

Philemon in the Context of Paul's Travels

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"And at the same time also, prepare for me a guest room [ἐτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν]; for I expect that through your prayers [ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν] I will be graciously given to you [χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν]" (Philemon 22).¹

Here Paul expresses a confidence in Philemon and in those Christians who comprised Philemon's family and home congregation. He *expects* (ἐλπίζω) that through their repeated prayers at worship he will be graciously restored to them all as a *gift* (χαρισθήσομαι).² The passage presumes both that Paul would go to where Philemon and his congregation were located (Colossae, in southwest Asia Minor), and that Philemon and the congregation that assembled in his "house" (οἶκον, 2b) would provide for the travelling apostle suitable "hospitality" (ξενία; Lat. *hospitium*)—a word that could mean a "guest room" in Philemon's house.³

¹ As translated by John G. Nordling in *Philemon* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 148, 281. An earlier version of this article was read at the Michigan District North and East Pastors' Conference (Bad Axe, Michigan, May 8, 2007). The article depends in large measure on ideas presented originally in Nordling, *Philemon*, 20–25, 36–38.

² Nordling, *Philemon*, 285–286: "In the NT χαρίζομαι usually means 'to give freely as a favor, give graciously' [F.W. Danker, W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1078; henceforth BDAG]. The form here is the first person future passive. Its nuance here has been the topic of much debate. BDAG [1078] cites Acts 3:14, which refers to Barabbas being set free (χαρισθῆναι) and explains, 'the one who is "given" escapes death or further imprisonment by being handed over to those who wish him freed.' The *Testament of Joseph* [1:6] has a similar verb, χαριτώω: 'I was in prison, and the Savior acted graciously in my behalf [ἐχαριτώσέ με]. I was in bonds, and he loosed me' [as translated by H.C. Kee in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 819]. Thus Paul expects that in answer to the prayers of Philemon's congregation, God will grant that 'I will be graciously given to you.' The apostle had called himself a δέσμιος, 'prisoner,' in verses 1 and 9. Now he anticipates that he will be released from prison and thus free to visit Philemon and his household in Colossae."

³ G. Stählin, "ξένος κτλ," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 15 vols., ed. G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. Fabry, trans. J.T. Willis, G.W. Bromiley, and D.E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006), 5:19, nn. 135–37, supposed the following terms

or the more general "hospitable reception" shown to a traveler.⁴ Either way, the passage stands as a perfect illustration of the ubiquity of Paul's travel in general,⁵ and of the pertinence of the Pauline travel itinerary for better understanding Paul's letter to Philemon in particular.

In this article I shall first consider the likely location of Philemon's house-church in Colossae; second, I shall attempt to answer the question of how the gospel first reached Philemon and his congregation through the efforts of both Epaphras and Philemon; and third, I shall attempt to establish a more secure context for the letter by probing social relations Paul maintained between himself and Christians in the interior of Asia Minor, the precise numbers of whom cannot now be accurately determined. The likely scenario suggests that Paul's shortest letter was more than just a communiqué urging reconciliation between two feuding individuals—that is, between Philemon and Onesimus—as is all-too-often assumed by well-meaning interpreters of the letter who stress the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus, which is certainly an important emphasis of the letter.⁶ Nevertheless, there must have been an acknowledged "communal purpose" to the letter, besides the purely personal or theological purpose of "fixing up a broken relationship between an injured master and his slave."⁷ It bears stressing that Paul

were virtually equivalent to ξενία in Philemon 22a: "inn" (πανδοχεῖον, Luke 10:34); "inn" or "lodging" (κατάλυμα, Luke 2:7); "guest-room" (κατάλυμα, Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11).

⁴ Cf. "hospitality" (φιλοξενία, Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2 ESV). Stählin himself preferred "guest chamber" as an adequate rendering of ξενία in Philemon 22a in English ("ξένος κτλ," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 5:20).

⁵ Based on likely travel itineraries put forward by Luke in the book of Acts alone, Ronald F. Hock estimated that Paul traveled nearly ten thousand miles during his reported career, which put him on roads swarming with "government officials, traders, pilgrims, the sick, letter-carriers, sightseers, runaway slaves, fugitives, prisoners, athletes, artisans, teachers, and students"; Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry. Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 27. For ancient travel in general cf. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT; London, UK: Yale University Press, 1983), 16–23; also cf. Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Reprint; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 128–37.

⁶ Cf., e.g., Nordling, *Philemon*, 1–2, 300–301, 345–46, etc. Also cf. John G. Nordling, "The Gospel in Philemon," CTQ 71 (2007): 71–83, especially 77, 78, 80, 81–82.

⁷ John G. Nordling, "Some Matters Favouring the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon," *Neotestamentica* 44.1 (2010): 114. Others who have stressed the communal, as opposed to the merely personal, nature of the letter are Sara C. Winter, "Methodological Observations on a New Interpretation of Paul's Letter to Philemon," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 39 (1984): 206; Norman R. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the*

would have been passionately concerned for the vitality of the larger congregation of which Philemon and Onesimus were a part, and doubtlessly also for the good of Christians still further removed from those assumed by the letter—that is, of Christians known to have existed in the Lycus river valley (where Colossae was located), and probably of Christians who were located in Galatia still further east. Thus, some awareness of ancient travel, the geographical location of Colossae in relation to other cities in Roman Asia, and social networks extending far beyond the leading *dramatis personae* of the letter do much to shed light on the quite complicated reasons for which Paul wrote to Philemon and the congregation in the first place.

