

Final Appeal Based on the Relationship Between Paul and Philemon (vv. 17-20)

**VERSE 17** **If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me** (Εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ [*conj ei if + conj oun + pro.acc.m.s. ego + pres.act.ind.2s. echo have; “regard” + noun acc.m.s. koinonos partner, partaker, sharer + aor.act.imper.2s. proslambanomai accept, welcome, receive + pro.acc.m.s. autos + conj hos + pro.acc.s. ego*]).

**VERSE 18** **But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account** (εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα [*part ei if + conj de + pro.acc.nt.s. tis “in any way” + aor.act.ind.3s. adikeo wrong + pro.acc.s. su + pres.act.ind.3s. opheilo owe + pro.acc.nts. houtos “anything” + pro.dat.s. ego + pres.act.imper.2s. eklogeo charge to one’s account*]);

**VERSE 19** **I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it** (ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω [*pro.nom.m.s. ego + noun nom.m.s. Paul + aor.act.ind.1s. grapho write + d.a.w/noun instr.f.s. cheir hand + adj.intr.f.s. emos my + pro.nom.s. ego + fut.act.ind.1s. apotino repay*] **(not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well)** (ἵνα μὴ λέγω σοι ὅτι καὶ σεαυτὸν μοι προσοφείλεις [*conj hina + neg me + pres.act.subj.1s. lego “to mention” + pro.dat.m.s. su + conj hoti that + conj kai also + pro.acc.m.s. seautou yourself + pro.dat.m.s. ego + pres.act.ind.2s. prosopheilo owe besides; “owe...as well”*]).

**VERSE 20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in**

**Christ** (ναί, ἀδελφέ, ἐγώ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ· ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ  
 [interj. *nai* yes + *noun voc.m.s. adelphos* + *pro.nom.s. ego* + *pro.gen.m.s. su* + *aor.mid.opt.1s. oninomai* benefit + *prep en* + *noun loc.m.s. kurios* + *aor.act.imper.2s. anapauo* refresh, give relief + *pro.gen.m.s. ego* “my” + *noun acc.nt.p. splagchnon* “heart” + *prep en* + *noun loc.m.s. Christ*]).

**ANALYSIS: VERSES 17-20**

1. In v. 17 Paul issues an explicit request that Philemon act in a manner consistent with their mutual partnership.
2. The verse opens with a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition which translates to mean: “If and its true” (protasis).
3. Paul knows full well that Philemon “regards” (pres.act.ind.2s. *echo* have, hold, receive, consider, regard, etc.) Paul as his “partner” in the ministry.
4. “Partner” (noun acc.s. *koinonos* partner, sharer; Matt. 23:30; Lk. 5:10; 1 Cor. 10:18, 20; 2 Cor. 1:7; 8:23; Heb. 10:33; 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:4) refers to individuals in a common enterprise.
5. Paul challenges Philemon to uphold this partnership by doing the right thing regarding Onesimus.
6. The cognate term translated “fellowship” in v. 6 (*koinonia*) continues the theme of a bond between Paul and his dear friend at Colossae.
7. There the phrase “partnership in the faith” refers to their mutual attachment to the truth and what it imposes upon the two parties.
8. As noted in v. 6 Philemon had the doctrine defining the operational and viewpoint will of God towards fellow believers.
9. This noun occurs 19x in 17 verses: Acts 2:42; Rom. 15:26; 1Cor. 1:9; 10:16; 2Cor. 6:14; 8:4, 13; 13:13; Gal. 2:9; Phil. 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; Phm. 1:6; Heb. 13:16; 1Jn. 1:3, 6, 7.
10. The term “partner” was often used in first century Hellenistic papyri in the sense of “business partner.”
11. So Paul is arguing that Philemon should grant Paul the same love and consideration he has bestowed on others.
12. In other words, to be consistent, and not selective.
13. Paul considers Onesimus a critical link in that uninterrupted “partnership.”
14. Their mutual involvement in the life of this slave is key to this relationship.
15. This connection forces Philemon to do some soul searching, and take Onesimus back, and by so doing, keep in place his attachment to Paul whom he holds in the highest esteem (protasis).
16. Paul in the second half of v. 17 makes his request explicit.

