

Philemon 1:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

Analysis

I beseech thee for my son Onesimus—παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου Ὀνησίμου (parakalō se peri tou emou teknu Onēsimum, I appeal to you concerning my child Onesimus). τέκνον (teknon, child/son) indicates spiritual parentage—Paul led Onesimus to faith. Ὀνήσιμος (Onēsimos, Onesimus—name means "useful/profitable," v. 11 plays on this). Paul delays naming Onesimus until verse 10, building suspense. Readers would recognize the irony: Paul, prisoner, advocates for the fugitive slave who reached him in Rome.

Whom I have begotten in my bonds (ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, hon egennēsa en tois desmois)—γεννάω (gennaō, beget/give birth) describes spiritual regeneration (1 Corinthians 4:15, Galatians 4:19). ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς (en tois desmois, in bonds/chains)—Paul's imprisonment became evangelistic opportunity. Onesimus, fleeing Philemon, providentially encountered Paul, heard the gospel, believed. God's sovereignty orchestrated the runaway slave's conversion through the imprisoned apostle.

Historical Context

Runaway slaves faced crucifixion, branding, or return to harsh masters (Roman law was brutal). Onesimus's route to Rome isn't explained—perhaps he stole money (v. 18) to fund travel, seeking the urban anonymity of empire's capital. His encounter with Paul shows God's providence: the very apostle who'd evangelized

his master (v. 19) now converts the slave. Paul's Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30) allowed visitors, enabling Onesimus's access.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does God use your difficult circumstances (like Paul's imprisonment) for gospel advance and others' salvation?
2. Who are your spiritual children "begotten" through your gospel witness, and how do you continue discipling them?
3. Do you view interruptions and inconveniences as divine appointments or annoying disruptions?

Interlinear Text

παρακαλῶ	σε	περὶ	τοῦ	ἐμοῦ	τέκνου	ὃν	ἐγέννησα
I beseech	thee	for	G3588	G1700	son	whom	I have begotten
G3870	G4571	G4012			G5043	G3739	G1080
ἐν	τοῖς	δεσμοῖς	μου,	Ὀνήσιμον			
in	G3588	bonds	my	Onesimus			
G1722		G1199	G3450	G3682			

Additional Cross-References

Colossians 4:9 (Parallel theme): With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.

1 Corinthians 4:15 (Parallel theme): For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

1 Timothy 1:2 (Parallel theme): Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Galatians 4:19 (Parallel theme): My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

Titus 1:4 (Parallel theme): To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

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