I. The Location of Philemon's House-Church

Where would Philemon's house-church have been located? The answer to this question is provided not so much in Philemon itself as in the letter to which Philemon has most often been connected—that is, Colossians. Many suspect a close connection between Paul's letters to Philemon and the Colossians⁸ for reasons to which we cannot do full justice here;⁹ let us at least consider, however, one powerful proof for the close connection of the two letters. It happens that the epistolary conclusions of Philemon and Colossians share five of six names listed in the final greeting. So Philemon 23–24 records the final greetings of Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke; likewise, Colossians 4:10–14 records the final greetings of Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus "who is called Justus" (ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰούστος, Col 4:11a), Epaphras, Luke, and Demas.¹⁰ Despite the absence of "Jesus who is called Justus," the final greeting in Philemon shares five out of the six names listed in Colossians, a remarkable correspondence between the two letters. The shared names must indicate that the five individuals in the two epistolary conclusions were the same people, for there could not easily have been separate Epaphrases, Marks, Aristarchuses, Demases, and Lukes in both letters. Thus, the five identical names, together with still other names that connect

Sociology of Paul's Narrative World (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 65–78; Larry J. Kreitzer, *Philemon* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 13.

⁸ In addition to most commentaries, cf. John Knox, "Philemon and the Authenticity of Colossians," *Journal of Religion* 18 (1938): 144–160; and John Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul. A New View of its Place and Importance*, Rev. ed. (New York: Abingdon, 1959), 34–55.

⁹ But cf. Nordling, *Philemon*, 324–328.

¹⁰ Cf. fig. 11 in Nordling, *Philemon*, 320 ("A Comparison of Philemon 23–24 and Colossians 4:10–14").

the two letters,¹¹ forge an "inseparable connection" between Philemon and Colossians, the evidence of which "cannot lightly be swept aside."¹²

Paul apparently had not yet been to Colossae when he wrote that Philemon should "prepare a guest room [ξενίαν]" for him in Philemon's house (Phlm 22a). That Paul had not yet been to Colossae is supported by two considerations. First, when Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians, he stated that certain Christians at Colossae and Laodicea had not yet "seen my [Paul's] face in the flesh [οὐχ ἑώρακαν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐν σαρκί]" (Col 2:1b). This small detail indicates to many¹³ that while Paul was certainly *known* to the saints at Colossae and Laodicea, a majority of Christians there had not actually *seen* Paul in the flesh, since the notion of seeing someone's "face" (τὸ πρόσωπον, Col 2:1) in the Pauline corpus expresses the immediacy of a personal encounter (cf. 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 10:1, 7; Gal 1:22; 2:11; 1 Thess 2:17; 3:10).¹⁴ Such instances may go back to the biblical idiom of seeing someone "face-to-face," such as occurs, e.g., in Genesis 46:30: "Israel said to Joseph, 'Now let me die, since I have *seen your face* and know that you are still alive'" (ESV, emphasis added).¹⁵

Second, although Acts records that Paul had passed through other regions of Asia Minor on previous occasions,¹⁶ there is no evidence to suggest that he had passed through Colossae itself before writing the letter to Philemon. In Acts 16:6 Paul and his entourage were hindered by divine impulse from preaching the Word in Asia (i.e., in Ephesus), so Paul could not have passed through Colossae at that time. In Acts 19:1 Paul did indeed reach Ephesus, yet he did so by way of the so-called "upper regions" (τὰ ἄνωτερικὰ μέρη), a phrase that probably refers to a route farther north that skirted Colossae by about twenty-five miles.¹⁷ Perhaps fatigue compelled Paul to traverse this northern route "over the hills"¹⁸

¹¹ E.g., Timothy (Phlm 1; Col 1:1); Archippus (Phlm 2; Col 4:17); Onesimus (Phlm 10; Col 4:9).

¹² Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3d ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 554.

¹³ See the list of twelve scholars in Nordling, *Philemon*, 20 n. 2.

¹⁴ So James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 129, on the basis of the passages provided in the parenthesis.

¹⁵ So Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 164.

¹⁶ Cf. Acts 13:13–14, 51; 14:20–21, 24–25; 15:41; 16:1, 4, 7–8; 18:23.

¹⁷ So F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 353.

¹⁸ So A. Souter, "Roads and Travel," in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, ed. James Hastings, John A. Selbie, and John C. Lambert (New York: Scribner, 1918), 2:396–397; cf.

and thus avoid the more heavily congested road through Colossae farther south.

Nevertheless, it seems quite possible that Philemon could have seen Paul "in the flesh" on some prior occasion (or occasions), even if the apostle had not yet passed through the exact part of Asia Minor where Philemon lived. Even if Paul had not seen Philemon in Colossae on an earlier occasion, Philemon could plausibly have seen Paul in the place where that apostle lived and taught for more than two years (Acts 19:10; cf. 19:8)—namely, in *Ephesus*, the great metropolis of Roman Asia. Acts 19:10 does not mention Philemon by name but does state that during Paul's lengthy sojourn in Ephesus "all [πάντας] the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord [ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου], both Jews and Greeks" (ESV; emphasis added). By his use of the word "all" here Luke may perhaps be engaging in overstatement,¹⁹ but his words need mean no more than that people from throughout the entire province of Roman Asia—and perhaps beyond—heard the gospel at Ephesus during the public lectures Paul himself delivered in the hall of Tyrannus (διαλεγόμενος ἐν τῇ σχολῇ Τυράννου, Acts 19:9). As the seat of the provincial governor, Ephesus attracted visitors on business "from throughout the province and beyond."²⁰

Hence it seems only natural to suppose that Philemon, possibly visiting Ephesus on business, may have been among the "all" who heard one or more of Paul's lectures, either among the Jews at the synagogue for three months (μήνας τρεῖς διαλεγόμενος, Acts 19:8) or among "the disciples" at the lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years (τοῦτο . . . ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο, Acts 19:10).²¹ From Ephesus Paul would undoubtedly have

F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 14.

