

Paul's Dilemma Resolved (vv. 13-14)

VERSE 13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might

minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel (ὃν ἐγὼ ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἑμαυτὸν

κατέχειν, ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῆ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου [*pro.acc.ms. hos whom +*

pro.nom.m.s. ego + impf.dep.ind.1s. boulomai wish, desire + prep pros with + pro.acc.ms.

emautou myself; “with me” + pres.act.infin. katecho keep, hold fast + conj hina + prep huper of

behalf of + pro.gen.s. su + pro.dat.m.s. ego me + pres.act.subj.3s. diakoneo minister, care for +

prep en + d.a.w/noun loc.m.p. desmos + d.a.w/noun gen.nt.s. egaggelion gospel]);

VERSE 14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything (χωρὶς δὲ τῆς σῆς

γνώμης οὐδὲν ἠθέλησα ποιῆσαι, [*prep choris without + conj de + d.a.w/noun genf.s. gnome*

consent + adj.gen.f.s. sos your + adj.acc.nts. oudis nothing; “anything” + aor.act.ind.1s. thelo

wish; “want” + aor.act.infin. poieo de], so that your goodness would not be, in effect,

by compulsion but of your own free will [ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ἦ ἀλλὰ

κατὰ ἐκούσιον [*conj hina so that + neg me + conj hos + prep kata + noun acc.f.s. anagke*

compulsion + d.a.w/adj.nom.nt.s. agathos goodness + pro.gen.m.s. su + pres.act.subj.3s. eimi +

conj alla but + prep kata + adj.acc.nts. ekousios willing]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 13-14

1. Paul continues to commend Onesimus to Philemon by highlighting what a valuable asset Onesimus had been to him in his imprisonment (v. 13).
2. Here is a relative clause that has Onesimus as its subject followed by an emphatic first person pronoun “I” drawing attention to Paul’s personal desire to retain Onesimus to minister to him in his imprisonment.
3. The imperfect verb “I wished” or “I would have liked to” (*boulomai*) is to be considered with the aorist verb “I wanted/preferred” in the next verse (v. 14).
4. The imperfect implies a tentative process, while the aorist describes a definite and complete action.
5. The imperfect can be rendered as an unfulfilled wish: “I would have like to...” while the aorist is a definitive act.
6. The imperfect denotes Paul’s desire to retain Onesimus, while the aorist denotes his resolution.
7. In v. 12 Paul has already said that he is sending Onesimus back to Philemon.

8. Here he reveals his desire to keep Onesimus and the reason for doing so.
9. In v. 14 Paul explains why he made the decision that he did.
10. The expressed reason for Paul's desire to retain Onesimus is a purpose clause (conj *hina* in order that).
11. "So that he on your behalf might minister to me" states the reason Paul wanted to retain Onesimus during his on-going imprisonment.
12. The precise wording of this phrase brings out the fact that had he retained Onesimus this would have benefited Philemon.
13. How so?
14. Paul and Philemon were in a partnership and as such there is mutual benefit to both parties.
15. Paul would have been benefited from service rendered and Philemon would be indirectly benefited by having a member of his household assisting his spiritual leader.
16. As a beneficiary of Paul's faithfulness as his apostle there is a certain indebtedness on Philemon's part.
17. The desired sphere of Onesimus' service is "in my imprisonment for the gospel."
18. The genitive case for the noun "the gospel" is a genitive of reference, expressing the real cause of Paul's imprisonment.
19. "The gospel" here refers to both the content of the gospel as well as the proclamation of the gospel which was the basis for his arrest and imprisonment.
20. V. 14 is the final part of this long sentence.
21. This verse is a transition from Onesimus as the focus of concern to Philemon.
22. This verse serves as a contrast to the previous clause.
23. This contrast is highlighted not only by the conjunction "but" (*de*), but also by the presence of the emphatic "your" possessive pro. *sos* your) a stronger pronoun than the simple genitive form of the 2nd singular "you" (*sou* v. 13).
24. Despite Paul's own desire, he is willing to give up his rights in deferring to Philemon.
25. Paul is hoping that Philemon will relinquish his own rights and act in a manner that is in line with Christian values.
26. Philemon's "consent" (d.a.w/noun *gnome* decision, consent) lies in the fact that Onesimus after all is his property and as such he holds the primary authority over his slave.
27. Again, all this is designed to encourage Philemon to act within the new framework of the CWL.
28. Paul and Philemon are in a "partnership" (cf. vv. 6, 17) and Paul recognizes that Philemon has priority in the matter of the disposition of Onesimus.
29. To retain Onesimus, as valuable as he has proved to be to Paul, would constitute a breach of that partnership, if Paul retained Philemon's slave apart from Philemon's "consent."
30. Paul's rights are superseded by Philemon's rights.
31. Had Paul retained Onesimus rather than sending him back, he would have put Philemon in a situation of "compulsion" (*anagke* necessity, compulsion) and would have sidestepped Philemon's "free will" (adj. *ekousios* willing; only here).
32. "Your goodness" or better "your good deed" (*ton agathon*) refers to a free-will application on the part of Philemon to allow Paul to retain Onesimus.
33. Circumstances were such that it was not possible for Philemon to make such a decision.
34. The word "compulsion" is found in the 2Cor. 8:7 in connection with the contrast between proper giving of funds and the wrong mental attitude.
35. So here we have a contrast between that which is "forced" and that which is "voluntary."

