*Light, etc.*, p. 331) notes how many of the papyri are concerning debts. That I say not [*hina mē legō*]. Neat idiom as in [2Co 9:4](#), delicately reminding Philemon that Paul had led him also to Christ. Thou owest to me even thine own self besides [*kai seauton moi prosopheileis*]. Old verb, only here in N.T., Paul using the verb [*opheilō*] of [verse 18](#) with [*pros*] added. He used every available argument to bring Philemon to see the higher ground of brotherhood in Christ about Onesimus.

1:20 Let me have joy of thee [*egō sou onaimēn*]. Second aorist middle optative of [*on-inēmi*], old verb, only here in N.T. Optative the regular construction for a wish about the future. "May I get profit from thee in the Lord." Refresh my heart in Christ [*anapauson mou ta splagchna en Christōi*]. See [verse 7](#) for [*anapauson*] (first aorist active imperative of [*anapauō*] and [*splagchna*] (3 times in this letter, [7](#), [12](#), [20](#)).

1:21 Obedience [*hupakoēi*]. "Compliance" seems less harsh to us in the light of [9](#). I write [*egrapsa*]. Epistolary aorist again. Even beyond what I say [*kai huper ha legō*]. That can only mean that Paul "knows" [*eidōs*], second perfect active participle of [*oida*] that Philemon will set Onesimus free. He prefers that it come as Philemon's idea and wish rather than as a command from Paul. Paul has been criticized for not denouncing slavery in plain terms. But, when one considers the actual conditions in the Roman empire, he is a wise man who can suggest a better plan than the one pursued here for the ultimate overthrow of slavery.

1:22 But withal [*hama de*]. Along with your kindly reception of Onesimus. On [*hama*], see [Acts 24:26](#); [27:40](#). A lodging [*xenian*]. Old word from [*xenos*], stranger. In N.T. only here and [Acts 28:23](#). I shall be granted unto you [*charisthēsomai humin*]. First future passive of [*charizomai*]. Used either as a favour as here and [Acts 3:14](#) or for destruction ([Acts 25:11](#)).

1:23 Epaphras [*Epaphrās*]. The Colossian preacher who apparently started the work in Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea, and who had come to Rome to enlist Paul's help in the fight against incipient Gnosticism in the Lycus Valley. My fellow-prisoner [*ho sunaichmalōtos mou*]. See on [Ro 16:7](#) for this word, also in [Col 4:10](#). Used metaphorically like the verb [*aichmalōtizō*] in [2Co 10:5](#), though some hold that Epaphras became a prisoner with Paul in Rome.

1:24 The other "co-workers" [*sunergoi*] here (Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke) are all named in detail in [Col 4:10-14](#) with kindly words.

1:25 Grace [*hē charis*]. This great word occurred in the greeting ([verse 3](#)) as it does in the farewell.

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