

Paul and Slaves

what his letters have to say
about Paul's attitude to slaves

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Introduction

In first century Asia Minor and Greece, when the apostle Paul wrote his letters, slavery was a common phenomenon. Slaves formed possibly up to a third of the population of the cities of Asia Minor. They were employed in most occupations and were part of virtually all aspects of daily life. During his journeys, Paul will have encountered many slaves, in the homes of wealthy patrons, in shops serving customers, in the streets attending children and as members of his own communities.¹

Paul uses the term 'slavery' and related terms (δουλεία, slavery, δοῦλος, slave, and δουλεύω, to be a slave) many times in his letters. In most cases, he uses them as a metaphor to describe a state of obedience or bondage to God or other powers. Sometimes, when used for obedience to God, this metaphor has a positive meaning, as it does when Paul calls himself a slave of Christ.² In other cases, when used for a state of bondage to powers such as sin or death, it has a highly negative meaning.

In four cases in the undisputed Pauline letters, however, the word δοῦλος denotes actual slaves in the communities to which the letters were written.³ In three texts slave and free are mentioned in the context of other social groups, such as Jews and Greeks, men and women, and married and unmarried, circumcised and uncircumcised people (in 1 Cor 12:12-13, Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 7:21-24 respectively). In the fourth text, the Letter to Philemon, someone mentioned by name, Onesimus, is described as a slave.

Although slavery as a metaphor in Paul's writing has been analysed in literature, hardly any comprehensive study of the texts dealing with non-metaphorical slaves has been attempted yet.⁴ One notable exception is the work on ideas of slavery in antiquity by historian Peter Garnsey, who compares the views of Aristotle, the Stoics, Philo, Paul and Augustine.⁵ Garnsey briefly discusses the four texts mentioned above, and draws some interesting conclusions. There are some drawbacks to his approach, however, in that he includes several non-Pauline texts from the New Testament in his analysis of Paul and does not always take the context of the passage into account.⁶

Garnsey characterises Paul's attitude as conventional and conservative in some passages, while in others Paul "appears to thumb his nose at all the important social and cultural hierarchies of his world, as upheld by laws, conventions and values."⁷

Ancient slavery

What were the social hierarchies and conventions of Paul's time, when it comes to the view and treatment of slaves? Slaves were property, the master had rights over both the labour and the person of the slave. This meant that a slave was under the total control of another person, without kinship, without social identity. A slave could be

¹ Westermann 1955, 127; Schumacher 2001, 195-210

² e.g. Rom 1:1, Phil 1:1

³ See Bauer δοῦλος

⁴ works on slavery as a metaphor include Martin, D.B., *Slavery as Salvation, the Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity*, Yale 1990 and Comes, I.A.H., *The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of the Early Church: from the New Testament to the Beginnings of the Fifth Century*, Sheffield 1998

⁵ Garnsey, P., *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, Cambridge 1996.

⁶ In my opinion, the non-Pauline texts influence his interpretation of 1 Cor 7:21-24 and of the Letter to Philemon.

⁷ Garnsey 1996, 180

beaten, humiliated and raped at the master's whim. Ancient slavery was one of the most extreme forms of domination of one person over another.⁸

While slaves were seen as property, the language used by society in relation to slaves, shows that they were also treated as human beings. Slaves could be scolded, punished and threatened, but also encouraged, rewarded and confided in. Within the household, where slave and free lived close together, most forms of human interaction between slave and free were possible.⁹

Apart from the household, slave and free also interacted within voluntary associations, as they did in the Pauline communities. In these associations, people came together on the basis of a common profession, cult or household, to share meals and honour the gods. Associations provided members, including slaves, with a sense of belonging and identity.¹⁰

Most modern scholars understand ancient slavery not simply in terms of labour or property, but also in terms of power and social relations. According to Zelnick-Abramovitz: "The *doulos* was not only a person reduced to the property of another, but also 'the other' in relation to the cultural code, as a *xenos* ('foreigner'), the slave was regarded as an outsider, alien to all that represented the cultural and political identity of the community."¹¹

Paul's attitude to slaves

In this thesis, I hope to answer the question: What was Paul's attitude to slaves? I look in detail at what the New Testament letters of Paul have to say about slaves, against the background of the social hierarchies and conventions of Paul's time. I do this by examining the four texts mentioned above, and relating them to each other, and to the position of slaves in voluntary associations.

Should Paul be seen as conservative or as someone who challenged the conventions outlined above. Do the texts present conflicting views, as Garnsey suggests?

In the first chapter of this thesis, Gal 3:26-29 and 1 Cor 12:12-13 will be examined. These texts both mention slaves and free together with other social categories, proclaiming unity among believers:

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor male and female, because you are all one in Christ Jesus.

1Cor 12:13 Because in one spirit we all were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and were all given one spirit to drink.

Chapter 2 looks at 1 Cor 7:21-24, where Paul addresses slaves about their position in the community:

1 Cor 7:21 Were you a slave when you were called, do not let it worry you, but if you can become free, rather use it. 22 Because a slave who was called in the Lord is a freedman of the Lord, just as someone who was free when called is a slave of Christ.

⁸ Patterson 1982, 9-10

⁹ Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005, 25

¹⁰ Harland 2003, 55

¹¹ Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005, 33

Chapter 3 examines the Letter to Philemon, which is written to a slave master about a slave, calling on the master to accept this slave as a brother.

Phlm 15 For perhaps he was separated for a short time, so that you might have him back for ever, 16 no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me, how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

In Chapter 4, the image of the way Paul regarded slaves, that emerges after the examination of these texts, will be compared with evidence on the position of slaves in voluntary associations, to show whether Paul's attitude to slaves was similar to that of other organisations. Finally, in the conclusion, I will bring together all the evidence and present my view of Paul's attitude towards slaves.

Chapter 1

One in Christ

There are two texts in Paul's letters where he speaks in a programmatic way about slaves in his communities: Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 12:13. In both these passages, different categories of people, two of which are slave and free, are described as becoming one. In this chapter, we will look at these two texts to see how they can help us understand Paul's attitude to slaves.

Gal 3:26-29

26 Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ· 27 ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε. 28 οὐκ ἐνὶ Ἰουδαίῳ οὐδὲ Ἕλληνι, οὐκ ἐνὶ δούλῳ οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερῳ, οὐκ ἐνὶ ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. 29 εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα ἐστέ, κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι.¹²

²⁶You are all sons of God through faith, in Christ Jesus, ²⁷because all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor male and female, because you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.¹³

1 Cor 12:12-13

12 Καθάπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα ἐν ἐστὶν καὶ μέλη πολλὰ ἔχει, πάντα δὲ τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος πολλὰ ὄντα ἐν ἐστὶν σῶμα, οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός· 13 καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἐν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνας εἴτε δούλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πάντες ἐν πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν.

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³Because in one spirit we all were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and were all given one spirit to drink.

We are interested in these texts because they both speak of slaves. Apart from slaves, however, they have several other elements in common: being baptized (ἐβαπτίσθητε, ἐβαπτίσθημεν), being one (εἰς ἐστε, εἰς ἐν σῶμα), Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός) and several pairs of social groups, one of which is slave(s) and free (οὐκ ἐνὶ Ἰουδαίῳ οὐδὲ Ἕλληνι, οὐκ ἐνὶ δούλῳ οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἐνὶ ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνας εἴτε δούλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι). These common elements are connected in a similar way in both passages: being baptized creates unity, this unity is described as being one in Christ or being one body that is Christ's and this oneness includes or transcends all social groups. Since the issue of slaves

¹² New Testament text cited is from Nestlé Aland 1993 throughout this thesis

¹³ Translation of New Testament text is my own throughout

forms a part of this thought pattern, we need to look at the pattern as a whole first, before focusing on slavery.

We will now consider how and why this chain of 'baptism - unity - Christ - inclusion' is used in Galatians 3:26-29 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 respectively.

Gal 3: 26-29

In ch 3, and throughout the letter, Paul is arguing that the Galatian believers are children of Abraham through their faith, through belonging to Christ. They need not follow the law and be circumcised, as his opponents claimed, in order to become heirs to the promise that God made to Abraham. This is the point verses 26 and 29 are making: it is your faith that makes you children of God, that makes you belong to Christ. Since you belong to Christ, you are heirs to the promise.

Verses 27 and 28 offer support for this (γὰρ), especially for the aspect of belonging to Christ that follows in verse 29: all who were baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor male and female, because all have become one in Christ. In baptism, a believer 'puts on Christ', he or she becomes like him.¹⁴ The old social position is replaced by the position of belonging to Christ. This is not just an individual experience. It is also an experience that brings different people into one community where old social distinctions lose their value.

Jew and Greek

For Paul's opponents in Galatia, the distinction between Jew and Greek was very important. Their view of the community of believers seems to have been that only Greeks who decided to become circumcised and follow the law, in effect become Jews, could be members.¹⁵ Paul was attacking this view with force by his pronouncement that this distinction does not exist in Christ. The pair 'Jew and Greek' is therefore highly relevant to the issue discussed in this letter. The pairs 'slave and free', and 'male and female', however, are not. It is not clear from the text why Paul uses these pairs here, other than to underline the complete unity of believers.

A diverging view of the question of the relevance of social pairs is presented by Martin in his article on Gal 3:28.¹⁶ He argues that all pairs of opposites mentioned in 3:28 are relevant to Galatians because they all serve to distinguish baptism from circumcision. All groups, Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, men and women could undergo the rite of baptism. Circumcision, on the other hand, was only relevant to one half of every pair: only Jews and men could be circumcised and slaves were not free to choose but had to be circumcised with their master. Since Paul's main objective in this letter is to convince the Galatians not to become circumcised, pointing out these differences strengthens his argument, according to Martin.

Martin's view has the advantage of giving an explanation for all pairs of opposites, where most commentators see only one pair as directly relevant. Yet his solution does not seem satisfactory to me. The point of this passage is not that there are no differences between these groups of people when it comes to participating in the rite

¹⁴ Longenecker 1990, 156

¹⁵ Esler 1998, 91

¹⁶ Martin 2003, 115-125

of baptism, they are not all 'one in baptism'. The point is that there are no differences between these people in Christ, they are 'one in Christ'. When undergoing baptism, a believer 'puts on Christ' (Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσαθε) and leaves the old distinctions behind. Not the distinction of who can take part in the rite is transcended, but the distinction of who one belongs to, who one is. All believers are now 'of Christ', they all belong to him (ὕμεις Χριστου).

In general in his letter to the Galatians, Paul does not contrast circumcision with baptism.¹⁷ He contrasts works of the law, such as circumcision, with faith, and reception of the spirit (eg. 3:2, 4:6, 5:4-5). Since I reject Martin's solution, in my view only the direct relevance of the pair Jew and Greek is clear in the context.

We have seen how the pattern 'baptism - unity - Christ - inclusion' is used in this text to refute the need for circumcision, because the distinction Jew-Greek, circumcised-uncircumcised, which was vital for Paul's opponents, is irrelevant when all belong to Christ.

1 Cor 12:12-13

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul deals with many difficulties and disagreements that have arisen in their community (e.g. 1 Cor 1:11-13, 11:18-19) and stresses the need for unity (e.g. 1 Cor 1:10). The theme of chapter 12 is being one while being many: the spirit and the body are one, even though the receivers of the spirit and the members of the body are many. The unity of the spirit is the subject of the first part of 1 Cor 12 (verses 1-11). The spirit gives many different gifts to believers, such as wisdom, teaching or healing, but it is still one and the same spirit. The metaphor of the body is introduced in vs 12 and is central to the second part of ch 12. Just as many members form one body, so it is with Christ. The different parts of the body all need each other, need to care for and respect each other (12:25-26). Verse 27 explains the metaphor: *you are the body of Christ, you are its members* (ὕμεις δὲ ἐστε σῶμα Χριστου καὶ μέλη ἐκ μέρους).

One body

The passage we are examining here describes how this one body was formed: *in one spirit we were all baptised into one body*. Though this one body has different members with different functions, the division is not based on the social groups mentioned. Interestingly, there is no indication in 1 Corinthians that the schisms breaking up the Corinthian community were along the lines of Jews and Greeks, or of slaves and free, with the possible exception of 1 Cor 11:18-23, which we will examine in the next chapter. (There are indications that the positions of men and women were causing problems (11:3-16, 14:34-35), possibly explaining why 'male or female' is not included here in the social categories, as it is in Gal 3:28.)

