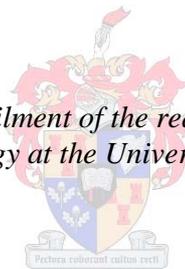


**ONESIMUS AS SLAVE IN THE PHILEMON
LETTER: SOCIAL AND THEOLOGICAL
IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHOS AND IDENTITY**

by

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*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch*



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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis/dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

December 2010

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ABSTRACT

In general, we tend to see slavery through negative eyes, also in the first century C.E. The reason is that slaves were not treated as human beings, but as things in the first century C.E. Therefore Patterson (1982:38) describes slavery as social death.

However, there were communities that treated slaves as human beings, not just as objects. An example is the Christian community in which Philemon's household was located, and in which a slave called Onesimus lived. Various opinions are suggested concerning Onesimus' slave identity, but scholars generally agree with the idea that he was indeed a slave. These debates are briefly considered in Chapter 2.

Onesimus, who ran away from his owner, met Paul in prison. He then became a Christ-believer through Paul. Onesimus' actual social status was still that of slave, even when he became a believer. Nevertheless, his spiritual status was that of a freedman in Christ.

Then, could Onesimus actually become a freedman in the social sense? My answer is 'Yes', based on two different perspectives, viz. a theological and a social perspective.

In Chapters 3 and 4, slavery is treated largely in a theological sense. According to a theological perspective, Onesimus could have spiritual freedom from God when he became a believer even though his current social status was defined as a slave. This dissertation introduces Paul's three other letters which use the term 'slavery', namely 1 Cor 7:17-24, Gal 4:21-5:1 and Phil 2:6-11. These three letters show how Paul understands the term 'slavery' in his theological thinking. In terms of metaphor, the term 'slavery' can have various meanings in biblical contexts. Therefore these three letters provide a good idea towards an understanding of Onesimus' identity as a freedman in a Christian community, and in particular, in Paul's theological thinking.

In Chapter 5, a more practical examination of slavery was provided. In the social perspective, the possibility of the manumission of Onesimus could be affected by the

first century Greco-Roman slavery system. Two factors are focussed upon, namely the household and manumission, to suggest the possibility of a change of Onesimus' status.

Finally, the possibility of the change of Onesimus' status can be fully assumed in both perspectives. In addition, the manumission of Onesimus could give hope to others who lived in slavery in Roman society. Therefore defining the identity of Onesimus gives us two important conclusions; slaves could live as freed persons in a social sense on the one hand; on the other hand, in a theological sense even slaves could receive spiritual freedom by Christ's love regardless of their social status. This is because all people are one in Christ and there is no social discrimination between people in the Christian community.

OPSOMMING

Ons is geneig om slawerny oor die algemeen negatief te beoordeel, soos ook in die eerste eeu n.C. Die rede hiervoor is die feit dat slawe tydens die eerste eeu nie as mense behandel is nie, maar as dinge. Patterson (1982:38) beskryf slawerny daarom as sosiale dood.

Daar was egter gemeenskappe waar slawe as menslike wesens behandel is en nie as blote objekte nie. 'n Voorbeeld is die Christen-gemeenskap waarin Philemon se huishouding was, en waar 'n slaaf genaamd Onesimus gewoon het. Verskeie menings word aangebied aangaande Onesimus se slawe-identiteit, maar akademiërs het dit eens dat hy wel 'n slaaf was. Hierdie debatte word kortliks opgeweeg in Hoofstuk 2.

Onesimus, wat gevlug het van sy eienaar, het Paulus in die gevangenis ontmoet. Daar is hy deur Paulus bekeer tot die Christelike geloof. Onesimus se werklike sosiale status was steeds dié van 'n slaaf, selfs nadat hy 'n gelowige geword het, maar sy geestelike status was dié van 'n vrygemaakte in Christus.

Sou Onesimus ook as 'n vrygemaakte eskou kon word in die sosiale sin? My antwoord is 'Ja', op grond van twee verskillende perspektiewe, nl. 'n teologiese en 'n sosiale perspektief.

