

Paul Is Witty

Paul chooses his words carefully in his letter to Philemon, using language in ways that are provocative and witty.

- *Euphemism*. Paul refers to Onesimus's problematic absence from the household (due to flight or failure to return home on schedule) simply as a time when Onesimus and Philemon have been "separated" for a while (v. 15).
- *Paradoxical tact*. Paul says that he is not going to mention the debt that Philemon owes to him (v. 19), but of course, in stating that he is not going to mention it, he actually does mention it.
- *Pun*. Paul indicates that Onesimus was once "useless" but is now truly "useful" (v. 11); the word "useless" (*achrēstos*) sounds like a word that means "without Christ" (*achristos*); the word "useful" (*euchrēstos*) is a synonym for a word that serves as Onesimus's proper name (*onēsimos*).
- *Wordplay*. Paul refers to Onesimus as "my own heart" (v. 12) and then calls on Philemon to "refresh my heart" (v. 20), giving the latter reference a double meaning: refresh Onesimus (who is Paul's heart), and refresh Paul's heart by sending Onesimus back to him.