When Paul elaborates on the different members of the body in 12:27-30, they appear to correspond with different tasks in the *ekklesia*. God has appointed apostles, prophets and teachers, and has given other powers, similar to the gifts of the spirit in 12:8-10. We can discern from 12:29-31 that there was some dissatisfaction about these tasks and gifts. Yet the social groups mentioned in 12:13 are nowhere implicated in any strife in Corinth.

¹⁷ see Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* 1998, 454-455

In 1 Cor 12, the thought pattern 'baptism - unity - Christ - inclusion', identified at the beginning of this chapter, is used to construct the image of the one body. All are baptized into one body that is Christ's, Jews and Greeks, slaves and free are all included in it. The incorporation of these social groups adds force to the image of the one body but the groups themselves are not directly relevant to Paul's argument.

Unity in Christ

We can conclude from our examination of these texts that, in spite of their differences, they contain a similar point. In both texts, the part of the chain of 'baptism - unity - Christ - inclusion' that is directly relevant to the argument is unity in Christ. Baptism, and the inclusion of social groups linked with it, are used to substantiate this unity. The social groups do not have any bearing on the matter discussed in either text (with the important exception, of 'Jew and Greek' in Galatians, as we have seen), yet they are present in both and are worded in a similar manner.

Baptismal origin

The fact that there does not appear to be a reason for mentioning the social categories, combined with the similar words used in both texts, has led to the idea that these words could find their origin in a form of baptismal liturgy.¹⁸ If these words are used in the context of baptism, Paul could quote them in Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 12:13 to underline the unifying effect of baptism.

In his commentary on Galatians, Betz points out other parallels to Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 12:13, most interestingly a passage from the Deutero-Pauline Letter to the Colossians, 3:9-11 which reads:¹⁹

9 μὴ ψεύδεσθε εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀπεκδυσάμενοι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ 10 καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν,

11 ὅπου οὐκ ἔστι Ἕλληνας καὶ Ἰουδαῖος, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δούλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός.

⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off the old man with his practices ¹⁰and have put on the new, who is being renewed in knowledge in the image of his creator, ¹¹where there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all in all.

The similarity between vs.11 and Gal 3:28 is clear. Betz regards 'taking off the old man and putting on the new' as a reference to baptism and 'putting on Christ'. Dunn, however, cautions against automatically seeing a baptismal context behind the expression 'putting on Christ'. There is no evidence that a change of clothes was part of the earliest baptismal ceremonies. Besides, Paul can also use this expression as a call to responsible living, as he does in Rom 13:14²⁰. The use of the aorist tense, however, denoting an event that occurred once in the past for 'having taken off'

¹⁸ Martyn 1998, 278; Longenecker 1990, 155; Betz 1979, 181-185

¹⁹ Betz 1979, 184

²⁰ Dunn, *Theology* 1998, 453-454

(ἀπεκδυσάμενοι) and 'having put on' (ἐνδυσάμενοι), does suggest a baptismal, rather than a hortatory background. A literal mention of baptism is found earlier in the letter, in 2:12:

12 συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν·

¹²*having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also resurrected with him through faith in the power of God, who resurrected him from the dead.*

The idea of being resurrected with Christ is retaken in 3:1: '*if then you have been resurrected with Christ*' (εἰ οὖν συνηγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ) and the consequences of this experience are elaborated in 3:5 -11. So there is a strong link between the baptism mentioned in 2:12 and the groups mentioned in 3:11. This passage can therefore be seen as an important parallel to Gal 3:26-28 and as confirmation of its baptismal origin.

The idea of a baptismal origin is more disputed for 1 Cor 12:13. The complicating factor in this text is the prominent role of the spirit. There is no strong link in Paul's writings between baptism and reception of the spirit, this is the only time the two are used together.²¹ Based on this emphasis on the spirit, some commentators conclude that Paul is using the word baptism here in a metaphorical sense, just as *being given one spirit to drink* is considered a metaphor, and not as a reference to the rite of baptism.²²

I will briefly examine this position, as set forth by Dunn and Fee. After analysing the tradition history of the expression 'baptized in the spirit' Dunn concludes that it is a metaphor taken from the rite of baptism. Its meaning, however, is distinct from, or even antithetical to, baptism in water. The individual is immersed in the spirit rather than in water. This is the meaning of the expression in the Gospels and Acts, and Paul, according to Dunn, uses it in a similar way. He is alluding to the Corinthians' experience of receiving the spirit, not their baptism.²³ According to Dunn, it is the one spirit that creates the one body, the verb 'baptized' is really not relevant.

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Fee claims that what makes the Corinthians one is their common experience of the spirit: "The spirit is what essentially distinguishes the believer from the non-believers (1 Cor 2:10-14); the spirit is what especially marks the beginning of Christian life (Gal 3:2-3); the spirit above all is what makes a person a child of God (Rom 8:14-17). Thus it is natural for Paul to refer to their unity in the body in terms of the spirit".²⁴

None of these texts brought forward by Fee, however, express the notion that unity among believers follows from the experience of the spirit. On the contrary, in 1 Cor 12:4-11 the diversity of the gifts of the spirit to believers is stressed. While the spirit emphatically is one, those receiving the spirit are many and diverse. It is difficult to

²¹ Fee 1987, 604

²² Fee 1987, 605; Witherington 1995, 258, Dunn, *Theology* 1998, 451

²³ Dunn, *Theology* 1998, 450-451

²⁴ Fee 1987, 603

see how one could attribute a unifying, body-building effect to the spirit in this passage.

Dunn's analysis of 'baptism in the spirit' also does not satisfy. It rests mainly on the use of the expression in non-Pauline sources. The fact that Paul wants to create an antithesis between baptism and the spirit is not supported by the text, and, as we have seen, neither is the link between the spirit and unity. That Paul on one occasion plays down his own role in baptising (in 1 Cor 1), as Dunn argues, is for rhetorical reasons and does not mean that baptism in itself is devalued. There is therefore no reason to suppose that the mention of the spirit excudes a reference to baptism in this text.

There are three elements involved in 1 Cor 12:13, spirit, baptism and the one body: *in one spirit we all were baptized into one body*. To my mind, the reason Paul uses baptism in connection with the spirit here, even though he never does so elsewhere, lies in the creation of the one body.

Baptism and unity

If baptism is used to create a link between the spirit and the one body, what is the conceptual connection between baptism and unity in Paul's thinking? The crucial text for this is Rom 6:3-5, the only other occasion where Paul speaks of 'baptism into Christ' (ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστόν), as he does in Gal 3:27. Just before this text about baptism, Paul has given a description of Christ as the second Adam (Rom 5): just as Adam's sin has brought condemnation and death over humankind, Christ's obedience will bring righteousness and life. Adam represents the old epoch where sin and death ruled. Christ, as the last Adam, represents a new creation, where all will live.²⁵

Paul's focus in Rom 6 is the power of sin and death over believers. Christ's death has ended the power of sin (6:10) and by taking part in Christ's death, through baptism, believers can come out from under the rule of sin over their lives.

3 ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι, ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστόν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν;

4 συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὡσπερ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρὸς, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν. 5 εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα·

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 because if we have grown together with the likeness of his death, we shall also be so with the likeness of his resurrection.

²⁵ Dunn, *Theology* 1998, 242

Through baptism, believers are buried with Christ. The result of this event of taking part in Christ's death is described by Paul with an organic image, 'having become grown together' (σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν). Believers have become grown together with the likeness of Christ's death (τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ).

Though this fusion with the likeness of Christ's death is a difficult concept, its effects become quite clear in the next part of Rom 6. Through it, believers have 'died to sin', they have become free from its reign and can live in Christ (6:11). Being a part of the likeness of Christ's death means sharing in the cosmic effects of his death: freedom from sin and death.

It will be helpful to cite Dunn's interpretation of this text: "In some sense the event of Christ's passion and resurrection has to be re-enacted in believers until the renewal of the new age is complete. Not only so, but the process cannot, almost by definition, be something merely individual or individualistic. Rather, by its very nature it is a shared experience which involves creation as well. The 'with Christ' cannot be fully enacted except 'with others' and 'with creation'."²⁶

Dunn emphasizes the importance of the 'with Christ' motif, that is found in this passage, and throughout Paul's letters. Both 'with Christ' and 'in Christ' or 'in the Lord' express the fundamental way that believers and Christ are connected. The many 'with' compounds (e.g. συνετάφημεν, buried with him, συνεσταυρώθη, crucified with him, συζήσομεν, live with him) that Paul uses, describe both believers sharing in Christ's death and life, and believers sharing this experience with each other.²⁷ Dunn suggests that the two uses were connected in Paul's mind "to express the same sense of a communality of believers rooted in its dependence upon their common experience of participation in Christ."²⁸

Though the focus in Rom 6:3-5 is on how to become free of sin, and not on the unity of believers, the terms in which the consequences of baptism for the relation between believers and Christ are described are certainly relevant. There is a strong affinity between the image of becoming one organism with Christ in his death and the image of becoming the body of Christ through baptism in 1 Cor 12, or that of putting on Christ in Gal 3:27. All these metaphors express the unity between believers and Christ, the participation of believers in Christ.

Participation in Christ and participation in the community of believers are fundamentally interconnected. The image of the body, in 1 Cor 12, that is both Christ and the *ekklesia* is a perfect illustration of this. Baptism is a vital moment in this process of participation. I do not wish to contend that Paul is using baptism in these verses in distinction from, or even in opposition to, other terms that he can use to describe the beginning of life as a believer, such as reception of the spirit or calling. It has become clear, however, that in these three texts, baptism is where participation happens and unity is created.

Neither slave nor free

We have come a long way without mentioning of slaves, but I feel this digression has been necessary to show how fundamental the idea of unity is in Paul's thinking. It is

²⁶ Dunn, *Theology* 1998, 403-404, interpretation of this text together with Rom 8:16-29

²⁷ Dunn, *Theology* 1998, 402

²⁸ Dunn, *Theology* 1998, 403

an essential part, not only of his ecclesiology, but also of his christology. It is this unity with Christ and with fellow believers that is elaborated in the formula '*neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor male and female*'. These pairs form the accepted divisions of the human race in Paul's time: men and women, Greeks and barbarians, free people and slaves.²⁹ Of course, for Paul, as a Jew, the distinction would not be between Greeks and barbarians, but between Jews and Greeks. We have seen the relevance of this pair in the letter to the Galatians. The distinction Jew-Greek was a heavily debated issue among believers in Galatia. The fact that this division had no relevance for Paul, had important consequences for the way believers interacted. The concept of unity in Christ serves as a foundation for Paul's position that the difference is irrelevant. Would the negation of the distinction between the two other pairs have had similar social consequences?

A possible further background for the use of the pairs Jew-Greek, slave-free, male-female, is given by Longenecker in his commentary on Galatians. The negation of differences could be an attempt to counter such blessings as are attributed to Thales or Socrates by Diogenes Laertius: "he used to say that there were three blessings for which he was grateful to Fortune: "first, that I was born a human being and not one of the brutes; next, that I was born a man and not a woman; thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian".³⁰ A similar expression of gratitude is attributed to Plato by Lacantius.³¹ Similar blessings also appear in Jewish morning prayers, cited by Longenecker: "blessed be He [God] that He did not make me a Gentile, blessed be He that He did not make me a boor [i.e., an ignorant peasant or a slave]; blessed be He that He did not make me a woman"³², though it is not possible to ascertain that such a prayer was used in Paul's time. It may be then that the words '*neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor male and female*' were created in deliberate opposition to these prayers that emphasize the differences and hierarchy between people.

Since these words '*neither slave nor free*' belong in the context of baptism, as we have seen, they stand at the beginning of life as a believer. They are integrally connected to Paul's convictions about Christ and humanity.

According to Garnsey, these passages present an appeal by Paul to the unity of mankind in the sight of God.³³ This appeal bears an obvious resemblance to the Stoic brotherhood of man, but Paul's concept of unity is more dramatic and provocative than any Stoic counterpart. It disregards social and cultural hierarchies and conventions.