In Hoofstukke 3 en 4 word slawerny grotendeels in teologiese sin behandel. Hiervolgens sou Onesimus geestelike vryheid deur God verkry het toe hy 'n gelowige word, hoewel sy heersende sosiale status hom as slaaf gedefinieer het. Hierdie proefskrif betrek Paulus se ander drie briewe waarin na slawerny verwys word, naamlik Kor. 7:17–24, Gal 4:21–5:1 en Fil 2:6–11. Hierdie drie briewe toon Paulus se begrip van die term 'slawerny' in sy teologiese beredenering. Metafories kan die term 'slawerny' verskillende betekenisse hê in die bybelse kontekste. Die briewe bied

daarom 'n helder omskrywing van Onesimus se identiteit binne 'n Christen-gemeenskap, en spesifiek, in Paulus se teologiese denke.

In Hoofstuk 5 word slawerny in meer praktiese diepte ondersoek. Volgens 'n sosiale perspektief, sou die eerste-eeuse Grieks-Romeinse slawernystelsel 'n rol speel in die vrystelling van Onesimus. Twee faktore kom hier ter sprake, naamlik die huishouding, en vrystelling – om die moontlikheid van 'n statusverandering vir Onesimus te suggereer.

Ten slotte kan die moontlikheid van 'n verandering van Onesimus se status binne beide perspektiewe aanvaar word. Daarby sou die vrystelling van Onesimus hoop verskaf het aan andere wat in die Romeinse samelewing in slawerny geleef het. Om die identiteit van Onesimus te definieer, bring ons tot twee belangrike gevolgtrekkings: slawe kon in die sosiale sin, as vrygemaakte mense leef ; in teologiese sin kon hulle ook geestelik bevry word deur die liefde van Christus, onafhanklik van hulle sosiale status. Dit is gegrond in die aanname dat alle mense een is in Christus en dat daar geen diskriminasie bestaan tussen mense binne 'n Christen-gemeenskap nie.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Bible and Versions and others

Acts	Acts
Col	Colossians
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians
<i>Dig.</i>	<i>Digesta</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae morales</i>
Gal	Galatians
Gen	Genesis
<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Institutiones</i>
John	John
KJV	King James Version
Luke	Luke
Matt	Matthew
<i>Nestle-Aland</i> ²⁷	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , 1993. ed. by B. Aland, K. Aland, J Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger. 27 th edition. Stuttgart: deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
Phil	Philippians
Phlm	Philemon
Rev	Revelation
Rom	Romans
RSV	Revised Standard Version
1 Thess	1 Thessalonians

2 Tim 2 Timothy
Titus Titus

Journals and Dictionaries

ABD *Anchor Bible Dictionary*

BDAG Bauer, W. [1957] 2000. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New testament and other early Christian literature*, rev. by F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. 3rd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

BSac *Bibliotheca Sacra*

BTB *Biblical Theology Bulletin*

CBR *Currents in Biblical Research*

HTR *Harvard Theological Review*

JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*

JSNT *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*

JSOT *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

Neot *Neotestamentica*

NTS *New Testament Studies*

USQR *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*

ZNW *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

We seldom seriously think of slaves these days. The term ‘slave’ in the New Testament is largely used positively relating to the ‘slave of Christ.’ Thus, slaves can be thought about in two categories. The one is to think in terms of the secular social side, the other one is to think in terms of Christianity. It could be easy to treat a topic of slavery in a social perspective, because slaves were simply a historical fact; in other words, slavery can be thought of as a specific first century societal context. However, in contradiction, it may be more difficult to treat the topic of slaves in a Christian society. The reason is that the Bible has a different viewpoint concerning slavery. Gal 3:28 is a good example (*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus*). The real status of slaves is enslavement, with everything it implies, but they also are freed persons in the theological sense. How then, can we understand slaves within both perspectives? And how can we synthesize a definition comprising the two different perspectives?

We might need to formulate a new perspective beyond a social or theological perspective in order to define the status of slaves within Christianity. In this sense, if we propose a simultaneous theological and societal viewpoint to define the identity of slaves in society, we will be able to reach a proper and appropriate conclusion regarding the definition of a Christian slave’s identity, like Onesimus, in a Christian community. We cannot fully understand the concept of the Christian slave with the ordinary viewpoint which is interpreted by the social viewpoint within Christian communities, because the term ‘slave’ can be understood diversely in the Christian context. In

particular, the term 'slave' can be interpreted metaphorically in the Christian context. For example, Paul called himself a 'slave of Christ' (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1). However, even though Paul indicated himself as a slave, his real social status was not that of a slave. Ultimately, a new understanding of the use of the term 'slave' will be needed.