¹⁹ For the possibility that Luke engaged in hyperbole in Acts 19:10 cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 648.

²⁰ Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 2:37, n. 215.

²¹ The "three years [τρετῖαν]" of Acts 20:31 may be an instance of inclusive time reckoning; P. Trebilco, "Asia," in David W.J. Gill and Conrad H. Gempf, eds. *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting* (The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting, vol. 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 310 n. 79. Alternatively, Paul may have rounded up the time of his Ephesian ministry to an even "three years." To consider the various possibilities, cf. Bruce, *Acts*, 356; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 559; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Christopher R. Matthews (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 163; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 648.

supervised ongoing evangelization to other parts of Roman Asia also,²² kept in touch with congregations founded earlier in his ministry,²³ and adhered to a rigorous schedule of missionary preaching and self-support designed to draw travelers to Ephesus in order to hear the gospel at the public lectures:

St. Luke . . . ascribes this dissemination of the Gospel, not to journeys undertaken by the Apostle [Paul], but to his preaching at Ephesus itself [cf. Acts 19:8–10]. Thither, as to the metropolis of Western Asia, would flock crowds from all the towns and villages far and near. Thence they would carry away, each to his own neighbourhood, the spiritual treasure which they had so unexpectedly found.²⁴

The Western text (D) of Acts 19:9 preserves the interesting addition that Paul's lectures occurred "from the fifth hour [ἀπὸ ὥρας πέμπτης] until the tenth [ἕως δεκάτης]—that is, from 11:00 AM until 4:00 PM.²⁵ These hours are supposed by some to have constituted siesta time in ancient Ephesus, so the textual addition attempts to explain why Paul (or his financial backers) might have been able to rent Tyrannus's hall for a reasonable price during off-hours. Quite possibly there were more people asleep at one o'clock *in the afternoon* than at one o'clock *in the morning!*²⁶ Colossae (where Philemon lived) was only a hundred miles or so from Ephesus.²⁷ It seems possible, then—indeed, *likely*—that Philemon visited Paul during the time of his Ephesian ministry and came to faith through the gospel Paul disseminated at the public lectures convened in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus. Philemon may then have allowed an associate of

²² This evangelization would especially have included the Lycus Valley, in which Colossae was situated. Bruce, *Acts*, 356; *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 15, n. 64, supposed that the "seven churches of Asia" (Rev 1:4) were planted at this time, and possibly still other Asian congregations.

²³ These congregations would have included those in Corinth and Macedonia. Paul probably wrote at least the first of his epistles to Corinth from Ephesus during the third journey; so Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 15, n. 86, with further testimonies there. According to Acts 19:22, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus from Ephesus to Macedonia.

²⁴ Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1879), 31.

²⁵ Bruce Metzger was inclined to accept this addition as an "accurate piece of information." Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 417.

²⁶ So, e.g., F.J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds. *The Beginnings of Christianity*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920–1933), 4:239.

²⁷ See the testimony in Nordling, *Philemon*, 22, n. 14.

Paul to visit him in Colossae and establish there a congregation in his own house (οἶκος, Phlm 2).

II. How the Gospel Reached Colossae: Epaphras and Philemon

If Philemon's congregation was located in Colossae, and if Philemon had met Paul for the first time and indeed had become a Christian as a result of Paul's public lectures in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9; Phlm 19b), then how did there come to be a congregation in Philemon's house—especially if Paul had not yet been to Colossae? Several scholars suppose that Philemon himself established the congregation there, as though he were a "preacher" who brought Christianity home to Colossae.²⁸ Dunn even speculated that "Philemon was a fine preacher."²⁹ The latter opinion, while theoretically possible,³⁰ in fact has several attending problems, which will be considered below.

Might then another seasoned Christian have brought the gospel to Philemon's house—one of Paul's many missionary associates, perhaps? Presumably Philemon might have permitted such a person onto the premises to teach his household the Christian faith and to fill what was essentially the pastoral office by preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. If that possibility was indeed the case, then Epaphras—not Philemon—becomes an attractive candidate for having actually brought the gospel to Philemon's home, located in Colossae. Epaphras was a native of Colossae (Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, Col 4:12), and from him the Colossian Christians had "learned" (ἐμάθετε, Col 1:7) the "grace of God in truth [τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ]" (Col 1:6). Such details may indicate that Epaphras—not Philemon—had been the original missionary to Colossae and possibly to the entire Lycus Valley (Col 4:13; cf. 4:15–16). Bruce opined that Epaphras actually evangelized the cities of the Lycus Valley in Phrygia under Paul's direction during the latter's Ephesian ministry, and founded the churches of Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea.³¹ Later, so the

²⁸ Thus Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, trans. W.R. Poehlmann and R.J. Karris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 190; Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary 44; Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 273; Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 138; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 34C; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 87.

²⁹ Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 321.

³⁰ There is a later tradition (*Apostolic Constitutions* 7:46) that Philemon became bishop at Colossae.