Garnsey notes that there was a large gap between the Pauline doctrine of the equality in the sight of God and the values of the social world. This gap could have created social tensions in the emerging communities. In the two other texts that discuss slaves, 1 Cor 7 and the Letter to Philemon, Garnsey feels that Paul eases this tension by implementing ethics that remain within the existing social structures. The instructions given in these texts do not threaten slavery at all.³⁴

²⁹ see Baldry 1965, 158

³⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 1.33, Loeb translation

³¹ Lacantius, *Divine Institutes* 3.19.17

³² Longenecker 1990, 157

³³ Garnsey 1996, 180

³⁴ Garnsey 1996, 188

Garnsey does not share my ecclesiological interpretation of the passages discussed here. He sees the unity of mankind proclaimed by Paul in terms of unity "in the sight of God" or "equal access to divine reward and punishment".³⁵ If my interpretation that unity and the 'one body' are primarily experienced in the community of believers, is correct, it is hard to imagine that there would be no implications for the way slave and free related within that community. A slave hearing *there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor male and female, because you are all one in Christ Jesus* on being baptised, may not have expected to become free, but may have expected to be treated as no one's slave within this new community. I agree with Garnsey that this represents a serious challenge to the social structure of slavery.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Paul's idea about slave and free is rooted in his christology and ecclesiology. In baptism, all believers participate in Christ. They unite to form the body of Christ that is the community of believers. The consequences of this unity are expressed in the words *there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor male and female, because you are all one in Christ Jesus*.

The distinction between slave and free meant nothing 'in Christ'. In what way did Paul apply this view when he wrote about slaves in his other letters? Did he remain within the existing social boundaries? In the next chapters, we will examine the two cases in Paul's letters where he addresses the situation of slaves, in general (1 Cor 7) and one in particular (Philemon), who were part of a Pauline *ekklesia*.

³⁵ Garnsey 1996, 180

Chapter 2

A freedman of the Lord

In this chapter, we will examine 1 Corinthians 7:21-24, where Paul appears to be addressing slaves directly:

21 δοῦλος ἐκλήθης, μή σοι μελέτω· ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι, μάλλον χρῆσαι. 22 ὁ γὰρ ἐν κυρίῳ κληθεὶς δοῦλος ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου ἐστίν, ὁμοίως ὁ ἐλεύθερος κληθεὶς δοῦλός ἐστιν Χριστοῦ.

23 τιμῆς ἠγοράσθητε· μή γίνεσθε δοῦλοι ἀνθρώπων. 24 ἕκαστος ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη, ἀδελφοί, ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω παρὰ θεῶ.

21 Were you a slave when you were called, do not let it worry you, but if you can become free, rather use it. 22 Because a slave who was called in the Lord is a freedman of the Lord, just as someone who was free when called is a slave of Christ. 23 You were bought at a price, do not become slaves of people. 24 let everyone in which he was called, brothers, let him stay in that with God.

Paul seems to be giving advice to slaves, but what exactly does he want them to do? The interpretation of this passage has divided scholars for centuries.³⁶ In particular the clause μάλλον χρῆσαι, 'rather use it' in v. 21 has caused much debate. What is it that should rather be used? This clause lacks an object and can be interpreted to mean very different things, depending on which object is preferred.

I feel that it is easy to misunderstand this text when it is read in isolation. Understanding the context and the way this text functions in it will be helpful to gain a perspective. We will therefore look at the relevant context first, before we turn to examine this passage in detail. Since chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians forms a separate text unit with a single subject, we can limit our look at the context to this chapter.

1 Cor 7: marriage

The subject of 1 Cor 7 is marriage. In the Corinthian community, many apparently believed that their new faith demanded of them that they should separate and live an ascetic life.³⁷ In response to a question from this part of the community about celibacy (7:1), Paul addresses various groups about how to act in marriage and whether to become or stay married.

In the first paragraphs (1-16), Paul gives guidelines for specific groups and argues exceptions: married people should not abstain. But when both partners consent they can do so for a time, though not for too long or lack of self-control will give the devil his chance (1-7). It is best for widowed people not to remarry. But if they do not have enough self-control they should, because it is better to marry than to burn with desire (8-9). Married people should not divorce. But if their non-believing spouse wants to

³⁶ For an overview of the history of the interpretation of this text, see Harrill 1995, 74-108

³⁷ Schrage 1995, 51; Dunn, *Theology* 1998, 695; Adams 2000, 90

leave, they should let them, because God wants us to live in peace (16).

In the next paragraph (7:17-24), Paul chooses a different approach. Here he formulates a general principle of conduct that he says he ordains in all churches (7:17 καὶ οὕτως ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις πάσαις διατάσσομαι). Since this is the paragraph that contains the verses on slavery, we will come back to it after we have completed our look at chapter 7.

In 7:25-28, Paul again addresses a specific group, the παρθενοὶ, the unmarried. Because of the present distress, it is good for a person to stay as one is: if you are bound, do not seek to become free, if you are free, do not seek marriage.

Paul apparently felt the need to explain: τοῦτο δέ φημι, ἀδελφοί, *what I mean is this, brothers*. What follows (7:29-31) is an outline of the attitude to marriage and to life in general that is a consequence of Paul's apocalyptic perception of the world. He moves beyond the issue of marriage and addresses the entire Corinthian community:

29 τοῦτο δέ φημι, ἀδελφοί, ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν· τὸ λοιπὸν, ἵνα καὶ οἱ ἔχοντες γυναῖκας ὡς μὴ ἔχοντες ὦσιν, 30 καὶ οἱ κλαίοντες ὡς μὴ κλαίοντες καὶ οἱ χαίροντες ὡς μὴ χαίροντες καὶ οἱ ἀγοράζοντες ὡς μὴ κατέχοντες, 31 καὶ οἱ χρώμενοι τὸν κόσμον ὡς μὴ καταχρώμενοι· παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

29 What I mean is this, brothers, time has been shortened, therefore from now on, those who have wives should be as though they did not, 30 those who mourn should be as though they were not mourning, those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, those who buy as though they were not possessing, 31 those who use the world as though they were not overusing it, because the form of this world is passing away.

Paul does not advise to withdraw from the world, but to take on a dispassionate attitude towards it, to live as if not (ὡς μὴ).³⁸ The coming end of the world relativizes all human actions. We should see the guidelines with regard to marital status formulated in 1 Cor 7 against this background. The Corinthian believers felt the need to change their situation in life because of their new faith. Paul's position is that the time is too short to be concerned with the world. Believers should not withdraw from the world, but not be engrossed by it either.

In the conclusion of the chapter (7:32-40), Paul comes back to the subject of marriage. Married people are concerned with things of the world, how to please their partners. Their interests are divided. Unmarried people are wholly concerned with pleasing the Lord. I would like you to be free from concern, Paul says, and to live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. If people feel they ought to marry, they can, it is not a sin. But if they have control over their will and do not marry, it is better.

We have seen that 1 Cor 7 is about marriage, especially about change in marital status. Though Paul makes it clear that being single is preferable to being married, he

³⁸ Adams 2000, 131

does not advise everyone to become or remain single. Since the time is short and the world is coming to an end, one's position in the world has limited relevance.

Stay as you are

Having finished our look at the context, we now turn to the paragraph that contains Paul's advice to slaves. In this paragraph, Paul puts his views on marriage in a bigger perspective, drawing comparisons from other areas. He formulates and reformulates a general principle and illustrates this with two examples, one of which is slavery. We will focus first on the principle:

7:17 εἰ μὴ ἑκάστῳ ὡς ἐμέρισεν ὁ κύριος,

but as the Lord has distributed to every one,

ἕκαστον ὡς κέκληκεν ὁ θεός,

as God has called every one,

7:20 ἕκαστος ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἣ ἐκλήθη,

let every one in the calling in which he was called

7:24 ἕκαστος ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη,

let every one in which he was called,

οὕτως περιπατεῖτω.

let him live like that

ἐν ταύτῃ μενέτω.

let him stay in that

ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω παρὰ θεῷ.

let him stay in that with God

We see that the principle has two parts and that both parts are rephrased several times. Central to the first part of the principle is the word κλησις/καλέω, calling/ to call. This word is generally used by Paul to refer to God's calling, the call to belong to Christ (Phil 3:14, 1 Cor 1:26). However, he can also use it in a related, but different way, as he does in 1 Cor 1:26: remember your calling (κλησις), brothers, not many of you were wise, not many powerful. In this verse, calling is used to bring to mind the social position of the believers at the time of their calling. I think that κλησις has a similar purpose in this paragraph. The examples that are given:

7:18 περιτετμημένος τις ἐκλήθη,

was anyone circumcised when called

ἐν ἀκροβυστία κέκληται τις,

was anyone uncircumcised when called

21 δοῦλος ἐκλήθη,

were you a slave when called

22 ὁ γὰρ ἐν κυρίῳ κληθεὶς δοῦλος

because a slave who was called in the Lord

ὁμοίως ὁ ἐλεύθερος κληθεὶς

just as someone who was free when called

make it clear that κλήσις/καλέω are used here in a similar way.³⁹ Paul admonishes his audience to remain in the social position they were in when they were called.

The principle of remaining as one is, is first applied to circumcision (7:18-19): was anyone circumcised when called, do not undo it, was anyone uncircumcised when called, do not circumcise. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is keeping the commandments of God.

The example of slavery

We now come to the text directed at slaves. As we have seen, Paul is illuminating his stance on marital position by comparing it with other social positions. Slavery functions as an example of how one's social status should not be changed (7:21-22):

21 δοῦλος ἐκλήθης, μή σοι μελέτω· ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι, μᾶλλον χρῆσαι. 22 ὁ γὰρ ἐν κυρίῳ κληθεὶς δοῦλος ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου ἐστίν, ὁμοίως ὁ ἐλεύθερος κληθεὶς δοῦλός ἐστιν Χριστοῦ.

21 Were you a slave when you were called, do not let it worry you, but if indeed you can become free, rather use it. 22 Because a slave who was called in the Lord is a freedman of the Lord, just as someone who was free when called is a slave of Christ.

We might have expected a wording similar to that of the previous example: 'was anyone a slave when called, do not become free'. But Paul changes from the third person to the second: '*were you a slave when you were called*' and does not, apparently, feel the need to tell slaves not to free themselves, but rather consoles them. '*Do not let it worry you*', could refer to the hardship of slavery as such, but more likely refers to the position of slaves in the community, since that is what the next verse addresses: a slave's position in the community was not inferior to that of a free person's. Paul's elaboration of the example of slaves seems to take him from the rule 'do not change', to the consolation 'you do not need to change'.

Rather use it

The main problem in understanding the second half of verse 21 is the meaning of μᾶλλον χρῆσαι, '*rather use it*'. What should be used? The clause μᾶλλον χρῆσαι lacks an object and needs to be completed. In the history of the interpretation of these words two possibilities have been offered: slavery or freedom.⁴⁰

In deciding which interpretation is correct, taking the context of the passage into account is important. Though most commentators who stress the importance of the context prefer the 'choose slavery' interpretation, I do not think that this follows from the context at all.⁴¹ In this chapter Paul is arguing against those who believe that their

³⁹ contrary to Bartchy 1973, 132-140

⁴⁰ Bartchy offers a third option: 'if you can become free, by all means live according to god's calling'. Since I do not agree with Bartchy's understanding of κλησις, nor with his view on slavery and manumission, I do not find his interpretation of μᾶλλον χρῆσαι convincing.

⁴¹ Harrill 1995, 76

call in the Lord demands a change in their marriage. In admonishing people to remain in their κλησις, he does not sanctify the status quo, but relativizes its importance.⁴² We see this in the first example (7:18-19): (un)circumcision is nothing, keeping God's commandments is what matters. Similarly in this paragraph (7:21-22): do not worry about being a slave, because a slave is free in the Lord. I agree with Witherington that part of the reason for this relativization lies in Paul's eschatology.⁴³ We have seen this in 7:29-31, where Paul changes the quality of human actions in the perspective of an ending world (ὡς μὴ, *as if not*).

Slavery is used to illustrate that change in social status is not necessary for a believer. That does not mean, however, that an exception in some cases would negate this principle. As has been shown earlier in this chapter, Paul grants many exceptions to the guidelines that he gives (7:5, 9, 11, 15, 36).⁴⁴ The advice to those married to a non-believing spouse to agree to a divorce (7:15) and to those who are single to marry if they burn with desire (7:9), make it clear that remaining as one is, is not a hard and fast rule. If the opportunity should arise for a slave to become free (through manumission, see below) there is no reason to assume from the context that Paul would oppose acceptance. Indeed, considering his wish that people be free from concern (7:32), to live in undivided devotion to the Lord, one would expect him to advise freedom.

Manumission

That Paul addresses the possibility of a slave becoming free, may seem strange to modern readers, but manumission, the freeing of a slave by the slaveholder, was a common practice in Paul's time. Holding out the prospect of freedom to slaves was seen as a way of encouraging their diligence and loyalty.⁴⁵ Manumission had advantages for both master and slave. A slave sometimes paid a considerable sum for manumission from his own savings.⁴⁶ Since the responsibilities of the slave towards the slaveholder did not end upon manumission, the master still benefited economically from the former slave. In most cases, a contract stipulated the obligations of the freed person to the former master for a set period.