Nowadays, we hardly ever encounter slavery and the notion of a slave hardly ever occurs to us in a social sense. But slavery was an accepted institution until relatively recently; even if slavery is now no longer an accepted practice. In the first century C.E., people became slaves through various means. For example, people could become slaves, by defeat in wars or by the more natural process, of being born as a slave.

Generally, when we think of slaves, we think of people without freedom. They could not own property and could not marry. They always belonged to and worked for their owners. They were sold and bought by slaveholders, to the point that slaves could not live as human beings. They could hardly do anything to benefit themselves. In short, they lost their rights to live as human beings. Patterson (1982:38) suggests that slavery can be described as social death.

However, in the biblical context there is a man who challenges our usual thinking about slavery. That man is Onesimus. Referred to in Paul's letter to Philemon, he is known as a slave of Philemon's household. Various different scenarios concerning the identity of Onesimus as a slave have been proposed by several scholars in current scholarship.

The different scenarios are as follows. The first position is the traditional viewpoint: that Onesimus was a runaway slave. This viewpoint is the generally held position since the fourth century C.E. (Harrill, 2003). According to this viewpoint, Onesimus was taken back to his Christian slaveholder, Philemon, by Paul after doing some harm, including theft, and of course, by running away. Onesimus contacted Paul in prison and was baptized by him. After that, Paul called Onesimus as a son (Phlm 10), and asked Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother and not a slave. In Phlm 16, Paul mentions Onesimus in this sense. (*No longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved*

brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord). This viewpoint is supported by, amongst others, J.G. Nordling (1991), S.S. Bartchy (1992a), W.H. Mare (2004).

The second major view regarding the status of Onesimus is the notion that he was a dispatched slave. According to this position, Onesimus did not run away but was sent to Paul by Philemon. The suggestion is that Onesimus served a specific function on behalf of Philemon's congregation, similar to that of Epaphroditus on behalf of the congregation at Philippi. Representatively, Winter's (1987) opinion supports this position. She proposes that: 1) The letter never mentions that Onesimus was a fugitive and to conclude such is to read more than Paul intended. 2) Onesimus was with Paul in prison because he was sent there by his owner. After examining the thanksgiving in vv. 4-7, Winter deduced that the letter only mentions Onesimus indirectly because the recipient already knows the whereabouts of the slave. 3) Onesimus did not run away but did meet Paul in prison, having been sent there purposely by his owner to report to Paul about the church at Colossae. 4) Paul wrote the letter so that Onesimus is not treated as a slave but is regarded as a brother who helps Paul's ministry. 5) Paul makes it clear that Onesimus is not a slave anymore in the Christian community and indirectly asks that Onesimus be manumitted.

The third viewpoint which challenges the traditional position is the suggestion that Onesimus appeals to Paul for intercession with his owner. According to this view, Onesimus was not a runaway slave trying to secure his freedom. His running away has some purpose related to intercession after some misdeed, probably towards Philemon. According to this position, Onesimus was not a criminal runaway slave but a delinquent truant according to Roman slave law. Lampe (1985:137) indicates that Onesimus could be seen as purposely running away to the apostle Paul who was a friend of Philemon, rather than viewing Onesimus as a slave running away from his owner. The purpose of this 'fleeing' was not with the intention of escaping the bonds of servitude but to obtain the apostle's intercession. In addition Rapske (1991) expands upon Lampe's viewpoint.

Lastly, Callahan (1993) offers another position. He rejects the traditional interpretation that Onesimus was Philemon's slave and suggests that Onesimus was an estranged brother of Philemon. When Paul exhorted Philemon to stop treating Onesimus as a slave, he was commanding him to desist from denying him the common virtues of brotherhood which were love, honour and respect.

As described above, there are various aspects of understanding Onesimus' position that impact on how Onesimus' identity can be understood that still raise scholarly debate. Onesimus could be a runaway slave, or a slave needing some mercy, or even a dispatched slave. Above all, however, the main focus is to define the identity of slaves in Christian communities through examining Onesimus' identity based on an understanding of slavery in the social sense.

