

Philemon 1:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

Analysis

Whom I would have retained with me—δν ἐγὼ ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν κατέχειν (hon egō eboulomēn pros emauton katechein, whom I myself was wishing to keep with myself)—βούλομαι (boulomai, wish/desire) and κατέχω (katechō, hold/retain). Paul confesses his desire: keep Onesimus as personal assistant. The imperfect tense ἐβουλόμην (eboulomēn, I was wishing) indicates past deliberation that he rejected.

That in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel (ινα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῇ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, hina hyper sou moi diakonē en tois desmois tou euangeliou)—ὑπὲρ σοῦ (hyper sou, on your behalf/in your place) suggests Onesimus's service would substitute for Philemon's desired but impossible service. διακονέω (diakoneō, serve/minister) in τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (the bonds of the gospel)—Paul's imprisonment was "for the gospel," giving it redemptive meaning. Onesimus could physically serve what Philemon could only spiritually support.

Historical Context

Roman house arrest (custodia libera) allowed personal attendants. Paul's co-workers included Timothy, Luke, Aristarchus, and others (Colossians 4:7-14, Philippians 2:19-30). Onesimus joined this team, proving his transformation from runaway to faithful minister. The phrase "in your stead" implies Philemon owed

Paul service—perhaps Paul had financially supported or spiritually mentored Philemon, creating reciprocal obligation in patronage culture.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. Do you release people to return to difficult situations even when you'd prefer their company and help?
2. How do you view your circumstances—neutral facts or "bonds of the gospel" with redemptive purpose?
3. Whose service or support do you appreciate as standing "in the stead" of others who cannot personally help?

Interlinear Text

ὅν	ἐγὼ	ἐβουλόμην	πρὸς	ἐμαυτὸν	κατέχειν	ἵνα	ὑπὲρ
Whom	I	would	with	me	have retained	that	stead
G3739	G1473	G1014	G4314	G1683	G2722	G2443	G5228
σοῦ	διακονῆ	μοι	ἐν	τοῖς	δεσμοῖς	τοῦ	
in thy	he might have ministered	unto me	in	G3588	the bonds	G3588	
G4675	G1247	G3427	G1722		G1199		
εὐαγγελίου							
of the gospel							
G2098							

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 3:1 (Parallel theme): For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

Philippians 1:7 (Parallel theme): Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

1 Corinthians 16:17 (Parallel theme): I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied.

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