

Instructions Regarding Onesimus (vv. 8-20)

Love versus Authority (vv. 8-9)

VERSE 8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do

what is proper (Διό, πολλήν ἐν Χριστῷ παρρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν σοι τὸ ἀνήκον [*conj dio therefore + adj.acc.f.s. polus “enough” + prep en + noun loc.m.s. Christ + noun acc.f.s parrersia confidence + pres.act.part.nom.m.s. echo + pres.act.infin. epitasso command, order + pro.dat.m.s. su + d.a.w/pres.act.part.acc.nts. anekei the right thing*]),

VERSE 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you (διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μᾶλλον παρακαλῶ

[*prep dia + d.a.w/noun acc.f.s. agape love + adv mallon rather, all the more + pres.act.ind.1s. parakaleo urge, appeal, exhort*] -- **since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus** [τοιούτος ὢν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ [*demonstr.adj.nom.m.s. toioutos of such a kind + pres.act.part.nom.m.s. eimi “I am” + conj hos as + noun nom.m.s. Paul + noun nom.m.s. presbutes old, aged + adv nuni now + conj de but, and + conj also + noun nom.m.s. desmios prisoner + noun gen.m.s. Christ + noun gen.m.s. Jesus*]]—

ANALYSIS: VERSES 8-9

1. Paul indirectly establishes his authority by asserting that he will not exercise his authority (v. 8).
2. The conjunction “therefore” points back to v. 7 as the grounds for Paul’s appeal to Philemon: “because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you in the past, I am appealing to you...”
3. V. 7 is part of the wider discussion of faith and love in vv. 4-7.
4. The participle “though I have” is a concessive circumstantial participle.
5. The term “confidence” (*parrersia*) is based on Paul’s position of authority based on his gift as an apostle “in Christ.”
6. Paul’s authority is such that it is “enough” (adj. *polus*) to issue a direct order to Philemon to restore Onesimus fully.
7. Here “confidence” or “boldness” is used with the verb “to order you” (pres.infin. *hupotasso* command, order) and points to Paul’s God-given authority over Philemon with regard to his relationship to his slave Onesimus.

8. Paul's "boldness" is based on his position as an "apostle of Christ by the will of God" a self-identification often found at the beginning of his letters (1Cor. 1:1; 2Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 2Tim. 1:11).
9. It is of special interest to note that in his letters Paul never refers to his own exercise of his authority over believers "to command."
10. On more than one occasion he expresses his hesitancy to command believers (cf. 1Cor. 7:6; 2Cor. 8:9).
11. It is striking that here, Paul affirms that authority, even though he says he will not exercise it toward Philemon.
12. As one commentator puts it, "Paul parades a theoretical apostolic authority unmatched elsewhere in his letters."
13. The expectation that Philemon will respond "in obedience" (v. 21) assumes that Paul is engaging in the exercise of his authority.
14. Regarding "what is proper" in this context implies a sense of duty.
15. With this expression (pres.part.w/d.a. *anekei* the appropriate thing) Paul is referring indirectly to the appeals that follow.
16. The phrase "as is fitting in the Lord" in Col. 3:18 refers in a wider sense of proper behavior in Christ.
17. Instead of a direct command, Paul appeals to Philemon on the basis of love.
18. "Appeal" and "command" points to a different framework of relationship between two parties.
19. "Appeal" (pres.ind. *parakaleo*) is a request made within a relationship of equals.
20. Paul's appeal "for love's sake" (*dia ten agapen*) serves as an example of Philemon's interaction with his slave.
21. Philemon has authority over Onesimus even as Paul has authority over Philemon.
22. Despite the contrast between "command" and "appeal," Paul has clearly established his authority to call Philemon to obedient submission.
23. Paul uses the convention of brotherhood to appeal to Philemon to treat a runaway slave as a brother rather than as a criminal.
24. "Yet for love's sake" (*dia w/acc.*) does not refer to Paul's mode of appealing, but to the grounds of this appeal in Philemon's own prior acts of love..
25. If Paul was referring to his own mode of appealing, he would have used *dia* + genitive, as he did elsewhere: "I urge you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christy, and through the love of the Spirit..." (Rom. 15:30).
26. Here the emphasis on "love" as the basis for Paul's appeal continues the theme already mentioned in the introductory section (vv. 5, 7).
27. This lies within Philemon's own application that derives from his personal faith the will of God rather than in external authority imposed by an apostle.
28. In vv. 9b-d Paul shifts to his own circumstances.
29. In the present argument for gracing out Onesimus Paul refers to himself as "the aged" and "prisoner."
30. These two designations point to weakness and dependence.
31. Shifting from a rhetoric of power to one of weakness, Paul urges Philemon to consider his relationship with Onesimus within this context.

32. While being an “old man” is the natural stage in one’s life journey, being a “prisoner of Christ Jesus” reflects an obedient will that is acclimated to circumstances that are imposed due to events out of one’s control.
33. Paul appeals to Philemon to relinquish his own autonomy and superiority.