³¹ F.F. Bruce, "Epaphras," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas and N. Hillyer, 3d ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 326.

reconstruction goes,³² Epaphras visited Paul during his Roman captivity, and apparently Epaphras's report (ὁ . . . δηλώσας ἡμῖν, Col 1:8) of conditions in the churches of the Lycus Valley moved Paul to write canonical Colossians.³³ As we have already seen, Epaphras was almost certainly with Paul when he wrote Philemon (Phlm 23), and the apostle stated that Epaphras "had much toil" (ἔχει πολὺν πόνον, Col 4:13) for the Christians (ὕπὲρ ὑμῶν) on whose behalf Paul was writing Colossians. Lohse speculates that controversy associated with the hostile "philosophy" (Col 2:8) back home had forced Epaphras to withdraw from Colossae and return to Paul (imprisoned in Rome) for support and encouragement.³⁴ Indeed, Epaphras's so-called "toil" (πόνος Paul calls it, Col 4:13) might have consisted of his agonizing over the Christians of the Lycus Valley in his prayers (ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς) that they might stand forth perfect (ἵνα σταθῇτε τέλειοι)—that is, withstand the corrosive heresy back home³⁵—and be "brought to fullness [πεπληροφορημένοι] in all the will of God" (Col 4:12).³⁶ Both the intensity of Epaphras's prayer and his evident proximity to Paul suggest that Epaphras was more than

³² The following scholars, among others, affirm Bruce's reconstruction (see previous note): Theodore G. Soares, "Paul's Missionary Methods," *Biblical World* 34 (1909): 328; Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 440; and, especially, Michael Trainor, *Epaphras: Paul's Educator at Colossae* (Paul's Social Network, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 79–95 passim.

³³ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 3. Trainor, *Epaphras*, 3 and 55, abides by the critical notion that Paul could not have written Colossians (it is, in his opinion, deutero-Pauline), though I am not persuaded by his reasoning (see my review of Trainor's *Epaphras* in a forthcoming issue of CTQ).

³⁴ Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 174.

³⁵ On the so-called "Colossian heresy," see Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, 73–113; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 546–50; Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 17–26; and Deterding, *Colossians*, 7–12.

³⁶ The rare word πεπληροφορημένοι (perf. mid./pass. ptc. of πληροφορέω) is part of the vocabulary in Colossians that suggests that so-called "fullness" (τὸ πλήρωμα) was at the heart of the controversy at Colossae. Indeed, Paul effects several plays upon that word in the course of the letter (Col 1:19; 2:9; cf. πληροφορία, Col 2:2; πληρώω, Col 1:9, 25; 2:10; 4:17), including the snatch of Epaphras's prayer that Paul reports in Col 4:12. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 173, explains: "[One] does not attain entry to the 'fulness' (πλήρωμα) through speculative knowledge about cosmic relationships, secret initiation rites and worship of the elements of the universe. Rather by adhering to Christ as head over the powers and principalities, the believers have 'their fullness in him' (ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, [Col] 2:9f) and know what God's will is ([Col] 1:9f). Consequently, they can stand firmly as 'perfect' (τέλειοι) [Col 4:12] only if they have been entirely and completely filled 'with everything that is God's will' (ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ)."

just a founder of a Christian congregation at Colossae.³⁷ Paul had probably commissioned Epaphras originally to bring the gospel to the entire Lycus Valley³⁸ and then, during the time of controversy, Epaphras had represented the orthodox position in Colossae as "the plenipotentiary representative of the Apostle."³⁹ The terminology used to describe Epaphras in Paul's letter to the Colossians mirrors the apostle's own self-description,⁴⁰ so Paul probably intended that the literary image of Epaphras's life and ministry might conform to the impress of his own.

Philemon would also have supported the mission efforts in Colossae, of course, but in what one imagines was essentially a lay capacity. Paul addresses Philemon first (Phlm 1), ahead of Apphia and Archippus (v. 2), and that fact—together with other subtle textual indications⁴¹—suggests that Philemon was a person of considerable importance at Colossae, both in Paul's estimation of him and in view of the congregation that worshiped in his house (οἶκος, v. 2). Philemon was probably the owner of the house, and so he would have been a wealthy man as well as a slave owner,⁴² a successful businessman,⁴³ and the *paterfamilias*—a legal term that signifies "the master of a house in respect to ownership, the proprietor of an estate, [the] head of a family."⁴⁴ Most households in Roman antiquity simply adhered to the religious allegiance and practice of the *paterfamilias*:

³⁷ Contrary to Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 134, who refers to Epaphras as a "local leader." Trainor supposes, however, that Epaphras was "foremost in Paul's retinue" (*Epaphras*, 41) and of a "quasi-apostolic status" (*Epaphras*, 53).

³⁸ So Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, 31–33; Soares, "Paul's Missionary Methods," 328; Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 14; Deterding, *Colossians*, 14 n. 93, 30–31, 187; Trainor, *Epaphras*, 85–89.

³⁹ Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 174.

⁴⁰ Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 280, relates the Pauline self-description to Epaphras as follows: "He [Epaphras] 'always' (πάντοτε; [Col] 1:3) 'wrestles' (ἀγωνιζόμενος; see on [Col] 1:29; cf. Phil 1:30) 'on your behalf in prayer' (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς; [Col] 1:3, 9) 'that you might stand mature' (τέλειοι; see on [Col] 1:28) 'and fully assured' (καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι; see on [Col] 2:2) 'in all God's will' (ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ; see on [Col] 1:9)."