36. Philemon had the opportunity to do the right thing when he was confronted with Paul's letter.
37. Cf. v. 6 “*and I pray* that the partnership of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you in Christ.”

The Divine Purpose In It All (vv. 15-16)

VERSE 15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while,

that you would have him back forever (τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν, ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς [*adv tacha perhaps + conj gar + prep dia + pro.acc.m.s. houtos this reason + aor.pass.ind.3s. chorizo separate + pro. pros from + noun acc.fs. hora hour; “a while” + conj hina + adj.acc.m.s. or adv aionios eternal; “forever” + pro.acc.m.s. autos him + aor.act.subj.2s. apecho have back*]),

VERSE 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord

(οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν, μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσω δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ [*adv ouketi no longer + conj hos as + noun acc.m.s. doulos + conj alla + prep huper beyond + noun acc.m.s. doulos + noun acc.m.s. adelphos + adj.acc.m.s. agapetos beloved + adv malista especially + pro.dat.m.s. ego + pro.dat.m.s. ego + interrog.pro.dat.nt.s. posos how much + conj de + adv mallon more + pro.dat.m.s. su + conj kai both + prep en + noun loc.f.s. sarx flesh + conj + prep en + noun loc.m.s. kurios*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 15-16

1. Paul, at last, refers to Onesimus' flight from Philemon (aor.pass.ind. *chorizo* be separated; a term in Hellenistic thought that expresses separation from a locality), and he considers it serving the will of God (v. 15)!
2. “For perhaps” (*tacha gar*) views the defection of Philemon as turning out to be a positive thing, and not the negative that began the process.
3. The adverb “perhaps” is found only 2x in the NT.
4. The other occurrence like the one found here sets up a situation of potentiality.

5. Rom. 5:7 “For one will hardly/rarely die for a righteous man, though perhaps for the good man someone would dare to die.”
6. So why does Paul appear here to be indecisive?
7. The reason is, that all this will only work for good (Rom. 8:28), if Philemon does the right thing in regards to Onesimus.
8. An unspecified period of time elapsed between Onesimus’ flight and his return (“for a while”; *pros horan*).
9. “For this reason” (*dia touto*) points to ahead to the second half of v. 15, which serves to provide the reason for Onesimus’ temporary absence from Philemon.
10. This all could be read as: “Perhaps for this reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever.”
11. The phrase connected with “so that” (*hina*) introduces the reason.
12. Onesimus’ temporary absence from Philemon, then, becomes the backdrop for God to establish a new beginning between Philemon and Onesimus that is permanent.
13. So again, “perhaps” is a term expressing contingency and the need to see beyond what is apparent.
14. God is the ultimate subject behind this event, allowing the separation and bringing all three parties to the place where they see the providence of God for good in the whole affair.
15. Philemon receiving Onesimus back represents the fulfillment of the divine plan.
16. “So that you might receive him back” (aor.subj. *anecho* receive in full, have back) involves the volition of Philemon.
17. The verb “might receive back” has a technical sense of receiving full payment in monetary transactions (cf. Phil. 4:18).
18. Applied here it refers to the full and unconditional reception of Onesimus.
19. Note the contrast between “for a while” and “forever.”
20. The temporary separation and the angst it caused will now be overshadowed by a renewed relationship between the master and his slave.
21. To “have him back forever” refers to a relationship that transcends earthly relationships as the next verse makes clear.
22. This is what Paul means as per the title “beloved brother” (cf. Col. 4:9 “and with him Onesimus, faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you all.”; and v. 10 “I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment”).
23. In v. 16 Paul explicitly articulates the relationship that should prevail between these two believers.
24. “You may have back” is here in v. 16 given further definition.
25. “No longer as a slave” points to a recognition the reality of the social order, but is tempered by the words “but more than a slave.”
26. The acknowledges the relationship believes have in Christ where there is neither “slave nor free” (Col. 3:11).
27. “More than” (prep *huper* w/acc. beyond, more than) does not deny the reality of the temporal status of Onesimus the slave of Philemon.
28. “More than” does point to his status as transcending Onesimus’ present status in the world.
29. The two competing realities are both fully recognized by all parties.
30. “A beloved brother” (cf. Col. 4:9) serves to set the tone for how Philemon should treat Onesimus.

31. As Philemon is “beloved” in v. 1, and as he has consistently expressed his “love for all the saints” (v. 5; cf. vv. 7-9), he is urged to continue his reputation in his treatment of Onesimus.
32. This love is to transcend all that has transpired.
33. The fact that slaves were considered aliens within a household is drastically altered by this sibling language (“beloved brother”).
34. Expanding on his relationship with Onesimus, Paul urges Philemon to rise to the occasion and follow Paul’s example.
35. The words “especially to me, but how much more to you” is a superlative-comparative combination.
36. If Onesimus is most important to Paul, he is to be even more important to Philemon precisely because he is Paul’s own son.
37. This assumption is made explicit in v. 17.
38. The contrast between “in the flesh” and “in the Lord” completes the thought of v. 16.
39. Both expressions are to be taken with “beloved brother.”
40. The one points to the temporal relationship within Philemon’s household where Onesimus would continue to function as a slave.
41. The thought here is that Onesimus is to be treated as a “beloved brother” within the realities of the household of Philemon as well as the household of God.
42. In conclusion, Paul is concerned with helping Philemon to receive Onesimus as an equal “in Christ.”