1.2 Aim of Research Project

Above all, the aim of this study is to define Onesimus' identity in a Christian community, and in addition to explore its implication for formulating Paul's position regarding the political context of his day. In Roman society, slavery was accepted as a social institution by people. In everyday life, slaves could be seen everywhere in Roman society. Onesimus would have been one of them. However, Onesimus was not only a slave but also became a believer after meeting Paul. How then should Onesimus be treated and regarded in a Christian community? Could the manumission of Onesimus be suggested after his becoming a believer, even though Paul did not mention it directly in his letters?

When recommending any one of Paul's epistles to somebody, Romans or Galatians would normally feature without hesitation. Nevertheless, the reason I chose Philemon is because Philemon is a representative text which indicates very well Paul's understanding of slavery, especially when also read in conjunction with 1 Cor 7:17-24

and Gal 4:21-5:1 and Phil 2:6-11. In these texts, Paul's use of the term 'slave' is understood more directly than in most other texts.

Secondly, the aim of this research is to understand a change for the concern of the social status of slaves in the first century context. How did people think about the manumission of slaves? In first century Roman society, slaves' labour was the main work force of the Roman social economy. Slaves took care of most of the work in society. Slaveholders depended on their labour. Thus slaveholders would not want them to be released from slavery, even in Christian communities. Ultimately, an alternative plan would be needed to solve this problem. Consequently, a synthesized understanding of manumission will be needed in both perspectives: the societal perspective and the theological perspective.

This study is not simply a suggestion about defining Onesimus' identity. It will allow one to arrange the different understandings of slavery between Christian communities and in Roman society. In other words, through defining Onesimus' identity, we can understand more how Paul thinks about slavery/slaves from his theological perspective, and in addition, how slavery as a social role can be treated in Christian communities in terms of an understanding of first century Roman society. Therefore, the definition of Onesimus' identity has to be treated and understood anew in this sense. The aim of this research is thus to define the identity of slaves, especially Christian slaves like Onesimus in a Christian community through the synthesis of both the societal perspective and the theological perspective.

1.3 Hypothesis

First of all, Paul introduces various designations for Onesimus in his letter to Philemon. Paul describes Onesimus, for example as a "my child" (Phlm 10, RSV), "my very heart" (Phlm 12, RSV), "a beloved brother" (Phlm 16, RSV). These expressions hint at who Onesimus is or may have become in Paul's view. Through examining these expressions,

one will be able to resolve the research problem, and suggest that Onesimus might not be regarded as a slave anymore in his Christian community. Also, through this study, one can understand the relationships between Paul and Onesimus, and Philemon and Onesimus. These relationships will show clearly the identity of Onesimus in the Christian community at that time. Furthermore, Paul said that Onesimus was useless before, but now he is indeed useful for his ministry. Onesimus helped Paul who was in prison. Here one can assume that Onesimus needed a new status as a freed person; Onesimus as a slave could not properly help Paul in his ministry without permission of his owner because Onesimus as a slave would belong to his owner and his owner's household. This means that Onesimus as a slave would always need his owner's permission to act. In the social sense, although Onesimus was currently a slave as defined by Roman law, the same Roman law also allowed for slaves to obtain their freedom. From Paul's theological viewpoint, Onesimus, as being 'in Christ,' is no longer a slave. In addition, in Paul's theological perspective, he refers to spiritual freedom in the first instance rather than physical freedom. Nevertheless, the suggestion regarding the actual change of Onesimus' social status would be proposed to the Christian community based on understanding the social slavery law. Of course, there are some premises for the practice of the manumission of Onesimus from slavery. In order to be manumitted from slavery, the slaveholders' consent is required. So Paul would ask Philemon to free Onesimus. When Onesimus becomes a freed person, he would accomplish Paul's ministry without restriction, thus better than before. Consequently, for Paul, the freedom of Onesimus concerns neither a social side nor a theological side, but rather both a social side *and* a theological side.

Secondly, it is important to understand slavery in terms of the political situation in which Paul founded himself in the context of the Roman Empire. Defining Onesimus' identity in Roman society is not the same as Paul's theological understanding. The reason is that, in Paul's theological understanding, slaves can be considered as free persons in Christ, even though their actual social status is slavery. Thus, one has to think about the relationship between the politics of Roman society and the Christian communities. Paul did not want to break social conventions or dismantle the systems of the day. Although Paul has authority as an apostle, he asks Philemon to free Onesimus

because Paul respects social law. One therefore needs to consider the social and political systems of early Roman society as an important aspect of the first century context of Paul's theology. However, in this comparative undertaking, the understanding of the concept of slavery will be investigated firstly, and how it functioned in early Christian society.

