

Philemon 1:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

Analysis

Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved—οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον (ouketi hōs doulon alla hyper doulon, no longer as a slave but above/more than a slave) ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν (adelphon agapēton, a beloved brother). ὑπὲρ δοῦλον (hyper doulon, above/beyond slave)—not "instead of" (Paul doesn't explicitly demand manumission) but "more than/superior to" (the relationship transcends legal categories). ἀδελφός (adelphos, brother) is family language; ἀγαπητός (agapētos, beloved) intensifies it.

Specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?—μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσῳ δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ (malista emoi, posō de mallon soi kai en sarki kai en kyriō)—if Onesimus is beloved to Paul (mere spiritual connection), how much more to Philemon (employer and brother)? ἐν σαρκὶ (en sarki, in the flesh—earthly master-slave relation) καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ (kai en kyriō, and in the Lord—spiritual brother relation). Both relationships now coexist, with spiritual reality transforming earthly dynamics.

Historical Context

This verse is Christianity's time-bomb under slavery. If slaves are "beloved brothers," slavery's dehumanization becomes impossible to maintain. The equation ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ (in flesh and in Lord) held together two realities: continued legal slavery (gradual social change) and present spiritual equality (immediate

gospel truth). Eventually, gospel equality demanded social transformation—the abolitionist movement's biblical foundation.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do you relate to social "inferiors"—employees, service workers, marginalized people—as beloved brothers/sisters in Christ?
2. What social hierarchies (class, race, education, wealth) do you allow to contradict gospel brotherhood?
3. How does viewing others as "more than" their social role or function change your treatment of them?

Interlinear Text

οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ δοῦλον ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν,

Not now **as** **a servant** **but** **above** **a servant** **a brother** **beloved**

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μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσῳ δὲ μᾶλλόν σοι καὶ ἐν

specially **to me** **how much** **but** **more** **unto thee** **and** **in**

G3122 G1698 G4214 G1161 G3123 G4671 G2532 G1722

σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν Κυρίῳ

the flesh **and** **in** **the Lord**

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Additional Cross-References

Colossians 3:22 (Parallel theme): Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

Matthew 23:8 (Parallel theme): But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

1 Corinthians 7:22 (References Lord): For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

1 Timothy 6:2 (Love): And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.