Though manumission did not offer total freedom, freed slaves did gain a certain amount of freedom and children born after manumission were free. Inscriptions show that many slaves were eager and proud to obtain free status.⁴⁷ Paul speaks about the possibility of becoming free (δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι), suggesting that the slave in question had some influence over the outcome. In an article on manumission and 1 Cor 7:21, Llewellyn cites a fascinating example of a slave who initiated her own manumission, with money saved by herself, thereby confirming Paul's idea.⁴⁸ Though Harrill cites evidence of slaves rejecting an offer of manumission (from a person other than the owner)⁴⁹, welcoming freedom if the opportunity arose, would be the obvious response. Advising slaves to reject manumission would certainly be very unusual.

⁴² Schrage 1995, 134-135; Witherington III 1995, 178; Wimbush 1987, 16

⁴³ Witherington III 1995, 179-180

⁴⁴ Harrill 1995, 123-126,

⁴⁵ Bartchy 1973, 88

⁴⁶ Bradley 1984, 107

⁴⁷ Bradley 1984, 82

⁴⁸ Llewellyn 1992, 63-65

⁴⁹ Harrill 1995, 86-87

Rather use it continued

Turning our attention back to the text, the ellipsis *μᾶλλον χρῆσαι* itself needs to be examined. It is in the nature of an ellipsis, that what is left out is obvious to the writer. If we do not assume that Paul was deliberately confusing his audience, we can assume that he omitted something so as not to repeat what he had already said. In his article on 1 Cor 7:21, Llewelyn argues that we would expect to infer what is omitted in the ellipsis from the immediately preceding clause.⁵⁰ When he investigated twenty one other New Testament cases of ellipsis in conditional sentences using *εἰ* (e.g. 2 Cor 5:16b), he found exactly this. In all cases, the ellipsis should be completed by an element from the preceding clause. If Paul had meant to have this ellipsis completed by anything other than the freedom mentioned in the preceding clause, “he would have needed to say so explicitly”.⁵¹ Of the two options, using freedom or slavery, the latter is certainly the more unusual. It seems unlikely that Paul would issue a directive to do something as unusual as refuse manumission in an offhand way, leaving the crucial words unsaid.

Further confirmation of this reading of *μᾶλλον χρῆσαι* comes from Harrill’s analyses of the use of *μᾶλλον* with *χρᾶσθαι* in ancient Greek literature.⁵² He concludes that in cases where two different situations are presented (as there are here: being a slave and having the opportunity of freedom), *μᾶλλον* tends to have an adversative meaning (instead, or preferably). An intensive meaning of *μᾶλλον* (even more), which would be required for the ‘use slavery’ option, is only found in cases where two similar situations are described.

The meaning of *ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ* could also shed light on this controversial verse. It is interpreted to mean either ‘but/indeed even if’, by those who favour the reading ‘use slavery’, or ‘but if indeed’, by those favouring ‘use freedom’. Paul’s contemporary Philo’s use of *ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ* shows that in his writings, both meanings occur. We find an example of the first in *De Mutatione* 222:

*Let none of them of the lowly or obscure in repute shrink through despair of the higher hope from thankful supplication to God, (ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ) but even if he no longer expects any greater boon, give thanks according to his power for the gifts which he has already received.*⁵³

The second meaning of *ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ* is found in *De Ebrietate* 198:

Now for my part I do not wonder that the chaotic and promiscuous multitude who are bound in inglorious slavery to usages and customs introduced anyhow, should give credence to traditions delivered once and for all, and leaving their minds unexercised, should give vent to affirmations and

⁵⁰ Llewelyn 1992, 67-68

⁵¹ Llewelyn 1992, 69

⁵² Harrill 1995, 108-121

⁵³ Loeb translation

negotiations without inquiry or examination. (ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ) But I do wonder that the multitude of so-called philosophers, who feign to be seeking for exact and absolute certainty in things, are divided into troops and companies and propound dogmatic conclusions widely different and often diametrically opposite not on some single chance point, but on all points great or small, which constitute the problems which they seek to solve.

These examples make it clear that ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ in itself can not be used to support either interpretation.⁵⁴ Since both meanings can occur, the correct meaning needs to be determined from the context in every case.

Conclusion on *rather use it*

Based on the observations listed above, however, we can conclude that verse 21 must be understood to mean that a slave should become free, if the opportunity arises. Most slaves, however, did not have the opportunity to become free. What then remains of the rule 'do not change' in the case of slaves, if change was impossible for most and encouraged for those for whom it was possible? The answer could lie, as Harrill suggests, in the difference between actively looking to change one's position and being offered the possibility of change.⁵⁵ We can find support for this in Paul's guidelines for divorce in 7:12-15: divorce is not something a person should initiate, but if a non-believing partner wants to leave, the believer is not bound (οὐ δεδούλωται). Similarly, a slave should not be pursuing freedom, but is free to accept the offer should it occur.

Paul adds '*but if you can become free, rather use it*' as an aside, to avoid the suggestion that there is anything wrong with a slave accepting the opportunity of freedom. It is clear, though, that the slavery example is much more problematic than the circumcision example, in bringing Paul's point about marriage across. Perhaps it is not the aptitude of the comparison that suggested the use of slavery to Paul, but the fact that men and women (the subject of the chapter as a whole), circumcised and uncircumcised and slave and free, belong together in Paul's thinking as the basic distinctions between people, that have all become irrelevant in the community of believers, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

A freedman of the Lord

Although the interpretation of 1 Cor 7:21, particularly μάλλον χρῆσαι has caused much debate, I consider the next verse to be much more important for understanding Paul's attitude towards slaves:

22 ὁ γὰρ ἐν κυρίῳ κληθεὶς δοῦλος ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου ἐστίν, ὁμοίως ὁ ἐλεύθερος κληθεὶς δοῦλός ἐστιν Χριστοῦ.

⁵⁴ the difficulty of understanding ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ is illustrated by the translation of De Josepho 24, translated 'nay, even if' in the Loeb edition, while the French translation by Amaldez et al. translates, in my opinion correctly, 'si, au contraire'.

⁵⁵ Harrill 1995, 127

22 Because a slave who was called in the Lord is a freedman of the Lord, just as someone who was free when called is a slave of Christ.

For a slave there is no need to worry, because a slave is freed in the Lord, while a free person is a slave of Christ. In verse 22, γὰρ takes up verse 21a *do not let it worry you*. The worldly positions of slave and free are equalized, in Christ.

According to Zelnick-Abramovitz, in her recent work on manumission in the ancient Greek world, manumitted slaves remained outsiders, who did not have political rights. After manumission, a former slave was called an *apeleutheros*, if still bound to a master, or an *exeleutheros* if not bound to anyone anymore. A former slave could never be seen as *eleutheros*, as fully free.⁵⁶

Paul, likewise, does not describe a slave as free, but as freed, *apeleutheros*. The distinction between slave and free is levelled by bringing the free into slavery. Both slave and free are bound to Christ, they belong to him. Slaves have the upper hand in the new situation as their status as freed is superior to the slave status of the free.

The fact that Paul needed to console slaves and to underline the change of status in Christ suggests that relations between slave and free were not as he would have wished. This notion is substantiated by a passage later on in this letter. In 1 Cor 11:20-22, we see that Paul corrects powerful members of the community, who felt they did not have to commune with the poorer members, many of whom would have been slaves:

20 Συνερχομένων οὖν ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ οὐκ ἔστιν κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν·
21 ἕκαστος γὰρ τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον προλαμβάνει ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν, καὶ ὃς μὲν
πεινᾷ ὃς δὲ μεθύει. 22 μὴ γὰρ οἰκίας οὐκ ἔχετε εἰς τὸ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν; ἢ
τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ θεοῦ καταφρονεῖτε, καὶ καταισχύετε τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας; τί
εἶπω ὑμῖν; ἐπαίνεσω ὑμᾶς; ἐν τούτῳ οὐκ ἐπαίνῶ.

20 when you come together, it is not the Lord's supper you eat. 21 Because everyone goes ahead and eats their own supper, and one is hungry, another drunk. 22 Don't you have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the community of God and humiliate those who have nothing? Should I praise you? I do not praise you in this.

The rich in the Corinthian community brought their privileged position into the shared meal. The exact nature of the offensive behaviour cannot be decided here. It was either not waiting for the poorer part of the community or eating their own portions, depending on the meaning of προλαμβάνει ('take beforehand' or 'take in') in verse 21.⁵⁷ In both cases, the rich were not sharing their meal with 'those who have nothing'. Those who had time and money to spare humiliated those who were not free to come to the table until their work was done or who were not given enough to eat and remained hungry. Paul considered the behaviour of the rich not just an insult to

⁵⁶ Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005, 337-338

⁵⁷ see Fee 1987, 542-543; Schrage 1995, 24-25

the poor, but to the *ekklesia* as a whole. If the meal is not shared by all equally, it is not the Lord's supper and its meaning is lost.

In verse 29 of the same chapter, still discussing the Lord's supper, Paul warns believers to '*discern the body*' (διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα) when they eat and drink, lest they incur judgement. 'The body' is used here as a metaphor for the community (as earlier in 1 Cor 10:17 and later in 12:12-27). This verse strengthens the point of the passage previously discussed, underlining the importance of the community. The Lord's supper demands that believers recognise each other as members of one body.

Slaves of people

We now turn to the final part of our text:

23 τιμῆς ἠγοράσθητε· μὴ γίνεσθε δοῦλοι ἀνθρώπων. 24 ἕκαστος ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη, ἀδελφοί, ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω παρὰ θεῶ.

23 You were bought at a price, do not become slaves of people. 24 let everyone in which he was called, brothers, let him stay in that with God.

You were bought at a price: the change in status, from slave to freed and from free to slave has been accomplished at a cost, presumably through Christ's death. For this reason, believers should not become slaves of people. Does Paul mean literally not selling oneself into slavery? The addition 'of people' (ἀνθρώπων) seems to be confusing. Without it, one would assume a literal meaning. People did sometimes sell themselves into slavery and Paul might warn them against it. Yet if this is the missing half of the 'do not change' illustration, i.e. 'if you were free when you were called, do not become a slave', this is a strange way of saying it. It is linked here to the salvation effected through Christ's death, which has brought all, slave and free, under Christ's rule.

Both slave and free were addressed in the first part of the verse. I believe that the verse should probably be interpreted as advice to both slave and free: 'do not let yourself come under the influence of people'. Slavery is more often a metaphor for being under the influence of negative powers in Paul's writing (Rom 6:16-20: slaves of sin, Gal 4:8-9: enslaved by gods, Rom 16:18 slaves of their own belly), though admittedly, this is the only case where we would find 'slaves of people'. This reading of verse 23 is confirmed by the ending of the next verse '*let him stay in that with God*'. This is the positive formulation of the same principle: do not change because of other people, stay as you are with God.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that in 1 Cor 7, Paul discusses the issue of change in marital status. He instructs his audience to remain in the social position of their calling. When using slavery as an example of this principle, he turns from admonition to consolation: '*do not let it worry you*'. Being a slave is not an obstacle in the community since the positions of slave and free are equal in Christ. He allows for an exception to the rule of remaining as one is, for those slaves who have the opportunity

to become free.

Garnsey characterises Paul's attitude in these verses as conventional and conservative. "Slaves should stay precisely where they are without resentment, in the knowledge that it makes no difference to Christ whether one is a slave or a free man."⁵⁸ Of course, Garnsey is correct in saying that Paul accepts slavery and does not directly challenge the institution. Paul's concern is not with society in general but with the lives of the believers in the communities he writes to. One reason for this is given by Paul in this letter: '*Time has been shortened*', '*the form of this world is passing away*' (1 Cor 7:29, 31), what one has or does in the world is of little meaning, it will all end soon.

It is clear from this text that slaves are still slaves in the Pauline community. Their situation in the world does not change upon becoming a believer. As believers however, as this passage shows, they are not inferior to free people: slaves are freed and the free are slaves, both belong to Christ. This pronouncement is dramatic and provocative, as Garnsey rightly notes. "The slave/free distinction in particular is treated in a cavalier way."⁵⁹

Garnsey appears to contradict himself when discussing this passage, which I feel is a consequence of his approach, lumping together Pauline, Deutero-Pauline and non-Pauline texts on slaves. Some of these texts contain instructions to slaves to be obedient, and to masters to be fair to their slaves. These texts seem to influence Garnsey's view of this passage. In the undisputed Pauline letters however, there is no such instruction that confirms the status quo. Not only does Paul bring slaves to a higher social level by telling them they are freed, but he also challenges the masters' position by calling them slaves.

