

Philemon 1:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

Analysis

But without thy mind would I do nothing—χωρίς δὲ τῆς σῆς γνώμης οὐδὲν ἠθέλησα ποιῆσαι (chōris de tēs sēs gnōmēs ouden ēthelēsa poiēsai, but without your opinion/consent nothing I wished to do)—γνώμη (gnōmē, opinion/judgment/consent). Paul refuses to keep Onesimus without Philemon's permission, despite apostolic authority and personal desire. This respects Philemon's property rights (however much gospel will transform them) and moral agency.

That thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly (ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ᾗ ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἐκούσιον, hina mē hōs kata anankēn to agathon sou ē alla kata hekousion)—ἀνάγκη (anankē, necessity/compulsion) versus ἐκούσιος (hekousion, voluntary/willing). τὸ ἀγαθόν (to agathon, your good deed/benefit) must flow from free choice. Paul could have commanded (v. 8) or simply kept Onesimus (v. 13), but coerced goodness isn't true virtue. Gospel produces willing obedience from transformed hearts, not grudging compliance.

Historical Context

Ancient ethics debated voluntary versus compelled virtue. Stoics prized rational choice; Paul agrees but roots freedom in grace. The patron-client system operated through obligation and reciprocity; Paul both uses (leveraging friendship) and transcends (seeking heartfelt response) this system. Forced forgiveness would embitter Philemon and demean Onesimus; willing reconciliation demonstrates gospel power.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Do you respect others' agency and decision-making even when you could manipulate or coerce desired outcomes?
2. How do you cultivate willing obedience to God versus mere external conformity or duty-driven compliance?
3. What good deeds do you perform "of necessity" (social pressure, guilt) rather than voluntary joy?

Interlinear Text

χωρίς	δὲ	τῆς	σῆς	γνώμης	οὐδὲν	ἠθέλησα	ποιῆσαι	ἵνα
without	But	G3588	thy	mind	nothing	would	I do	G2443
G5565	G1161		G4674	G1106	G3762	G2309	G4160	
μὴ	ὥς	κατὰ	ἀνάγκην	τὸ	ἀγαθόν	σου	ἢ	ἀλλὰ
G3361	as	it were of	necessity	G3588	benefit	thy	be	but
	G5613	G2596	G318		G18	G4675	G5600	G235
κατὰ	ἐκούσιον							
it were of	willingly							
G2596	G1595							

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 9:7 (Parallel theme): Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

1 Chronicles 29:17 (Parallel theme): I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.

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