

Philemon 1:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldst receive him for ever;

Analysis

For perhaps he therefore departed for a season—τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν (tacha gar dia touto echōrīsthē pros hōran, for perhaps because of this he was separated for an hour/season)—τάχα (tacha, perhaps/probably) expresses tentative divine providence reading. ἐχωρίσθη (echōrīsthē, was separated) is divine passive: God separated them. πρὸς ὥραν (pros hōran, for an hour/short time) contrasts with αἰώνιον (aiōnion, eternal, v. 15b)—temporary separation yields permanent reunion.

That thou shouldst receive him for ever (ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς, hina aiōnion auton apechēs, that you might have him eternally)—αἰώνιος (aiōnios, eternal/forever). The theology: God orchestrated Onesimus's sinful flight to accomplish his salvation and eternal relationship with Philemon. Romans 8:28 applied: God works through evil for good. Joseph's words to brothers: "You meant evil, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Onesimus's temporary absence as slave produces eternal relationship as brother.

Historical Context

Providence (πρόνοια, pronoia) was philosophical concept: divine oversight of human affairs. Paul Christianizes it: God superintends history redemptively. The "for ever" suggests both earthly reconciliation and eternal heavenly fellowship. Slavery was temporal institution; brotherhood in Christ eternal reality. This verse

seeds slavery's eventual abolition—if brotherhood is eternal and slavery temporary, Christianity undermines slavery's foundations.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. Can you discern God's providential purposes in painful separations, betrayals, and losses you've experienced?
2. How does viewing present suffering as "for a season" versus eternal blessing help you endure and forgive?
3. What relationships might God be transforming from temporary, superficial connections to eternal, deep brotherhood?

Interlinear Text

τάχα	γὰρ	διὰ	τοῦτο	ἐχωρίσθη	πρὸς	ὥραν	ἵνα
perhaps	For	G1223	therefore	departed	for	a season	that
G5029	G1063		G5124	G5563	G4314	G5610	G2443
αἰώνιον	αὐτὸν		ἀπέχης				
for ever	him		thou shouldst receive				
G166	G846		G568				

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 50:20 (Parallel theme): But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.