Garnsey is correct in saying that "it makes no difference to Christ whether one is a slave or a free man", yet he does not appear to see the full meaning of the words 'to Christ'. This is not some eschatological or heavenly reality, the body of Christ is made up of believers, they live 'in Christ' and 'with Christ', as we have seen in the previous chapter. If it makes no difference to Christ, it makes no difference in the community. Here lies the revolutionary potential of Paul's words. Slave and free should sit at the table and share a meal together as freed and slave.

In the next chapter, we will see if Paul changes his provocative views when discussing the case of one slave, Onesimus, in his letter to Philemon.

⁵⁸ Garnsey 1996, 176

⁵⁹ Garnsey 1996, 180

Chapter 3

As a brother

In his letter to Philemon, Paul writes about a slave, Onesimus, to his master, Philemon and to the church that gathers at Philemon's house. We can understand from the letter that something has happened between Onesimus and Philemon, though it is not clear what. After this incident, Onesimus has been with Paul and he is now coming back to Philemon.

To determine what can be understood from this letter about Paul's view of slaves in the community, two key questions need to be answered: what were the circumstances that brought Onesimus to Paul, and what did Paul ask Philemon to do. Was Onesimus a fugitive slave, as Garnsey believes, or was he seeking help from Paul?⁶⁰ Did Paul simply ask Philemon to take Onesimus back, did he encourage Philemon to manumit him, or was he aiming for an even greater change in their relationship?⁶¹

The answers influence our understanding of the way Paul saw the relationship between slaves and masters in the *ekklesia*. We will therefore closely read the letter with these two questions in mind.

1-7 greeting and thanksgiving

1 Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν 2 καὶ Ἀπφία τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ, 3 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. 4 Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε μνηστὴν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, 5 ἀκούων σου τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν, ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους, 6 ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργῆς γένηται ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν. 7 χαρὰν γὰρ πολλὴν ἔσχον καὶ παράκλησιν ἐπὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου, ὅτι τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἁγίων ἀναπέπνυται διὰ σοῦ, ἀδελφέ,

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our beloved fellow worker 2 and Apphia, our sister and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house, 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God every time I make mention of you in my prayers 5 hearing of your love and faith which you have for the Lord Jesus and for all the saints 6 that the sharing of your faith might be effective in the knowledge of all the good that is among us for Christ. 7 For I have had much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Paul starts his letter by introducing himself, unusually as 'a prisoner of Christ Jesus' (δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ), and his co-author Timothy. He calls Timothy a brother (ὁ ἀδελφός) a term used many times by Paul for his co-workers and fellow believers in

⁶⁰ Garnsey 1996, 176, also Binder 1990, 34, the latter is suggested by Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon* 1996, 334-335

⁶¹ Patterson 1982, 271, considers manumission the object, while De Vos 2001, 104 sees greater implications

general (e.g. 1 Cor 1:1, 2 Cor 1:1, Rom 16:14, Gal 3:15). We will encounter this term again later on in the letter.

He then names the addressees: Philemon, 'our beloved fellow worker' (τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν), Apphia and Archippus and 'the church in your house'. Though the letter is personal, written to a second person singular, it is also addressed to the community and was most likely read at a meeting of the house church.⁶²

In verses 4-5 Paul gives thanks for Philemon's love (τὴν ἀγάπην) and faith (τὴν πίστιν) that he has for Jesus and for all believers (πάντας τοὺς ἀγίους).

The meaning of verse 6 is rather problematic, and we can only go into it briefly. ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου can be understood as 'your sharing in faith', 'you having a part in faith'.⁶³ Paul's wish then would be that Philemon's part in faith increases his knowledge (ἐπιγνώσει) of all the good.

I favour the interpretation, that κοινωνία refers not to Philemon's own share, but to Philemon sharing with others. Then ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς means 'the shared experience of your faith' or 'the experience of sharing your faith'.⁶⁴ Paul's prayer is that the experience of Philemon sharing his faith becomes effective in knowledge of all the good. Philemon's faith is presented as a benefit to all.

This interpretation fits with the tone of the thanksgiving, where both verses 5 and 7 praise Philemon for his faith and love. Paul is building him up, in preparation for his plea. Crediting Philemon with a central role in the community seems more appropriate in this context than an exhortation to grow in knowledge, but the verse remains difficult to understand.

In verse 7 Paul speaks of the joy and encouragement he has had from Philemon's love, he has refreshed or given rest (ἀναπέπαυται) to the hearts of the believers (τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἀγίων).

Several of the words Paul uses in this introduction, such as love (ἀγάπη), heart (σπλάγχνα) and brother (ἀδελφε), return in the appeal to Philemon that follows. With his opening paragraph, Paul has set the tone for the letter and with his praise for Philemon, has made it more difficult for him to refuse his request.⁶⁵

8-22 Paul's appeal for Onesimus

8 Διό, πολλὴν ἐν Χριστῷ παρρησίαν ἔχων ἐπιτάσσειν σοι τὸ ἀνήκον 9 διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μᾶλλον παρακαλῶ, τοιοῦτος ὢν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ·

10 παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Ὀνήσιμον, 11 τὸν ποτέ σοι ἄχρηστον νυνὶ δὲ [καὶ] σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ εὐχρηστον, 12 ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι, αὐτόν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα· 13 ὃν ἐγὼ ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἑμαυτὸν κατέχειν, ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῆ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, 14 χωρὶς δὲ τῆς σῆς γνώμης οὐδὲν ἠθέλησα ποιῆσαι, ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ἦ ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἐκούσιον. 15 τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὦραν, ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς, 16 οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον

⁶² Dunn, *Epistle* 1996, 313

⁶³ Stuhlmacher 1981, 33; Binder 1990, 48-49

⁶⁴ so Dunn, *Epistle* 1996, 318-319

⁶⁵ See also Stuhlmacher 1981, 32 n.46

ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ δούλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν, μάλιστα ἐμοί, πόσω δὲ μᾶλλον σοὶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ. 17 Εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ. 18 εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα. 19 ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω· ἵνα μὴ λέγω σοὶ ὅτι καὶ σεαυτὸν μοι προσοφείλεις. 20 ναί, ἀδελφέ, ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ· ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ.

21 Πεποιθὼς τῇ ὑπακοῇ σου ἔγραψά σοι, εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω ποιήσεις. 22 ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἐτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν· ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν.

23 Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμαλώτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 24 Μάρκος, Ἀρίσταρχος, Δημᾶς, Λουκᾶς, οἱ συνεργοί μου. Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

8 Therefore, even though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is fitting, 9 I rather appeal to you through love, such as I am, Paul, and old man, but now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus. 10 I appeal to you for my son, whom I have begotten while in chains, Onesimus, 11 he was once useless to you but is now useful to you and me, 12 I am sending him back to you, that is, my own heart. 13 I would have liked to keep him with me, so that on your behalf he could serve me, in chains for the gospel. 14 but I wanted to do nothing without your consent, so that your goodness might not be by compulsion but voluntary. 15 For perhaps he was separated for a short time, so that you might have him back for ever, 16 no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me, how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. 17 If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. 18 And if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account. 19 I, Paul, am writing with my own hand, I will repay; not to mention that you owe me your very self besides. 20 Yes, brother, let me have some benefit from you in the Lord, refresh my heart in Christ.

21 Confident of your obedience I have written to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. 22 At the same time, prepare a guest room for me; for I am hoping that through your prayers I may be given back to you.

23 Epaphras, who is my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Even though Paul feels he is in a position to tell Philemon what to do, he rather asks him through love, because (διό) of Philemon's love and faith (4-7). He asks him to do τὸ ἀνῆκον 'what is appropriate', 'what is fitting'. Though we do not yet know what it is Paul asks, it is not something he designates as exceptional, or unusual, but as something the circumstances demand. The term τὸ ἀνῆκον suggests that Philemon is asked to do what would be appropriate for anyone in his situation.

Paul describes himself as a πρεσβύτερος, someone who is to be respected because of his age while, at the same time, he is a prisoner because of his gospel.⁶⁶ Paul mentions his imprisonment several times in this letter. Both in his introduction (1) and here in verse 8, he calls himself a prisoner of Christ Jesus (δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ), a term not used in any of the other letters undisputedly by Paul. In verses 10 and 13 he speaks about being in chains, in vs. 13 more specifically ‘*in chains for the gospel*’ (ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). This image of being in chains also occurs several times in Philippians 1. Later on in this chapter, when we discuss Paul’s strategy in writing to Philemon, we will examine why Paul emphasizes his imprisonment.

Paul then comes to his reason for writing the letter (vs. 10): Onesimus, whom he calls his child. That Paul has ‘*begotten him*’ in prison undoubtedly refers to Onesimus being converted by Paul. This is the news that this letter brings to Philemon. While Onesimus has been away, he has become a believer, just like him.

That he was once useless and now useful (vs. 11) is a pun on his name, Onesimus meaning useful. I do not think there is any need to speculate on whether Onesimus was a useless slave, as some commentators do. Paul simply hints at the change his conversion has made, which has turned him into a member of the community and has therefore made him useful in his eyes. Onesimus’ conversion is the only reason we can discern from the letter for the change in attitude that Paul will ask of Philemon.

Paul is now sending Onesimus back, presumably with this letter. He calls him his own heart (τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα), which brings to mind vs. 7 where Paul spoke of the hearts (τὰ σπλάγχνα) of the saints that benefited from Philemon. Paul suggests that he could have kept Onesimus without Philemon’s consent but chose not to. Even though he would have liked to keep Onesimus with him (13), to serve him on Philemon’s behalf, he does not want to force this good deed on Philemon (14, κατὰ ἀνάγκην). The fact that Paul felt he was in the position to decide whether Onesimus would go back or not, makes it unlikely that he was a runaway slave in any legal sense. Harboring a runaway slave was considered a serious crime, making Paul liable to severe punishment.⁶⁷

According to Moses Finley, in his book on ancient slavery: “fugitive slaves are almost an obsession in the sources. Slaveowners did not suffer such a loss of property lightly. They sought help from friends and associates, they offered rewards by public advertisement, they consulted oracles, astrologers and dream interpreters, they appealed to the public authorities and they engaged professional ‘slave-catchers’ (fugitivarii), known in the Roman world, at any rate from the late Republic”.⁶⁸

Paul could hardly have written so lightly that he would have liked to keep Onesimus, if this was what he faced. The passive in vs. 15 (ἐχωρίσθη) again does not seem in keeping with Onesimus having run away. To write that Onesimus and Philemon were separated, seems an unlikely way to describe the crime of a slave running away.

Perhaps, Paul says, Onesimus was separated for a time from Philemon, so that he might have him back forever, but now under different circumstances. Philemon is

⁶⁶ Dunn, *Epistle* 1996, 327

⁶⁷ Patterson 1982, 269

⁶⁸ Finley 1980, 100

encouraged to see the loss of his slave in a positive light: he has been away, but has come back as a brother.

In this verse, Paul comes closest to defining the new relationship between Onesimus and Philemon and the change this required from Philemon especially: *'no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me, how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.'* Onesimus comes back no longer as a slave (οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον), but, because of his conversion, as a brother (ἀδελφόν). Paul does not give any special reason for this change, it is simply another way of saying that Onesimus has become a believer. As Philemon has not been a witness to this event, it is Paul who has to bring him this news in this letter.

There is a strong resemblance between the thought expressed in this verse, *no longer as a slave but as a beloved brother in the Lord* and the baptismal proclamation that we examined in Chapter 1. Paul describes the bond between believers and Christ, and consequently that between believers themselves, in very strong terms. They have become one body, have become grown together. What is phrased in general terms in other letters is made personal in this special case. The social distinction between slave and free is replaced by the unity of brotherhood.

Paul often describes relationships within his communities in terms of family; Onesimus has become his child in prison and is now Philemon's brother just as he is Paul's brother. A man would be expected to treat his brother with honour, to protect his welfare and to strive to lessen the inequalities between them, very different from the behaviour of a master to a slave.⁶⁹

We may expect Paul to say that they are now brothers in the Lord (καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ), but, surprisingly he says firstly that they are brothers in the flesh (καὶ ἐν σαρκί). This notion of brothers both in the flesh and in the Lord, is not found elsewhere in Paul. The term 'flesh' (σαρξ) refers to the earthly or human side of life. The brotherhood between Philemon and Onesimus is, apparently, not limited to the religious community, but also concerns their every day life.