⁴¹ See "The Epistolary Recipients: Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and 'the Church throughout Your House'" in Nordling, *Philemon*, 160–176.

⁴² Paul twice refers to Onesimus as a "slave" (cf. αὐτόν . . . ὡς δοῦλον ἄλλ' ὑπὲρ δοῦλον) in v. 16.

⁴³ Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 301.

⁴⁴ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879), 723 (italics original). Here is the passage that the dictionary uses to provide a working definition for the term *paterfamilias*: "*paterfamilias appellatur, qui in domo dominium habet, recteque hoc nomine appellatur, quamvis filium non habeat; non enim solam personam eius, sed et jus demonstramus. Denique et pupillum patremfamilias*

It was the normal practice for households to conform to the religious affiliations and practices of the householder, *paterfamilias* or οἰκοδεσπότης. When the *paterfamilias* underwent conversion or change of allegiance, it would have been entirely normative for other members of the household to transfer their loyalties accordingly.⁴⁵

We should consider, therefore, that there could have been no congregation at all in Philemon's house had Philemon not cooperated fully with Paul from the beginning, received such emissaries as Paul would have sent (see discussion of Epaphras above), and supported the Christian mission in Colossae in any number of ways (e.g., providing for the catechesis and baptism of the dependents in his household). Paul's opening address ("to Philemon our beloved and fellow-worker [Φιλίμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν]," v.1) resembles other passages where Paul refers to trusted collaborators as "fellow-workers [συνεργοί]," for example, Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3; cf. Acts 18:2-3), Urbanus (Rom 16:9), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), and the mysterious "rest of my [Paul's] fellow-workers [τῶν λοιπῶν συνεργῶν μου]" (Phil 4:3). The aforementioned Christians might well have been literal workers—craftsmen, artisans, handworkers, weavers, and the like—because so much of the Pauline paraenesis was intended for Christians who were working.⁴⁶ There are yet other passages, however, where the term "fellow-worker" (συνεργός; cf. συνεργέω) seems to refer more specifically to men known from supporting passages to have been pastors and evangelists, who—together with Paul—were engaged in what we might refer to as the apostolic ministry. Thus, Timothy was a "fellow-worker" of Paul

appellamus" = "he is called *paterfamilias* who holds lordship in the house, and he is correctly called by this name even if he does not have a son; for we refer not only to his person but also to his right. Indeed, we call even a little boy the *paterfamilias*," Justinian Digest 50.16.195 (my translation).

⁴⁵ N.H. Taylor, "Onesimus: A Case Study of Slave Conversion in Early Christianity," *Religion and Theology* 3 (1996): 262. Taylor adds (*ibid.*): "This [conversion to the master's religion] would not have been a voluntary act but rather involuntary conformity, willing or unwilling, with the decision and action of the *paterfamilias*."

⁴⁶ So Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 64-65, on the basis of 1 Thess 4:11-12. For the work-related vocations of the first Christians in general cf. Todd D. Still, "Did Paul Loathe Manual Labor? Revisiting the Work of Ronald F. Hock on the Apostle's Tentmaking and Social Class," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 781-95; John G. Nordling, "Slavery and Vocation," *Lutheran Forum* 42 (Summer 2008); and John G. Nordling, "A More Positive View of Slavery: Establishing Servile Identity in the Christian Assemblies," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19 (2009): 63-84, especially 80-84. Still other passages that suggest that literal work was important to Paul and to his epistolary audiences are Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 2:9; and 2 Thess 3:6-13.

(Τιμόθεος ὁ συνεργός μου, Rom 16:21);⁴⁷ Paul and Apollos were "fellow-workers" of God (θεοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, 1 Cor 3:9); Silvanus, Timothy, and Paul were "fellow-workers" of the Corinthians' joy (συνεργοί ἐσμεν τῆς χαρᾶς ὑμῶν, 2 Cor 1:24); Titus was a "partner" of Paul and a "fellow-worker" of the Corinthians (Τίτου, κοινωνὸς ἐμὸς καὶ εἰς ὑμᾶς συνεργός, 2 Cor 8:23), and so on.⁴⁸

As the letter stands, however, there is no reason to suppose that Philemon was a pastor or a "preacher,"⁴⁹ since Epaphras, not Philemon, seems to have occupied that role at Colossae (see the discussion on Epaphras above). Paul probably referred to Philemon as "our beloved fellow-worker" (Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν, Phlm 1b) to form an affectionate bond with him and so link Philemon's artisan service—whatever it was—to his own unique office as an apostle and preacher of the word. The use of the term "fellow-worker" as an identity-building device between the apostle Paul, the co-sender Timothy, and indiscriminate Christians at Corinth, comparatively few of whom occupied pastoral office, occurs, e.g., in 2 Corinthians 6:1, where Paul writes, "as God's fellow-workers [συνεργοῦντες] we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain" (NIV). In Paul's letter to Philemon, therefore, the term "fellow-worker" (συνεργός, v. 1) most likely indicates an affectionate epithet used by Paul to elevate Philemon's past services to Paul and to Paul's emissaries, to the Colossian Christians (referred to as "saints" in vv. 5, 7), and ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ himself:

Paul calls him [Philemon] our "fellow-worker," thus affectionately linking Philemon's work with his own. The term "fellow-worker" is by no means confined to full-time servants of the Gospel like the men who in v. 24 join in greeting Philemon. All who toil for the furtherance of Christ's work, however glamorous or unglamorous their work, have a share in one great common work for eternity. Philemon must thrill with pride to have the

⁴⁷ Cf. 1 Thess 3:2, where Paul refers to Timothy as "our brother and fellow-worker of God [Τιμόθεον, τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ]."