Thirdly, defining Onesimus' identity is important for the purpose of understanding Paul's theological perspective on slavery within first century ethos. How did Paul treat the issue of slaves within Roman society? And how did Paul connect this subject with the Christian communities of his day? Thus, a study of Onesimus' identity does not simply implicate slaves, but has important consequences for Pauline theology and ethos, and in the end, for Christian theology and practice.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology of this study will be based on the socio-rhetorical approach of V. K. Robbins. The reason why I choose this methodology is to focus on a text itself using various methods which help to understand the text. Socio-rhetorical criticism is an approach to literature that focuses on values, convictions, and beliefs both in the texts we read and on the world from which the texts derive. The approach invites detailed attention to the text itself. It moves interactively into the world of the people who wrote the texts and the texts as literary units. Also, socio-rhetorical criticism integrates the ways people use language with the ways they live in the world (Robbins, 1996:1).

Robbins (1996) primarily introduces the socio-rhetorical approach as comprising various strategies. These strategies entail the investigation of the following aspects of a text: (1) inner texture: (2) intertexture: (3) social and cultural texture: (4) ideological texture and (5) sacred texture. Inner texture concerns features like the repetition of particular words, the creation of beginnings and endings, alternation of speech and storytelling, particular ways in which the words present arguments, and the particular

“feel” or aesthetic of the text. Intertexture concerns a text’s configuration of phenomena that lie outside the text. Social and cultural texture concerns the capacities of the text to support social reform, withdrawal, or opposition and to evoke cultural perceptions of dominance, subordination, difference, or exclusion. Ideological texture concerns particular alliances and conflicts that the language in a text and the language in an interpretation evoke and nurture. Ideological texture concerns the text itself and how interpreters of the text position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups. Sacred texture exists in texts which somehow address the relation of humans to the divine. Sacred texture exists in communication about gods, holy persons, spirit beings, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community, and ethics (Robbins, 1996: 3-4).

This study will employ particularly two textures from the above range of strategies. The one is a social and historical intertextual approach, and the other one is the ideological textual approach.

Firstly, slavery was a specific event in a specific time period. In other words, slavery can be considered a representative social system of first century Roman society. Thus, an understanding of slavery is needed to understand the topic with its focus on various social and historical factors of that time period. Basically, an intertextual approach is concerned with the “configuration of phenomena” which is outside of the text such as the structure of households, social role or social identity like that of a slave, and social and historical events in a specific time period (Robbins 1996:3). One has to understand Roman society in order to understand early Christian world. How were issues of slavery described in the Roman world? Therefore, we need to study these relationships through comparing the Roman world and early Christianity. We need a good understanding of early Roman society to understand Paul’s theology. Thus we need to know about the politics, culture, social law and social environment of the first century C.E., without which, we cannot fully understand Paul’s theology.

Secondly, a focus on the ideological texture of the Philemon letter will be important (Robbins 1996:95-96). According to Robbins, ideological analysis of a text is simply an

agreement by various people that they will dialogue and disagree with one another during the conversation. Analysis of the ideological texture of a text exists at the opposite end of the spectrum from analysis of the inner texture of a text. Inner texture concerns the words, phrases, and clauses of the text itself, but ideological texture concerns the biases, opinions, preferences, and stereotypes of a particular writer and a particular reader. In ideological analysis, an interpreter is analysing both himself or herself as a writer and reader and one or more other writers and readers. A special characteristic of ideological analysis is its focus on the relation of individual people to groups. For interpreters of ideology, it is not very satisfactory to talk about one "person's ideology." A person's ideology concerns her or his conscious or unconscious enactment of presuppositions, dispositions, and values held in common with other people. As a result of their focus on commonly held values and points of view, ideological interpreters regularly use the concept of a "system" for their analyses. In this sense, the purpose of this study is to examine how people considered slaves in Roman society, and also how slaves would have been considered or treated in a Christian community.