Onesimus’ Relationship to Paul (vv. 10-12)

VERSE 10 I appeal to you for [concerning] my child Onesimus, whom I have

begotten in my imprisonment (παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Ὀνήσιμον [*pres.act.ind.1s. parakaleo appeal + pro.dat.m.s. su + prep para for + d.a.w/noun gen.nt.s. teknon child + pro.gentnt.s. emos my + rel.pro.acc.m.s. hos whom + aor.act.ind.1s. gennaio father; “begotten” + prep en + d.a.w/noun loc.m.p. desomos imprisonment + noun acc.m.s. Onesimus*]),

VERSE 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to

me (τόν ποτέ σοι ἄχρηστον νυνὶ δὲ [καὶ] σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ εὐχρηστον [*d.a.acc.m.s. to “who” + adv pote formerly + pro.dat.m.s. su + adj.acc.m.s. achrestos useless + adv nun now + conj de + conj + pro.dat.m.s. su + conj + pro.dat.m.s. ego + adj.acc.m.s. euchrestos useful, beneficial*]).

VERSE 12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, **sending** my very heart

(ὃν ἀπέπεμψά σοι, αὐτόν, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα [*pro.acc.m.s. hos + aor.act.ind.1s. anapempo send back + pro.dat.m.s. su + pro.acc.m.s. autos him + pro.nom.nt.s. houtos “that is” + pres.act.ind.3s. eimi + d.a.w/noun acc.nt.p. splagchnon + ad.acc.nt.p. emos my very*]),

ANALYSIS: VERSES 10-12

1. Paul finally names the persons that is the subject of his appeal.
2. “I appeal (*parakaleo*) has as its object “you” (sing.).
3. The preposition “concerning” (*peri*) with the verb “I appeal” is directed to Philemon “on behalf of” Onesimus.
4. Paul identifies Onesimus as “my child” (*tou teknon*)—an identification that is also applied to Timothy (1Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:23).
5. In both of these cases Paul is commending to the recipients a person coming to them from him.

6. The relationship under the designation “my child” imposes a certain demand upon the recipients as they consider how they should receive them.
7. The relationship between Paul and Onesimus is depicted as a father-son relationship.
8. In v. 10 we finally encounter the name of the person that is at the center of Paul’s appeal.
9. Onesimus was a common name applied to slaves.
10. This is the same Onesimus whom Paul describes in Col. 4:9 as “the faithful and beloved brother.”
11. Paul goes on to describe Onesimus, after identifying him as “my child,” as the one “who I have begotten in my imprisonment.”
12. The metaphor of “begotten” builds on the father-son relationship under the rubric “my child.”
13. Some interpreters take this to mean that as a result of Onesimus’ association with Paul in Rome that this is a reference to Onesimus’ conversion.
14. But here it is taken in the sense of spiritual restoration as in the example of the younger son in the parable of prodigal son.
15. In Phil. 2:22 Timothy is identified as Paul’s son, because of his involvement in the ministry: “But you know his proven worth, that he served me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *servi*ng his father.”
16. The reference to Onesimus’ birth (aor.ind. *gennaō* to father; give birth to) does not refer to his conversion as he was a convert that was part of Philemon’s household.
17. In v. 11 there is a wordplay on the name Onesimus.
18. Onesimus, a common name of slaves, means “useful.”
19. This wordplay provides a contrast between Onesimus’ past and his present status as a productive restored believer.
20. Paul does not detail how Onesimus “was formerly useless” (only here *achreptos*) to his master Philemon.
21. It involves his flight from his master.
22. The contrast between Onesimus’ past and his present “usefulness” (*euchreptos*) is because while with Paul he recovered from his reversionism (rebellion, betrayal, etc.).
23. The phrase “to you and to me” is Paul’s commendation of Onesimus based on his service to Paul in his imprisonment.
24. Paul is telling Philemon that the one who proved himself “useless” is someone who Philemon can benefit from both as a slave and as a faithful brother in Christ.
25. In commenting on Onesimus’ return to Philemon, Paul again states Onesimus’ importance to him (v. 12).
26. This verse reads: “whom (rel.pro.acc.s. *hos*) I am sending back to you, him (redundant 3rd person pro.), the one (demonst. pro. *houtos*) who is my own heart.”
27. The relative clause in v. 12 is a further description of Onesimus.
28. “Whom I have sent back” (aor.ind.1s. *anapempo* send, send back) is an epistolary aorist whereby the letter writer places himself in the timeframe of the recipient at the arrival of Onesimus.
29. The word translated “heart” reappears here (cf. v. 7) as Paul identifies Onesimus as “my own heart” (*splagchnon* also at Col. 3:12; Phm. 1:7, 12, 20).
30. The idea is Paul is sending ‘part of myself.’
31. The noun “heart” has a strong emotional connotation.

32. This identification serves to compel Philemon to forgive and receive back his estranged slave without reservation.

To accept Paul's "heart" would demonstrate Philemon's continued commitment in his labor of love for all the saints (v. 7), as well as his partnership with Paul (vv. 17, 20).