

Philemon 1:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is,
mine own bowels:

Analysis

Whom I have sent again—ὃν ἀνέπεμψα (hon anepempsa, whom I sent back/up)—ἀναπέμπω (anapempō, send back/send up) describes returning fugitive to owner. Roman law required fugitive slaves' return; Paul complies legally while revolutionizing the relationship spiritually. **Thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels** (σὺ δὲ αὐτόν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα, προσλαβοῦ, sy de auton, tout estin ta ema splanchna, proslabou)—προσλαμβάνω (proslambanō, receive/welcome/accept).

τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα (ta ema splanchna, my bowels/heart)—Paul identifies with Onesimus so completely that receiving Onesimus equals receiving Paul himself. This echoes Jesus's teaching: receiving sent ones means receiving the Sender (Matthew 10:40, John 13:20). The apostle's representative becomes extension of apostle's person. Paul stakes his personal honor on Philemon's reception of Onesimus—rejection would personally wound Paul.

Historical Context

Fugitive slave laws permeated Roman society. Pliny's letters describe returning runaway slaves. Paul couldn't violate law by harboring fugitives indefinitely, but he transforms legal return into gospel opportunity. The letter travels with Onesimus and Tychicus (Colossians 4:7-9), providing safe passage. Paul's personal involvement (this letter) ensured Philemon couldn't punish Onesimus without betraying their friendship.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do you receive people who've wronged you—with suspicion and grudging tolerance, or wholehearted welcome?
2. When has someone so identified with another that rejecting one meant rejecting both—how did this affect your response?
3. Do you use your relational influence to advocate for the marginalized and restore the outcast?

Interlinear Text

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|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|
| ὄν | ἀνέπεμψα· | σὺ | δὲ | αὐτόν, | τοῦτ' | ἔστιν | τὰ |
| Whom | I have sent again | thou | therefore | him | G5124 | G2076 | G3588 |
| G3739 | G375 | G4771 | G1161 | G846 | | | |
| ἐμὰ | σπλάγχνα· | πρὸς | λαβοῦ· | | | | |
| is mine own | bowels | receive | | | | | |
| G1699 | G4698 | G4355 | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 31:20 (Parallel theme): Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.

Ephesians 4:32 (Parallel theme): And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Mark 11:25 (Parallel theme): And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

Luke 15:20 (Parallel theme): And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

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