⁴⁸ For other passages of this type cf. οὗτοι μόνοι συνεργοὶ εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ("these ones alone were fellow-workers in the kingdom of God," Col 4:11 [refers to Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus who is called Justus]); οἱ συνεργοί μου ("my fellow-workers," Phlm 24 [refers to Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, and possibly Epaphras in Phlm 23]). For the highly suggestive phrase παντὶ τῷ συνεργοῦντι καὶ κοπιῶντι ("to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it," 1 Cor 16:16b, NIV), which probably refers to someone engaged in the ministry of word and sacrament, cf. E.E. Ellis, "Paul and His Co-workers," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1971): 441.

⁴⁹ Contrary to Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 321, and others.

Lord's great servant Paul reach down his hand to him and say: "My fellow-worker."⁵⁰

III. Did Philemon's Home Congregation Link Paul to Christians in Galatia?

We have now established a backdrop against which to probe Paul's letter to Philemon still more deeply. If the issue behind the letter was an incident that involved a runaway slave,⁵¹ Philemon's immediate congregation would of course have been considerably affected and, one supposes, so would many other congregations, both nearby and far away. Distinct groups of Christians are mentioned in the Lycus Valley not only in Colossae itself (Col 1:2), but also in Laodicea (Col 4:13; cf. 4:15-16), Hierapolis (Col 4:13), Nympha's house (Col 4:15), and Philemon's house (Phlm 2b). None of these congregations were more than fifteen miles removed from one of the others, and each congregation probably had been founded by Epaphras during Paul's lengthy residence in Ephesus.⁵² There could only have been a considerable amount of give and take between the local Christians under such circumstances, so something really catastrophic (like the flight of a trusted slave in Philemon's household) would almost certainly have affected the Christians throughout the length and breadth of the Lycus Valley and far beyond. Nor does it seem too extreme to suppose that a kind of "pipeline" existed between Paul (wherever he was when he wrote Philemon), the Christians of the Lycus Valley discussed above, and possibly Christians still further removed that had been brought to faith in Christ as early as the first missionary journey conducted by Paul and Barnabas (cf. Acts 14:21; 16:1; 18:23).⁵³ Indeed, Paul could have founded congregations in Cilicia (southeast Asia Minor) not

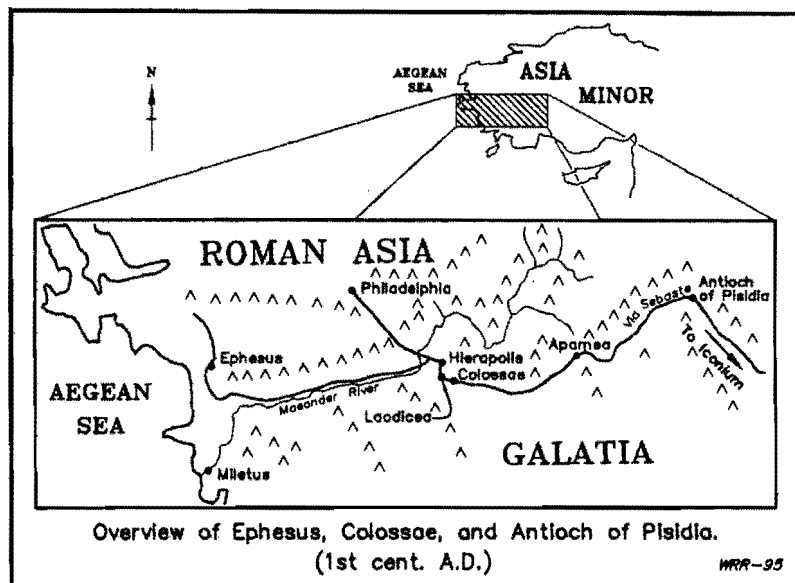
⁵⁰ H. Armin Moellering and Victor A. Bartling, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 249.

⁵¹ Cf. Nordling, "Author, Time, Place, and Purpose of Writing," in *Philemon*, 5-19; Nordling, "Some Matters."

⁵² For approximate distances between the three cities, cf. C.E. Arnold, "Colossae," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D.N. Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1089; and F.F. Bruce, "Laodicea," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4:229. On Epaphras as the founder of the congregations in the Lycus Valley, see Part II above and, additionally, J.M. Norris, "Epaphras," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, 5 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962, 1976), 2:107; F.F. Bruce, "Epaphras," *New Bible Dictionary*, 326.

⁵³ For the supposed "pipeline," cf. Nordling, "Some Matters," 113 n. 105. For more on the Christians of the Lycus Valley, cf. A. Kirkland, "The Beginnings of Christianity in the Lycus Valley: An Exercise in Historical Reconstruction," *Neotestamentica* 29 (1995): 109-124.

long after his conversion, in the 30s AD;⁵⁴ Wilson argues convincingly that the founding of Cilician churches during Paul's "silent years" influenced the itinerary of Paul's first journey and also his entire subsequent itinerant ministry.⁵⁵



Consider how the harmful effects of Onesimus's theft and flight may well have been felt much farther from Colossae, among congregations linked to Philemon's house by the efficient road systems of Asia Minor.⁵⁶ During Paul's first missionary journey (ca. AD 46–48) congregations had been established in Galatia, and these would have consisted of the Christians mentioned at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13–52), Iconium (Acts

⁵⁴ So Mark Wilson, "Cilicia: The First Christian Churches in Anatolia," *Tyndale Bulletin* 54 (2003): 17–18, on the basis of Acts 9:30. Wilson opines that Paul's "so-called 'silent years' were busy and not at all a passive spiritual retreat in Tarsus" (18).