17. The verb “receive back” translated “accept” (aor.act.imper.2s. *prolambanomai*) is used for receiving a person as an equal apart from the past (cf. Rom. 15:7 “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.”).
18. The nature of the desired outcome of receiving back into the household of faith on the part of Philemon is defined in that phrase “as *you would* me.”
19. This phrase recalls Onesimus’ status as Paul’s “child” (v. 10), and therefore as a worthy representative of the apostle.
20. Philemon held absolute power over Onesimus and he could have treated him as he pleased.
21. But to do the wrong thing would be the same as if he disrespected Paul himself (cf. v. 12 “And I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart.”).
22. Paul by this imperative is calling on Philemon to take the spiritual high ground in his reception of Onesimus.
23. “Treat him like you would treat me” makes this transparent.
24. In v. 18 Paul is covering all the bases.
25. “But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything” is a second 1<sup>st</sup> class condition meaning “and he has.”
26. This conditional sentence brings into view the hidden circumstances of Onesimus’ sudden exit from his master and his niche.
27. Onesimus, a runaway slave, had probably stolen from his master, and that prompted his escape.
28. A somewhat indirect statement to the exact circumstances to his escape from his master involved various wrongdoings embedded in the protasis.
29. The protasis is somewhat vague as per “wronged you in any way or owes you anything” as Paul here exercises tact.
30. It seems improbable that Paul was not privy to the actual set of circumstances that fueled Onesimus’ flight.
31. It has been noted that Phrygian slaves had a bad reputation for being immoral and corrupt.
32. Paul is here attempting to cover all possible infractions.
33. The verb “owe” can refer to theft as well as loss of service or both.
34. So Paul here is anticipating an objection on the part of Philemon to receive Onesimus as if nothing ever happened.
35. The call to “charge it to my account” adopts commercial language.
36. Paul assumes the responsibility to repay any such loss; after all he is doing it for his faithful “child.”
37. What father does not come to the rescue of his son where the circumstances warrant it?
38. The fact Paul was in prison does not mean that he had no financial resources at his disposal.
39. During Paul’s first Roman imprisonment the Philippians sent Paul a monetary gift (Phil. 4:18; cp. vv. 15-17).
40. Within these verses, dominated by imperatives directed at Philemon (vv. 17, 18, 20), Paul inserts a statement that contains an emphatic first person personal pronoun “I” along with his own name “Paul” (v. 19).
41. This is followed with a first person possessive pronoun (“with my own hand”).
42. Next, is a declaration of promise to pay any expenses that Philemon might have incurred with respect to his runaway slave.
43. The aorist verb “I am writing” provides yet another example of the epistolary aorist (cf. Col. 4:8).

44. The reference to Paul's writing with his own hand is to be compared with other endings to his letters where he provides his signature (1Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2Thess. 3:17).
45. Some interpret this to mean that Paul wrote the entire letter with his own hand, while others think that Paul wrote only the ending to this letter beginning with v. 19.
46. In any case, with his own signature, Paul promises to honor his commitment to pay Philemon for losses incurred.
47. The effect here is a legal promissory note.
48. This explains Paul's words: "charge (pres.imper. *ellogeo* also at Rom. 5:13) that to my account."
49. In Hellenistic papyri this verb has also been used to refer to missed days of labor with the departure of a laborer.
50. Paul in the second half of v. 19 adds to the rhetorical force of his appeals to Philemon by mentioning Philemon's indebtedness to him.
51. The phrase "not to mention" (*hina me lego*) is an idiomatic usage in parenthetical thought.
52. In light of the parallel in 1Cor. 9:4 where this same idiom is used as device to mention something that he claims not to mention.
53. The rhetorical phrase is designed to take Philemon's position from creditor to debtor, putting him under a timeless spiritual obligation to comply with the will of God in the matter of Onesimus.
54. The question is: "What does Philemon owe Paul?"
55. The answer is that he "owes" Paul for the apostolic ministry that brought Philemon salvation and his present standing in the plan of God.
56. The compound verb "you owe...besides" (*prosopheilo* owe besides; only here) has the additional meaning of "in addition."
57. "Your own self" refers to the spiritual benefits incurred as a result of Paul's efforts that brought the gospel to Colossae.
58. Here, note that Philemon owes Paul his very self which essentially reduces him to the status of Paul's slave/servant.
59. Paul again calls Philemon his "brother" (cf. v. 7).
60. "Yes" (*nai*) points to the expectation of a positive response (cf. Rom. 3:29).
61. This designation, together with the imperative "refresh" (*anapauo* give relief, refresh) is the framework for the main body of this letter (e.g., vv. 8-20)
62. In this central section of the letter Paul urges Philemon to think and act in a fashion compatible with the ethos of the household of God.
63. "In the Lord" refers to positional sanctification, and that includes the wisdom that we have available within that relationship (includes the 66 books of the Bible with all the topics contained therein).
64. And for Philemon that means that he is to respect the doctrine that extends forgiveness and restitution to an errant believer.
65. And all the more for a believer that was very high in Paul's estimation.
66. V. 20 has Paul asking Philemon for a payment on the debt he owes him.
67. And that payment is the full and unconditional reinstatement of Onesimus.
68. By doing the right thing Philemon was the source of spiritual refreshment to the man who owed him his very person.

69. “Refresh my heart” recalls v. 7 where Paul said he took much joy and comfort in the good deeds of Philemon toward the royal family at Colossae, resulting in the refreshment of the hearts of those saints.
70. As the final of the three imperatives of this section of verses, the impact of the freewill decision to fully embrace Onesimus refreshed the heart of the one Philemon owed so much to.
71. “My heart” should be considered in light of v. 12, where Onesimus is described as “my own heart” (same noun *splagnon*).
72. To refresh Paul would also refresh Onesimus.
73. Philemon has no viable choice but to reinstate Onesimus, if he wants to maintain the unbroken partnership between himself and his spiritual leader in Christ.
74. By so doing, Philemon will continue in his role as refresher of positive volition.
75. Paul is “in Christ” and “in Christ” he received refreshment from his ally Philemon.