Paul goes on to encourage Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would Paul (17 προσλαβοῦ αὐτόν ὡς ἐμέ) if he considers Paul a κοινωνόν. This is a partner or co-worker (as used for Titus in 2 Cor 8:23), synonymous with the word used for Philemon in the introduction (συνεργῶ). Paul brings Onesimus to his own social level, that of a colleague and a guest, and urges Philemon to treat him accordingly. Just as a brother, a guest stands at the opposite end of the social spectrum from a slave.⁷⁰ For a slave to be treated as a guest in the house of his master would be a complete turnaround.

Verse 18 indicates that something had occurred before Onesimus left: *'if he has wronged you or owes you anything'* (εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἢ ὀφείλει). But Paul does not want to dwell on what happened or whether Onesimus was at fault. A much cited parallel with regard to this passage, is Pliny the Younger's letter to Sabinianus.⁷¹ This letter was written on behalf of Sabinianus' freedman, who had come to Pliny to find help. I will quote a few interesting lines from this letter:

⁶⁹ De Vos 2001, 103

⁷⁰ De Vos 2001, 103

⁷¹ Pliny the Younger, Ep. 9.21

Your freedman with whom you said you were angry has been with me; he threw himself at my feet and clung to me with as much submission as he could have done at yours. (...) in short, he convinced me by his whole behavior, that he sincerely repents of his fault. (...) I know you are angry with him, and I know too, it is not without reason; but mercy is never more worthy of praise than when there is the justest cause for anger. (...) Allow something to his youth, to his tears, and to your own gentle disposition: do not make him uneasy any longer, and I will add too, do not make yourself so; for a man of your kindness of heart cannot be angry without feeling great uneasiness.

I am afraid that if I add my prayers to this, I would seem to be compelling you rather than asking you to forgive him. Yet I will do it and in the strongest terms since I have rebuked him very sharply and severely, warning him that I will never intercede for him again. Although it was proper to say this to him, in order to frighten him, it was not intended for your hearing. I may possibly have the occasion to again intercede for him and obtain your forgiveness if the error is one which is suitable for my intercession and your pardon.⁷²

Of course we do not know to what extent the occurrence between Sabinianus and his freedman was similar to that between Philemon and Onesimus. But it is interesting to see that Sabinianus uses the freedman's tears and repentance to soften Sabinianus' feelings. Paul does not refer to Onesimus' feelings about the incident at all. Neither does Paul tell Philemon that he has rebuked Onesimus, or warned him, as Pliny does. Paul is remarkably uninterested in Onesimus' part in the affair.

There are fascinating similarities in style and rhetoric between Pliny and Paul. Pliny, for example, says that if he added his prayers, he would seem to be compelling rather than asking for forgiveness. He then goes ahead and does put full pressure on Sabinianus. Paul makes the same distinction in vs. 8-9, but chooses a different tactic, saying that he could command Philemon, but rather appeals.

Pliny writes down what he has said to the freedman, adding that this was not intended for Sabinianus' hearing. Paul uses a similar trick in vs. 19: *'not to mention that you owe me your very self'*. Both authors manipulate their addressees, saying things without actually saying them.

Paul does not dwell on the incident between Philemon and Onesimus. Again, he places himself between them, showing his strong personal bond with Onesimus. Just as he transferred his own credit with Philemon to Onesimus in the previous verse, he now takes on all of Onesimus' debit: *put that on my account* (τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα). Paul can safely make this grand gesture since he considers Philemon to be deeply in his debt already, as he points out in a not very subtle way (not to mention, ἵνα μὴ λέγω). Perhaps to compensate for this damage to Philemon's pride, Paul follows with a joke: let me have some benefit from you (ἐγὼ σου ὀναίμην), *refresh my heart* (ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα). The first clause contains another play on Onesimus name, while in the second, the word heart is another reference to Onesimus, whom Paul has called his heart in vs. 12.

Paul is positive that his plea for Onesimus will be successful: *confident of your obedience, knowing that you will do even more than I ask* (21 Πεποιθῶς τῇ ὑπακοῇ

⁷² translation Stowers 1986, 160

σου, εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω ποιήσεις). Having started with an appeal rather than a command (vs 8-9), he now changes his tone and speaks confidently of obedience.

Some commentators have understood the 'even more' of verse 21 to possibly mean manumission.⁷³ Paul could be asking Philemon to free Onesimus. But manumission in itself would not necessarily have changed the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon in a fundamental way, as we have seen in Chapter 2. A freed slave would usually continue to serve his or her master, under similar circumstances.

In the manumission practice of the time, a contract was drawn up, specifying the obligations of the freed slave to the former master. Former masters still had the right to control and punish their freed slave. De Vos concludes from this that Paul was not concerned with a structural and legal change, as this would not have made a difference in itself, but only with a change in the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus and their perception of each other.⁷⁴ This change was far greater than any legal change could have been.

However, we know from the text in 1 Corinthians that we examined in Chapter 2, that Paul does consider manumission an improvement for slaves. In 1 Cor 7:21 he urges slaves to take the opportunity for freedom, should it arise. Would he have wanted less for his child, Onesimus?

I do agree with De Vos that the major change in Onesimus' situation would not have come from Philemon manumitting him, but from Philemon seeing him as a brother, rather than a slave. However, as we have seen in 1 Cor 7, Paul still considers it worthwhile for a slave to be freed in legal terms, even though a slave is already freed in the Lord. I think this 'even more' that Paul speaks of here, could therefore very well refer to manumission.

Conclusion

What can we now say about the two questions we formulated at the beginning of this chapter?

Firstly, what brought Onesimus to Paul? We have found the possibility that Onesimus had run away to be highly unlikely, on the basis of Paul's attitude in verses 13-15. Therefore, Garnsey's view that Paul's conservative stance on slavery is confirmed in this letter, returning a fugitive slave to his master, has to be rejected.

It is also possible that Philemon himself sent Onesimus to Paul. Although the fact that something had occurred before Onesimus left, which could stand between him and Philemon, does not speak in favour of this option.

That Onesimus came to Paul for some form of mediation, possibly because of what had occurred, seems most likely.⁷⁵ If that is the case, then the letter makes it clear that for Paul, Onesimus becoming a believer was far more important than any previous trouble between him and Philemon. Paul deals with the matter in two sentences, the gist of which is Philemon's indebtedness to Paul. He does not try to soften Philemon with talk of Onesimus' regret or remorse. In the light of their new brotherhood, any

⁷³ Dunn, *Epistle* 1996, 345, Stuhlmacher 1981, 53-54

⁷⁴ De Vos 104

⁷⁵ so Dunn, *Epistle* 334, Barclay 101

previous discord has become irrelevant. Whatever it was that brought Onesimus to Paul, it certainly does not interest Paul. Only the result of their meeting, Onesimus becoming a believer and a brother, matters.

What did Paul ask of Philemon? The first part of the request seems to be for Onesimus to be sent back to Paul. Paul would have liked to keep Onesimus, but wants Philemon to send him voluntarily (8-14). A further request is that Philemon receives Onesimus as a brother, as he would receive Paul. Paul wants Philemon to accept that Onesimus has become a believer, and that this has changed their relationship completely. In order to do this, Philemon has to forget whatever happened between him and Onesimus and cannot let it stand between them.

We can tell from Paul's tone that he is asking a lot from Philemon; throughout the letter he flatters and manipulates him. Several times Paul mentions his authority over Philemon, but then expressly refrains from using it. In verse 8 he claims to be bold enough to command Philemon, but then he rather appeals. Verse 14 suggests that Paul could force Philemon to do a good thing, but that he prefers him to do it voluntarily. In verse 19 Paul offers to take on whatever debt Onesimus has incurred, as he and Philemon both know that Philemon owes himself to Paul and would never try to collect.

It is as if Paul is playing a dangerous game, applying as much leverage as he can without upsetting Philemon, in order to get maximum results for Onesimus and himself. Part of this game may be his emphasis on his own weak position, that of a prisoner. Immediately at the beginning of the letter he introduces himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Again at the start of his plea in verse 9 he presents this image of himself: *I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus*. As we can understand from 2 Tim (1:8 and 2:9), being in prison could be considered shameful. Since Paul was asking a great thing from someone of considerably higher social standing (a slave owner rich enough to welcome a church community in his house) he may have tried to make himself smaller socially, while still emphasising his authority over Philemon in faith (vs. 5-8, 14 19).

Apart from this major shift in the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon, was Paul asking *even more* and also aiming for Onesimus' manumission? Based on Paul's attitude to manumission in 1 Cor 7, this certainly seems likely. Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus in his new status as a fellow believer, and to send him back to Paul as a freed man.

Of course, the case of Onesimus is a special one, in which Paul was obviously emotionally involved. We do not know how much of Paul's request was specific to this situation. What does become clear from this letter, however, is that the change from slave to brother upon becoming a believer, is not substantiated by Paul, it is simply a given. This confirms the position, expressed in the passages examined so far, that in the Lord, a slave was no longer a slave.

Chapter 4 Slaves as members of associations

In the previous three chapters, we have pieced together an image of the way Paul viewed slaves in his communities, from references to slaves in three of his letters. We have seen that within these communities, Paul regarded them as no longer slaves. In the first chapter we saw this in 1 Cor 12 and Gal 3, where Paul declared the distinction between slave and free irrelevant after baptism, which incorporates everyone in the unity of Christ. In chapter 2 we examined 1 Cor 7, where Paul aims his message directly at slaves: being a slave is not an obstacle in being a member of the community, in Christ a slave is freed, just as a free man is a slave of the Lord. In chapter 3 Paul's letter to Philemon was seen to hold a similar message: with his conversion to Christianity, Onesimus has become a brother and Philemon should no longer regard him as a slave.

As we have seen, Paul is not concerned with slaves in general, nor with slavery as an institution, but only with the position of slaves within the community of believers. In this final chapter, we will therefore compare the Pauline communities with similar organisations in Paul's time that had both free and slave members. From this comparison we hope to learn whether Paul's view of the position of slaves in the *ekklesia* was exceptional, or similar to other organisations.

Voluntary associations

In Greece and Asia Minor, Paul's work area, many people came together in voluntary groups, to socialize, share meals and worship. These groups, voluntary or private associations, as they are called in literature, are similar to Pauline communities in several ways.⁷⁶ They used terms similar to those early Christian groups did, to designate themselves and some pagan writers describe early Christian groups in terms otherwise used for associations.⁷⁷ In some associations, familial language (mother, father, brother) was used by apparently unrelated members.⁷⁸ Though in these cases this language may not have the strong conceptual background that it has for Paul, i.e. all believers being God's children and therefore brothers and sisters, it does suggest that there was a strong bond between members of a particular group. Just like Pauline communities, associations provided social identity and cohesion for their members.

The main activities of the associations were also similar to those of Pauline communities. Association members came together regularly to honour their gods and to have communal meals. The religious dimension of associations is attested by numerous inscriptions that record the origin of an association as a result of a dream or vision in which a deity appeared. In response to this dream, the association was then formed to worship that deity.⁷⁹ Archaeological evidence also shows the importance of religious devotion for such groups. In many cases, (remnants of) altars, monuments and temples are found in halls used by associations.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Eg. Kloppenborg 1996; Harland 2003; Van Nijf 1997

⁷⁷ Harland 2003, 3 n1

⁷⁸ Harland 2003, 32

⁷⁹ Ascough 2003, 34

⁸⁰ Harland 2003, 63-74

The communal meals held by associations had the form of a *deipnon*, followed by a *symposion*. During the *deipnon* the meal would be eaten, while the *symposion* was a period of drinking, accompanied by entertainment. As with the meals in Pauline communities, that most likely also took this *deipnon-symposion* form, the entertainment at the *symposia* of associations could be philosophical discourse, hymn singing or communal worship.⁸¹

On the grounds of these similarities, we can consider associations to be useful analogies for early Christian congregations.

There were many different associations and Pauline communities will have had more in common with some than with others. Three types were usually distinguished, on the basis of their principle activity: funerary, religious and professional associations. This typology is no longer considered adequate, however, since the activities of various associations overlapped to a large degree.⁸² All were, at least in part, religious, since piety was found in all dimensions of ancient culture. Professional associations were not strictly involved with economic activities, but with social and cultic as well. The burial of members was a function of many associations, but most likely not the sole purpose of any. It is therefore deemed more appropriate to distinguish associations on the basis of the profile of their membership: based on a household, a common trade or the cult of a deity.⁸³

The first and last group correspond most to Pauline groups, since these were obviously religious and also appear to have been based, at least partly, on household groups. Both in Acts and in Paul's letters people are mentioned with their 'house', sometimes in a greeting or in relation to baptism (Acts 11:14, 18:8, 1 Cor 1:16, Rom 16:10). The house is also named as a meeting place (1 Cor 16:19, Phlm 2), as it was for associations based on the household. The household included not only the biological family but also those dependent on them, their servants and slaves. Like the Pauline communities, these household associations consequently had a heterogeneous membership, including people of different social levels, men and women, slaves, free and freed people.