⁵⁵ Wilson, "Cilicia," 29–30.

⁵⁶ Cf. "Roads, Travel, and Networking in Asia Minor," in Nordling, *Philemon*, 31–36. For a fascinating study likening the intricate system of Roman roads and shipping lanes to the modern "information superhighway," cf. Michael B. Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation," in *The Gospels for all Christian: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 49–70.

14:1-5), Lystra (Acts 14:6-20), and Derbe (Acts 14:20-21).⁵⁷ Pisidian Antioch, the first city Paul visited, was particularly important as the "new Rome" of the Greek east,⁵⁸ and quite possibly Paul hastened to that city for the express purpose of winning "converts of substance" there,⁵⁹ the most prominent of whom was Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:7).⁶⁰ Hence it seems likely that Paul deliberately bypassed Perga and other promising communities of Pamphylia (Acts 13:13) to take the gospel directly to the Roman elites of Pisidian Antioch who had been attracted to Jewish worship as "God-fearers" (cf. οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν, Acts 13:16). Mitchell all but proves that this same Sergius Paulus became, later in life, the earliest senator from the eastern provinces to attain to the consulship at Rome (as a suffect, in AD 70).⁶¹

At any rate, it seems scarcely credible that Paul, during his years in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:10; 20:31), would have allowed himself to be out of contact for any length of time with the congregation at Pisidian Antioch—to say nothing about undoubtedly large numbers of Christians still farther east in Galatia, whom he had visited on earlier occasions.⁶² In Acts 14:21, Luke mentions that Paul and Barnabas "discipled many" (μαθητεύσαντες ἱκανούς) in Derbe during the first journey, indicating that "a large congregation" had been founded there.⁶³ Likewise, the same two apostles (Acts 14:14) appointed elders for the Asian Christians "in every church"

⁵⁷ By "Galatia" I mean the four cities of south central Asia Minor just mentioned, as well as their surrounding regions: "It was as natural to refer to the churches of [Pisidian] Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe as churches of Galatia, as it was to call that of Corinth a church of Achaia [cf. 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Thess 1:7]" (Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2:4). I admit that there are highly-regarded traditional scholars who hold that Paul first evangelized the northern part of the Roman province—Ankyra, Tavium, and Pessinus (instead of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe)—although it seems impossible to prefer the latter interpretation to the former. For two traditional scholars who hold to the so-called "north-Galatian theory," cf. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 15-17; and Bo Reicke, *Re-examining Paul's Letters: The History of the Pauline Correspondence*, ed. David P. Moessner and Ingalisa Reicke (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 46.

⁵⁸ So Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2:8; cf. Stephen Mitchell and Marc Waelkens, *Pisidian Antioch: The Site and its Monuments* (London: Duckworth, 1998), 11-12.

⁵⁹ Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2:6.

⁶⁰ For inscriptions linking Sergius Paulus's family to Rome and Pisidian Antioch, cf. Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 1:151-152, nn. 68-77; 2:6-7, nn. 39-43.

⁶¹ So Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 1:152; 2:6 n. 40.

⁶² Acts 14:21 refers to Lystra, Iconium, and (Pisidian) Antioch, while Acts 16:1 names Derbe and Lystra. Further movements through these regions may be referred to in Acts 16:6 and 18:23, where "Phrygia" and "Galatia" are mentioned.

⁶³ Haenchen, *Acts*, 435.

(χειροτονήσαντες . . . κατ' ἐκκλησίαν πρεσβυτέρους, Acts 14:23), indicating that already from the first journey and thereafter provision had been made for men to fill the office of the ministry in congregations of Asia and beyond.⁶⁴ Indeed, the advancement of the gospel into south central Asia Minor had momentous implications for the destiny of Christianity itself: "If it did not mean that there were now more Gentile Christians in the world than Jewish Christians, it suggested that the time was not far distant when this would be so."⁶⁵

IV. Conclusion

It would seem likely, then, that Philemon represented a stable Christian contact for Paul located in the Lycus Valley and a man upon whom many itinerant Christians depended while traversing the rugged climes of Asia Minor.⁶⁶ We can assume that Paul's lectures in Ephesus were more or less public events⁶⁷ and that "all" manner of persons were drawn to Paul from far and wide, including Philemon himself, who was converted by Paul to Jesus Christ, as Paul indicates in Philemon 19b: "though I say nothing to you that even your very self you owe to me." After his conversion, Philemon apparently placed himself, his house, and all that was his at the disposal of Paul in service to Christ and to his fellow Christians. The apostle may then have sent Epaphras as his emissary to Colossae to minister and establish congregations there that met for the proclamation of the word, the instruction of catechumens, and the reception of the sacrament.

⁶⁴ Cf. Bruce, *Acts*, 286: "The πρεσβύτεροι were appointed on the model of those in the Jerusalem church (cf. [Acts] xi.30). . . . The 'elders' of a church are also called ἐπίσκοποι ('overseers'), as at Ephesus ([Acts] xx.28, cf. xx.17) and Philippi (Phil i.1), προϊστάμενοι ('leaders'), as at Rome (Rom xii.8) and Thessalonica (1 Th[ess] v.12), ἡγούμενοι ('guides'), as in Heb xiii.17."

