

2 Timothy 1:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:

Analysis

The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. In stark contrast to Asian deserters, Paul commends Onesiphorus for courageous faithfulness. The prayer "The Lord give mercy" (dōē eleos ho kyrios, δῶη ἔλεος ὁ κύριος) invokes divine blessing not only on Onesiphorus but his entire household. This reflects biblical principle of covenant blessings extending to faithful believers' families (Acts 16:31, 1 Corinthians 7:14).

Onesiphorus "oft refreshed me" (pollakis me anepsyxen, πολλάκις με ἀνέψυξεν)—the verb anapsychō (ἀναψύχω) means "cool, refresh, revive," like cool water refreshing a weary traveler. Onesiphorus's frequent visits brought practical help, encouragement, and fellowship to Paul in prison. Such ministry was dangerous—visiting condemned criminals risked guilt by association. Yet Onesiphorus repeatedly came, demonstrating sacrificial love.

Critically, Onesiphorus "was not ashamed of my chain" (ouk epaischynthē tēn halysin mou, οὐκ ἐπαισχύνθη τὴν ἄλυσιν μου). While others fled to avoid shame, Onesiphorus embraced it by publicly associating with a chained prisoner. The verb tense indicates settled attitude, not momentary courage. "My chain" metonymically represents Paul's imprisonment and the shame it brought. Onesiphorus's shameless faithfulness exemplifies the courage Paul urges on Timothy (v. 8) and contrasts sharply with Phygellus and Hermogenes's desertion.

Historical Context

Roman prisons were not designed for long-term incarceration but detention awaiting trial or execution. Conditions were harsh—darkness, cold, limited food, no sanitation. Prisoners depended on friends and family for food, clothing, and basic necessities. Visiting prisoners was thus essential ministry but also dangerous. Guards could harass visitors, authorities could add visitors' names to suspect lists, and social stigma attached to those associating with condemned criminals. Onesiphorus's willingness to repeatedly visit Paul despite these risks demonstrated extraordinary courage and love. His example inspired early Christian tradition of prison ministry as essential expression of Christian charity.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Who are the suffering, marginalized, or socially ostracized Christians you could "refresh" through practical help, visits, or encouragement despite potential cost?
2. In what situations are you tempted to be "ashamed of the chain"—distancing yourself from faithful but suffering believers to protect your reputation?
3. How can you follow Onesiphorus's example of repeated, sacrificial service to those in need rather than one-time gestures of charity?

Interlinear Text

δῶη ἔλεος ὁ κύριος τῷ Ὁνησιφόρου οἴκῳ ὅτι
give mercy the Lord of Onesiphorus unto the house for
G1325 G1656 G3588 G2962 G3588 G3683 G3624 G3754

πολλάκις με ἀνέψυξεν καὶ τὴν ἄλυσίν μου οὐκ
oft me he and G3588 chain of my not
G4178 G3165 G404 G2532 G254 G3450 G3756

ἐπῆσχύνθη,
ashamed
G1870

Additional Cross-References

2 Timothy 4:19 (Parallel theme): Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

Acts 28:20 (Parallel theme): For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

Ephesians 6:20 (Parallel theme): For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Philemon 1:20 (References Lord): Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

Philemon 1:7 (Parallel theme): For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

Hebrews 10:34 (Parallel theme): For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Hebrews 6:10 (Parallel theme): For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Psalms 18:25 (Grace): With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright;

Psalms 37:26 (Grace): He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed.

Nehemiah 13:22 (Grace): And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

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