Slaves as members

Many associations had slaves as members, we can find confirmation of this fact from several sources.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, most of these sources provide little information on the situation of slaves in these associations or the relations between slave and free members.

Confirmation of the presence of slaves in associations can be found in Roman law, though the relevance of law for understanding everyday practice is surely limited.⁸⁵

Slaves, too, with the consent of their masters, may be admitted to the associations of the lower orders [in collegia tenuiorum]; those in charge of

⁸¹ Smith 2003, 179

⁸² Kloppenborg 1996, 18; Harland 2003, 28

⁸³ Kloppenborg 1996, 20-22; see also Harland 2003, 29

⁸⁴ see Waltzing 1900, 251-254, e.g. SEG XXXV 1024

⁸⁵ Digest 47.22.3.2; Mommsen, Krueger & Watson 1985, 794

such associations should know that if they admit slaves to such associations without the master's knowledge or consent, they will henceforth be liable to a penalty of a hundred gold pieces per slave.

Whether slave owners were reluctant to give permission to their slaves or whether slaves in Paul's environment did indeed ask or require permission from their master can not be determined from this text.

As the provision of a burial was one of the objectives of many associations, inscriptions were made to record a burial of a member or mark a collegial burial plot. These funerary inscriptions also provide evidence of the participation of slaves in associations.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, they only attest to slaves being members, but say nothing about their position within the associations.

The main source for more detailed information on associations is the inscriptions that were posted at meeting places. These statutes and dedications give information about the form and activities of the group. They usually give the name of the group and the deity or deities to whom the organisation is dedicated. They sometimes also include the requirements for membership, the amount of dues to be paid by each member, the names and duties of officers, the specified meeting times, and the rules of conduct expected of members at meetings.⁸⁷ In several cases, lists of members are found that report their status, whether they were free, freed or slave.⁸⁸ This mention of status, sometimes in combination with a mention of the dues paid by each member, shows an interest in making the hierarchy of the group public.⁸⁹

An inscription that confirms this interest in hierarchy with respect to slaves, was found in Lanuvium (south-east of Rome) dating from 136 CE⁹⁰:

It was voted unanimously that whoever desires to enter this collegium shall pay an initiation fee of 100 sesterces and an amphora of good wine, and shall pay monthly dues of 5 asses.

It was voted that if a slave member of this collegium dies, and his master or mistress unreasonably refuses to relinquish his body for burial, and that he has not left written instructions, a token funeral ceremony will be held.

It was voted that if any slave member of this collegium becomes free, he is required to donate an amphora of good wine.

We understand from this inscription that the association had both slave and freed members. The significance of the amphora of wine, to be donated at manumission, is that it expressed a change in status within the community.⁹¹ Whether a member was a slave or freed appears to have been relevant for one's position within the group. We

⁸⁶ Scott Perry 1999, 137, e.g. SEG XXIX 1186 (inscription of an association of carpenters)

⁸⁷ Smith 2003, 88

⁸⁸ e.g. Donceel 27-71, SEG 36 [1986] 925

⁸⁹ Harrill 1995, 150

⁹⁰ Dessau, ILS 7212, translation Lewis & Reinhold 1990, 186-188

⁹¹ Harrill 1995, 151

have no evidence from his letters that Paul had a similar status awareness; 1 Cor 11:20-22, where Paul reprimands the rich, as we have seen in chapter 2, rather shows the opposite.

A different attitude towards slaves

There are indications, however, that the hierarchy in associations was not always rigid. Two inscriptions from a group of Dionysos *mystai* in Byzantion, give thanks and honour to a slave (or possibly a freedman) by the name of Semnos.⁹² He is honoured together with a free man, for performing several functions in this association, one of which was that of controller of finances (εὐθυνος).

Another association that does not appear to confirm the prevailing hierarchy is a private cultic association from Philadelphia. The inscription stating their origin, aims and rules, is frequently seen to be a relevant analogy to early Christian communities, as men and women, and slaves and free, are all explicitly welcomed in it.⁹³ I will cite this inscription here in full, because I think many parts of the text are relevant, when making a considered comparison with Paul.

The beginning of this text describes how someone named Dionysius received instruction from Zeus in his sleep, to open his house to people and establish a cult that would sacrifice there regularly to various deities (1-15).

The second paragraph (15-25) forbids members to use spells or potions, especially those trying to interfere with reproduction. Then follow two passages on rules for sexual behaviour of men (26-34) and women (35-50), that we will examine in detail later.

The next paragraph (51-58) names the goddess Agdistis as the guardian of the *oikos* and calls upon members to touch the inscription on certain occasions, if they are confident that they have obeyed the ordinances given. The text ends with a prayer for the welfare of Dionysius.

*May Good Fortune Prevail.
For health and common salvation
and the finest reputation the ordinances given
to Dionysius in his sleep were written up,
5 giving access into his oikos to men and women,
free people and slaves. For in this place have been set up
altars of Zeus Eumenes, and of Hestia his coadjutor,
and of the other saviour gods, and Eudaimonia,
Plutus, Arete, Hygieia,
10 Agathe Tyche, Agathos Daimon, Mneme,
the Charitae and Nike.
To this man Zeus has given ordinances for
the performance of the purifications, the cleansings and the mysteries,
in accordance with ancestral custom and as has now been written.*

⁹² IByzantion 31 and 32

⁹³ Dittenberger, SIG 985; translation Barton & Horsley 1981, 9-10; quoted in Harland 2003, 30 and 70; Harrill 1995, 150; Meeks 1974, 169; Klauck 1981, 85; Ascough 2003, 35

15 *When coming into this oikos let men and women, free people and slaves, swear by all the gods neither to know nor make use wittingly of any deceit against a man or a woman, neither poison harmful to men nor harmful spells.*

20 *They are not themselves to make use of a love potion, abortifacient, contraceptive, or any other thing fatal to children; nor are they to recommend it to, nor connive at it with, another. They are not to refrain in any respect from being well-intentioned towards this oikos. If anyone performs or plots any of these things, they are neither to put up with it nor keep silent, 25 but expose it and defend themselves.*

Apart from his own wife, a man is not to have sexual relations with another married woman, whether free or slave, nor with a boy nor a virgin girl; nor shall he recommend it to another. Should he connive at it with someone, they shall expose such a person,

30 *both the man and the woman, and not conceal it or keep silent about it. Woman and man, whoever does any of the things written above, let him not enter this oikos. For great are the gods set up in it: they watch over these things, and will not tolerate those who transgress the ordinances.*

35 *A free woman is to be chaste and shall not know bed of, nor have sexual intercourse with, another man except her own husband. But if she does have such knowledge, such a woman is not chaste, but defiled and full of endemic pollution, and unworthy to reverence this god whose holy things these are that have been set up. She is not to be present at the sacrifices,*

40 *nor to strike against the purifications and cleansings, nor to see the mysteries being performed.*

But if she does any of these things from the time these ordinances have come on to this inscription, she shall have evil curses from the gods for disregarding these ordinances. For the god does

45 *not desire these things to happen at all, nor does he wish it, but he wants obedience. The gods will be gracious to those who obey, and always give them all good things, whatever gods give to men whom they love. But should any transgress, they shall hate such people and*

50 *inflict upon them great punishments.*

These ordinances were placed with Agdistis, the very holy guardian and mistress of this oikos. May she create good thoughts in men and women, free people and slaves, in order that they may obey the things written here.

55 *At the monthly and annual sacrifices may those men and*

women who have confidence in themselves touch this inscription on which the ordinances of the god have been written, in order that those who obey these ordinances and those who do not may be manifest.

*60 Saviour Zeus, accept the touch of Dionysius mercifully
and kindly, and be well disposed towards him and his family. Provide
good recompenses, health, salvation, peace,
safety on land and sea*

The explicit inclusion, mentioned three times (lines 5-6, 15-16 and 53-54), of men and women, free people and slaves (ἀνδράσι καὶ γυναῖξιν ἐλευθέρους καὶ οἰκέταις/δούλοις), as members in this association is remarkable. Access without discrimination on the grounds of gender or civic status was apparently important to this group.⁹⁴ The inclusion formula has led to some far reaching conclusions by commentators: Meeks considers this inclusion as a sign that "in some cultic associations the ordinary social roles were disregarded".⁹⁵ Harrill suggests that "in its membership and access to religious participation, this cultic association disregarded the ordinary, hierarchical social roles of male and female, slave and free".⁹⁶ Harland, however, regards this inscription as simply an example of an association based on household connections. He does not comment on the explicit mention of free people and slaves as members, though none of the other household associations mentioned by him, invite slaves in this pronounced way.⁹⁷

Information about slave members usually comes from lists of members that state what each person's status was. This is, therefore, certainly an unusual group, though Meeks and Harrill may be going too far with their conclusion of disregard for social roles in it. They only comment on lines 5-6 and 53-54, where the inclusion of men and women, free people and slaves is mentioned and do not discuss the other relevant parts of the text.

When we look at the entire text, however, we do see distinctions being made between social groups. The paragraphs on sexual morals (25-50) are not consistent with a disregard for social roles. Here, different rules apply for men and women, and free women have a different status from women who are slaves.

A married man is forbidden to have sex with another married woman, a boy or a virgin girl. Relations with unmarried women who are not virgins are apparently allowed. A free woman (35 γυναῖκα ἐλευθέραν), however, has to be chaste (ἀγνην) and is not allowed to have sex with any man apart from her husband.

The differences between men and women are not only found in the respective rules for their behaviour, but also in the punishment on violation of the rules. The rejection of a woman who breaks these rules is far greater than that of a man.

If a man acts in conflict with the regulations, both he and the woman he is involved with, are warned not to enter the house, they are not tolerated by the gods. A woman who breaks the rules is considered defiled and a source of endemic pollution (37 μεμιασμένην καὶ μύσους ἐμφυλίου πλήρη). Her pollution affects those around her, therefore she can not be present at any rituals. The gods will punish her with evil

⁹⁴ Barton & Horsley 1981, 16

⁹⁵ Meeks 1974, 169

⁹⁶ Harrill 1995, 150

⁹⁷ e.g. IGUR 160

curses. Contrary to the woman illicitly involved with a man, the man involved with a married woman is not included in any form of punishment.

Enslaved women are explicitly excluded from these rules on sexuality. They are not required to be chaste, their status apparently does not affect the entire community, as the impurity of free women does. The restrictions laid down for men allow masters to have sex with their slaves, a practice that was common in Greek society, as long as they are not married or a child (26-28).⁹⁸ Given the fact that female slaves were not masters of their own sexuality, it is not surprising that this association does not require them to follow any rules in this respect. Though they are members, the community as a whole is not affected by their behaviour. Even though male slaves are not explicitly excluded from the regulations, the same applies to them in many ways. The rules suppose control over one's choice in sexual partners, but a male slave could not reject a married woman if she was his master, nor was he free to choose an enslaved partner.⁹⁹

We have established that the text does differentiate between groups that appeared to be included without distinction in the formula '*men and women, free people and slaves*'. Regulations differ for men and women, and free women are set apart from enslaved women.

We may see further evidence of distinction and stratification within this association in two cases in the text where the formula is not repeated in its entirety, where men and women are mentioned but free people and slaves are not. In line 15, members of the association are called upon to swear not to use any deceit, poison or spells against a man or a woman (μήτε ἀνδρὶ μήτε γυναικί). Adding 'free people or slaves' in this case would have meant that a master would swear not to deceive his or her slave. This would have been a rather submissive gesture for owners used to absolute power over their property. That the oath is limited to 'a man or a woman', therefore, might very well be deliberate.

The second case where 'free people and slaves' is not found, is in lines 56-57, where 'men and women' (ἄνδρες τε καὶ γυναῖκες) are summoned to touch the inscription at the monthly and annual sacrifices, if they are confident that they have obeyed the ordinances given. The ordinances on sexuality are stated to apply only to men and free married women, but can, as we have seen, in practice hardly be observed by any slaves. Thus, the fact that 'free and slave' is not added in this case may again reflect social conventions. Perhaps, then, slaves did not take part in touching the inscription, which appears to have been a central rite for this association.

Comparison with Paul

In our examination of this text, we have seen that in spite of the emphasis on social inclusion, several explicit and implicit social distinctions are made within this association. We will now compare this text, particularly the rules on sexual behaviour, to the guidelines formulated by Paul for his congregations.