⁶⁵ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 279. That at least the formidable New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce favored the so-called "south-Galatian theory" is demonstrated by the following quote: "The church of Antioch [on the Orontes River, in Syria] had now become a mother-church with a large number of daughter-churches, not only in the dual province of Syria-Cilicia but possibly in Cyprus and certainly in South Galatia," *New Testament History*, 278.

⁶⁶ For a physical description of the region, cf. William M. Ramsay, *The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1895), 1-6. Ramsay himself traversed the area in October 1881, apparently by pack mule.

⁶⁷ The word "all" (πάντας) in Acts 19:10 apparently means that *anyone*, "Jew or Greek," could have attended Paul's lectures over the two-year period (τοῦτο . . . ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἑτῇ δύο).

It is tempting to suppose that this connection between Paul and his co-workers, among whom he counted Philemon, consisted of a kind of "pipeline" by which Paul would have been able to maintain close contacts between himself and large numbers of Christians still farther east, such as those who had been brought to faith in Christ during the first journey (AD 46–48). It would have required a wealthy, dedicated, and strategically positioned Christian to maintain a linkage between Paul (at first in Ephesus, then later in Rome) and a place like Pisidian Antioch, which was connected by the highway system to still other Asian centers across the upland plains and mountain passes (see map above). Paul's reliance upon Philemon and his congregation must be the reason why the apostle called Philemon a "beloved fellow-worker" (τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ, 1b) and a "partner" (κοινωνόν, 17a), titles indicating a high level of shared experience, trust, and collegiality among Pauline associates in general.⁶⁸ These considerations suggest, at any rate, that Paul was not so much interested in mending the breach that had happened between Philemon and Onesimus in the one congregation, as he was in trying to head off a massive disruption in communications between himself and countless numbers of congregations and Christians still farther east. In the common understanding of the New Testament, we should take it that Philemon, members of Philemon's house congregation, Lycus Valley Christians, Galatian Christians, and ultimately all the Christians of all the congregations in all the missionary theaters were related to Paul, to one another, and to us within in the bond of peace (ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης, Eph 4:3).⁶⁹ Of course, Paul was concerned about the forgiveness of sins that he hoped ultimately would reunite Philemon to Onesimus, and the Christians of Philemon's house congregation—whether named or unnamed—to all the other Christians who would ever live, and so still hear

⁶⁸ Paul's description of Philemon resembles that of Titus, who was Paul's "partner and fellow-worker" (κοινωνός ἐμὸς καὶ . . . συνεργός) in service to the Corinthians (2 Cor 8:23). Indeed, Philemon must have been a highly regarded Christian in the Lycus Valley, especially when compared to the scarcely known Nympha (Col 4:15, no epithet) and to other unnamed Christians at Colossae. References to such unnamed Christians include "to the saints in Colossae" (τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις, Col 1:2a); "on behalf of you" (ὕπὲρ ὑμῶν, Col 4:13); "on behalf of . . . those in Laodicea" (ὕπὲρ . . . τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ, Col 4:13a; cf. παρ' ὑμῖν, 4:16a); and "on behalf of . . . those in Hierapolis" (ὕπὲρ . . . τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει, Col 4:13b).

⁶⁹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 280: "[A]s the readers heed the apostolic injunction to bend every effort so as to maintain their oneness in the local congregation(s) as well as in their wider relationships with other believers, the peace which Christ has won and which binds Jews and Gentiles together into the one people of God will be increasingly evident in their lives."

the concluding blessing of grace at the Divine Service: "The grace [τὴ χάρις] of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit!" (25):

Philemon, Onesimus, and the congregation gathered in Philemon's house faced obvious challenges—and opportunities—in Christ as they pondered their future together. But so did all the other Christians to whom Paul ever wrote, appending as he did his distinctive blessing of grace (τὴ χάρις) to each letter.⁷⁰ Paul never attempted to cast different, more "relevant" or "utilitarian" blessings to his diverse epistolary audiences. Instead, the relatively static form of his final blessing trusts that the words themselves, which God the Holy Spirit had inspired through the apostle Paul, convey "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" . . . to those who first heard, or all who would ever hear, the blessing.⁷¹

Even so—and for all his theological astuteness—Paul was a pragmatist who did not want the one crisis to undo all the work of his earlier missions. He therefore looked beyond the "ruckus" that had enveloped the one congregation, and realized the really catastrophic effect that the falling-out between Philemon and Onesimus could have upon Christians in the immediate area, and far beyond the immediate area.⁷² I submit, then, that it was out of a concern for the wider church in Asia Minor—and for the future of the entire Christian mission—that Paul undertook to write Philemon, both the man and the letter.

⁷⁰ Obviously related forms of the greeting appear at Rom 16:20b; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:13; Gal 6:18; Eph 6:24; Phil 4:23; Col 4:18b; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; 1 Tim 6:21b; 2 Tim 4:22b; Titus 3:15b; Phlm 25.

⁷¹ Nordling, *Philemon*, 343.

⁷² Nordling, "Some Matters," 112: "A similar scenario between Onesimus and Philemon transpired, then, causing such a ruckus in Philemon's household that Paul, writing for Christians of a 'high-context' society, would hardly have had to drop the sort of details many assume must accompany crises of this type." Trainor maintains that the letters to Philemon and the Colossians presume information well-known to their audiences: "This presumption indicates that the letters were written in a 'high-context' society. High-context societies produce sketchy and impressionistic texts, leaving much to the reader's or hearer's imagination," Trainor, *Epaphras*, 5.