

1 Corinthians 7:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

Analysis

For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman—the phrase apeleukheros kyriou (ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου, "freedman of the Lord") uses the term for a manumitted slave. Slaves who are Christians possess spiritual freedom in Christ, liberated from sin's bondage (John 8:34-36; Romans 6:17-18). Their earthly slavery does not define their identity.

Conversely, **likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant** (doulos Christou, δοῦλος Χριστοῦ, "slave of Christ"). Free persons who become Christians exchange one master for another—they are now wholly owned by Christ. Paul frequently calls himself Christ's doulos (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1), emphasizing total allegiance.

This verse establishes a profound reversal: earthly slaves are spiritually free, earthly free persons are spiritually enslaved to Christ. Social status is relativized by spiritual reality. The gospel grants dignity to slaves while humbling the free, demolishing social hierarchies' ultimate significance (Galatians 3:28).

Historical Context

Roman law distinguished between slaves, freedmen (manumitted slaves), and freeborn citizens. Paul uses this legal framework to explain spiritual realities: conversion liberates slaves from sin's tyranny while binding free persons to

Christ's Lordship. This radical redefinition of identity challenged Roman social stratification.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does spiritual freedom in Christ provide dignity and hope for those in oppressive earthly circumstances?
2. What does it mean that free Christians are "slaves of Christ"—how should this affect our sense of autonomy?
3. How does this verse's reversal of social status reflect the gospel's radical reordering of values?

Interlinear Text

ο	γὰρ	ἐν	κυρίου	κληθεὶς	δοῦλός	ἀπελεύθερος
G3588	For	in	the Lord	he that is called	being a servant	freeman
G1063	G1722	G2962		G2564	G1401	G558
κυρίου	ἐστιν	όμοιώς	καί	ο	ἐλεύθερος	κληθεὶς
the Lord	is	likewise	also	G3588	being free	he that is called
G2962	G2076	G3668	G2532		G1658	G2564
δοῦλός	ἐστιν	Χριστοῦ				
being a servant	is	Christ's				
G1401	G2076	G5547				

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 2:16 (Parallel theme): As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

Philemon 1:16 (References Lord): Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

Galatians 5:1 (References Christ): Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Galatians 5:13 (Parallel theme): For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Psalms 116:16 (References Lord): O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.

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