Just like the Philadelphian association, Paul welcomes men and women, free people and slaves (Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 12:13) into his communities. We have discussed these

⁹⁸ Finley 1980, 95-96

⁹⁹ Schumacher 2001, 240

texts extensively in the first chapter. Like the Philadelphian association, Paul places great value on proper sexual conduct within his congregations. He also uses a similar notion of pollution when members engage in illicit behaviour, as we can see from the following text from 1 Cor 6:15-19, condemning men for having sex with prostitutes, something that is allowed in the Philadelphia association:

- 15 οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν μέλη Χριστοῦ ἐστίν; ἄρα οὖν τὰ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποιήσω πόρνης μέλη; μὴ γένοιτο.
16 [ἦ] οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ὁ κολλώμενος τῇ πόρνη ἐν σώμα ἐστίν; Ἔσονται γάρ, φησὶν, οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν.
17 ὁ δὲ κολλώμενος τῷ κυρίῳ ἐν πνεύμα ἐστίν.
18 φεύγετε τὴν πορνείαν. πᾶν ἁμάρτημα ὃ ἐὰν ποιήσῃ ἄνθρωπος ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματός ἐστίν· ὁ δὲ πορνεύων εἰς τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα ἁμαρτάνει.
19 ἢ οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματός ἐστίν οὗ ἔχετε ἀπὸ θεοῦ, καὶ οὐκ ἐστὲ ἑαυτῶν;

- 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!*
16 Or do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute becomes one body (with her)? Because, it is written, "the two will become one flesh".
17 he who unites himself with the Lord becomes one spirit (with him).
18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.
19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy spirit within you, whom you have from God and that you are not your own?

Paul presents a similar idea of one member's sexual actions affecting other members of the community. In his view, if a man who is a member of the community has sex with a prostitute, that causes the body of Christ to become one with a prostitute. Every member of the community is a member of Christ, therefore their body is not their own. What happens to the individual body, happens to the body of believers, as it were. The contamination appears to be immediate, not, as in Philadelphia, flowing from the continued presence of the offender in the community.

I see no reason to assume that this effect of a member on the entire group is limited to men for Paul, as it is limited to women in the Philadelphian text. Men are used as an example here, but the relationship between members and the body would be the same for any member. In his sexual ethics generally, Paul does not distinguish between men and women or between free and enslaved women. In 1 Cor 7, as we have seen in chapter two, every guideline that applies to women applies to men as well. Of course, just like the Philadelphian text, Paul's regulations presuppose authority over one's own body and sexual conduct. Since Paul apparently applies them to all members without exception, these rules may have formed a problem for slave members.

This is the argument Glancy makes in her article 'an obstacle to slaves' participation in the Corinthian church'. Unfortunately, she holds the view that slaves in the Roman Empire were unable to contract legal marriages and that therefore Paul's advice in 1 Cor 7, which, as we have seen, centres around questions of marriage, is of little

relevance to slaves.¹⁰⁰ The text from the Philadelphian association offers evidence to the contrary, as do many tomb inscriptions.¹⁰¹ Though the bond between slaves, called 'conternubia', was not the same as the official bond that existed between free partners, it was a kind of marriage, and could be respected by free people, as the inscription from Philadelphia testifies. We need not assume, therefore, that Paul only addresses free people when writing about marriage.

The fact remains that many slaves were not in a position to determine for themselves whether they lived in accordance with Paul's guidelines or not. We have no indication from Paul's letters how he judged this situation. We can see that Paul took a different approach to this problem from the association in Philadelphia. He did not set apart free women as chaste and pure, but considered each member's body as affecting the body of believers. Whether or not Paul's inclusion on principle of all members, under equal demands, excluded slaves in practice, can not be determined.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the information that is available on slaves as members of associations is sparse. The nature of the surviving evidence is such that what was customary practice between members of association generally remains hidden. However, what we can say from the inscriptions we have examined is that though slaves were members of associations just as free people were, their status as slaves seems to have set them apart in most cases. Even where they apparently were as welcome as any member, in Philadelphia, a slave was not an equal participant. There is a huge gulf between inviting slaves to join, and telling them they are freed, as Paul does. In our look at the associations, we have seen nothing comparable to Paul's view that just by becoming a member of the group, a slave is no longer a slave, but a brother.

¹⁰⁰ Glancy 1998, 496

¹⁰¹ Schumacher 2001, 242-244

Conclusion

It is evident from Paul's letters that he was in a constant struggle to bring his point across, about how to live together as believers. The situation of slaves was one aspect of this point. In this struggle, the principle that dominated Paul's view of the community of believers was unity: all believers are one in Christ. This unity overrides social distinctions and replaces them with a new brotherhood. Slaves are told by Paul that, as part of the community of Christ, they are no longer slaves.

The texts on slaves by Paul are certainly not abundant, but since they all point in the same direction, I think they do allow us to form an opinion. Slightly paraphrasing the key sentences from the four texts that I have discussed, we can see that they overlap and thus strengthen each other:

There is neither slave nor free, all are one in Christ (Gal 3:28)

Whether slave or free, all form one body that is Christ's (1 Cor 12:12-13)

A slave is a freedman of the Lord, while a free person is a slave of Christ (1 Cor 7:22)

Onesimus is no longer a slave, but is a brother, both in the flesh and in the Lord (Phlm 16)

A surprisingly consistent picture emerges. In every text, the status of slave is denied or replaced by another status: by unity, by becoming freed, or by brotherhood. Also, in every text, the situation of slave and free is related to the Lord or Christ. As we have seen in Chapter 1, 'in Christ' or 'in the Lord' is an essential motif for Paul to describe existence as a believer. 'In Christ' is not an eschatological reality, but it is where life is lived.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, this attitude follows directly from Paul's christology. The starting point is the distinctly Pauline idea of participation in Christ. As the second Adam, Christ has started a new creation. In baptism, all believers become one with Christ, all believers participate in him, to live in this new existence. They unite to form the body of Christ that is the community of believers.

Within this community, as all believers become one, social distinctions are overcome. The social differences that were fundamental in Greek thought, between Greek and barbarian, free and slave, man and woman, are pronounced to be no longer relevant. In a society that placed great importance on social hierarchy, Paul needed to fight for this counter-cultural position. Clearly, the baptismal proclamation did not wipe away all influence of social distinctions. Otherwise Paul would not have needed to address the issue of slave and free or have spoken up for slaves.

Chapters 2 and 3 have shown us how he does this in 1 Corinthians and the letter to Philemon. Both letters not only show concern for the position of slaves, but also remind the free that they are not superior. The rich and powerful are told that a right understanding of the body of believers is a necessary condition for the Lord's supper. In the letter to Philemon, Paul tries to influence the master Philemon's attitude and behaviour towards Onesimus. He has the power to change his relationship with Onesimus to fit their new status as brothers.

We have seen from this that Paul does not write about the position of slaves in general, he does not take a stand on slavery as an institution, or encourage any anti-social behaviour of slaves. In this sense, Paul can be regarded as conventional, as Garnsey suggests. However, Paul does not encourage submissive behaviour of slaves either, as later New Testament writers did, who admonished slaves to be obedient and loyal. In this respect, Garnsey misjudges Paul's conservatism. On the contrary, Paul tells slaves that they are freed, and in the same breath lets masters know that they are slaves.

The unity of slave and free that Paul envisions for his communities is rightly termed 'dramatic' and 'provocative' by Garnsey. We have seen that Paul is consistent in this attitude throughout his letters. There is no conflict between a 'conservative' and a 'provocative' Paul, on the issue of slaves. Paul simply limits his interest to his communities, where social and cultural hierarchies are denied. This implies a strong criticism of the social values of his time.

In Chapter 4 we have seen that hierarchy was an important characteristic, not only of society in general, but of voluntary associations as well. These groups sometimes had both slave and free members and in one case explicitly welcomed all. Yet even in this association, slaves were not equal participants. Voluntary associations show no equivalent of the Pauline idea that slave and free needed to sit at the table as equals.

Paul's attitude to slaves, his disregard for the distinction between slave and free, can thus not be traced back to social values of his time. It is born of his christology and ecclesiology, it is a consequence of his most fundamental beliefs.

Further research

This conclusion raises two distinct questions, suggesting further research. Both questions concern the generalisation of the principle of 'unity in Christ'.

Firstly, is the principle of unity applied equally for all categories mentioned by Paul? Does the consistent application in the case of slaves shed any light on issues regarding other social categories, for example, on the much debated issue of Paul's attitude to women?

Secondly, does the perspective of unity in Christ remain a ruling principle for the later Deutero-Pauline letters, with regard to their attitude to slaves? I will briefly explore the second question here.

In the Deutero-Pauline letters, there is a shift in the approach to slaves. The focus is no longer on their position within the community, but on their behaviour as slaves. In all four Deutero-Pauline texts where slaves are addressed (1 Tim 6:1-2, Tit 2:9-10, Col 3:22-4:1, Eph 6:5-9), they are urged to be obedient and respectful, a marked difference from Paul's words.

Two texts, 1 Tim 6:1-2 and Tit 2:9-10, base their admonitions on the standing of the Christian message, slave behaviour should not jeopardise this. I cite Tit 2:

9 δούλους ἰδίους δεσπόταις ὑποτάσσεσθαι ἐν πᾶσιν, εὐαρέστους εἶναι, μὴ ἀντιλέγοντας, 10 μὴ ροσφιζομένους, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν πίστιν ἐνδεικνυμένους ἀγαθῆν, ἵνα τὴν διδασκαλίαν τὴν τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ κοσμῶσιν ἐν πᾶσιν.

9 slaves should obey their masters in everything, they should be pleasing, not argumentative 10 They should not steal from them, but show that they can be fully trusted, so that they will make the teaching about God our saviour attractive in every way.

This passage is quite a departure from Paul's attitude to slaves. The subjugated position of slaves is reinforced and the masters are not discussed. Neither Titus nor 1 Timothy seem to contain anything similar to Paul's idea of the unity of believers or participation in Christ.

The two other Deutero-Pauline texts, however, do contain some similarities. In Eph 4: 12-13, we hear an echo of Paul: Christ has appointed leaders *'to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity (ἐνότητα) in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God, (...) attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ'*. However, here unity in Christ is a goal to be attained, rather than a present reality, as it is with Paul.

In Chapter 1, we have already seen that Colossians offers an important parallel to the baptism statements made by Paul. In baptism, the old man has been taken off and the new man is put on, who is being renewed *'in the image of his creator where there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all in all'* (Col 3:10-11). However, this new situation is not immediately realised in baptism, but has to be striven for (Col 3:1-11). As in Ephesians, it is presented as a goal.

In Ephesians and Colossians, we also encounter an approach to slaves that has similarities with Paul. As the passages in both letters have much in common, it is enough to cite only Col 3:22-4:1

22 Οἱ δούλοι, ὑπακούετε κατὰ πάντα τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις, μὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοδουλίᾳ ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀπλότῃ καρδίας φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον. 23 ὃ ἂν ποιῆτε, ἐκ ψυχῆς ἐργάζεσθε ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις, 24 εἰδότες ὅτι ἀπὸ κυρίου ἀπολήμψεσθε τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν τῆς κληρονομίας. τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε· 25 ὁ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίζεται ὁ ἠδίκησεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν προσωποληψία.

4:1 Οἱ κύριοι, τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὴν ἰσότητα τοῖς δούλοις παρέχεσθε, εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔχετε κύριον ἐν οὐρανῷ.

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not just to serve the eye, to please people, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work from the heart as if for the Lord and not for people. 24 knowing that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord in reward. You are slaves of the

lord Christ. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be paid back for the wrong he has done and there is no partiality.

4:1 Masters, give slaves what is right and fair, knowing that you also have a master in heaven.

In both Colossians and Ephesians, not just the slave but also the master is addressed. Slaves are told that they will ultimately be rewarded. There will be no partiality, which seems to imply that bad masters will be punished. However, the perspective is clearly more eschatological than communal. The present situation is not challenged. Just as the unity with Christ is not fully realised in both texts, an end to partiality is also something of the future.

This brief look into the Deutero-Pauline texts, although it was, of course, very limited, certainly seems to confirm that, as with Paul, these authors' attitude to slaves was related to their view of the unity in Christ. In Titus and 1 Timothy, where any idea of the unity of believers appears to be absent, the inferior position of slaves is not challenged. In Ephesians and Colossians, where unity is a hope for the future, slaves and masters are promised a future justice. Only for Paul was this unity of believers a fundamental reality: *there is neither slave nor free, all are one in Christ.*

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