This research will not be restricted to exegetical work about the text itself only, since this is not exclusively an exegetical study of Paul's letter to Philemon. The present study will interpret the term 'slavery/slaves' in order to understand how the term was used within Roman society and in Paul's theology. However, as the terms 'slavery/slaves' also occurs in three other Pauline texts, this study will briefly refer to 1 Cor 7:17-24 and Gal 4:21-5:1 and Phil 2:6-11, hoping to cast further light upon the letter to Philemon and the understanding of the term 'slavery/slaves.' In these texts particularly the term 'slavery/slaves' can be understood metaphorically, in a theological sense. That is, Paul's thinking on slave/slavery will be explained in these texts. Furthermore, through consideration of these texts the theological meaning of slavery can be suggested, assisted by an understanding of the societal meaning of slavery.

With these methodologies I will focus on the role of slaves within the Roman society and within the Christian communities, and also concentrate on a possibility of the change of the social status of slaves in the first century context. For this reason, I chose

the socio-rhetorical approach, particularly the social and historical texture and the ideological texture to understand the status of slaves in first century Roman society and Paul's Christian community as well.

1.5 Delimitation

There are several limitations in studying this subject. Firstly, this research will be based on the letter to Philemon. This means that the basic text of the study is the letter to Philemon. Of course, the term 'slave' is used in Paul's other letters. However, Paul's letter to Philemon is concerned with slavery as an actual social institution based on first century Roman society. In addition, even though the letter to the Colossians (Col 4:9) mentions Onesimus, the main text of this research is Paul's letter to Philemon because Paul mentions the name of Onesimus and expresses his existence more clearly in the Philemon letter.

Secondly, this research will focus on the identity of Onesimus in relation to the understanding of slavery in Paul's day. In other words, the main concerns of this research will be focused on slavery as a social system in first century Roman society. In addition, Onesimus became a believer through Paul. This indicates that Onesimus as a Christian slave has to be understood in a Christian context. Thus, the concept of slavery will be understood in terms of the theological understanding as well.

Thirdly, I will focus on Paul's understanding of slavery within Christianity. This study is concerned with Paul's theological understanding of slavery and his resultant ethos as can be determined from the letter to Philemon. Generally, ethos contains not only moral but also cultural and communal values (Schütz, 2006:289). Thus, the topic will be based on the understanding of people in the first century C.E. In addition, the ethos of Pauline Christianity includes something more than just the notion that a Christian's individual ethical behaviour based on his freedom from the law is what constitutes his new life. The Pauline ethos also values the community and expresses a conviction that this new

life has a coercively social and communal orientation (Schütz, 2006:291). How Paul regards slaves in Christian communities is one of main topics in this study.

Each of the three limitations is co-dependent and the three necessarily impact upon one another.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF SURVEY OF PREVIOUS STUDIES OF ONESIMUS' IDENTITY IN THE LETTER TO PHILEMON

2.1 Introduction

The question of Onesimus' identity has been studied by many scholars. Generally, there are four viewpoints used to explain Onesimus' identity. These are: (1) Onesimus as a runaway slave; (2) a dispatched slave; (3) an estranged slave; (4) an estranged brother. The first three viewpoints consider Onesimus as a slave, whereas the last viewpoint does not consider Onesimus as a slave.

2.2 A Traditional Viewpoint: Onesimus as a Runaway Slave

Many scholars follow the viewpoint that Onesimus was a runaway slave (Vincent 1897:158; Kummel 1966:246; Thompson 1967:173; Guthrie 1970:635; Lightfoot [1959] 1970:312; O'Brien 1982:266; Meeks 1983:59; Melick 1991:338; Nordling 1991:99; Moule 19--?:285; Thompson 2005:194; Wilson 2005:317). According to this position, Onesimus, who was a slave of Philemon's household, ran away from his owner after some or other wrong-doing.

2.2.1 P. T. O'Brien

O'Brien (1982) supports the viewpoint that Onesimus was a slave and ran away from Philemon, Onesimus' owner. However, Onesimus wronged his owner, and then ran away. O'Brien (1982:266) states, "Onesimus had stolen and then absconded." In addition, Lohse (1971:204) says, "He had already caused injury to Philemon's property solely by running away."

Although it is still arguable whether Onesimus did wrong, some of scholars presume that Onesimus stole his owner's money.¹ O'Brien (1982:267) states that slaves often ran away from their owner in the Roman world of Paul's day. Why did Onesimus commit something wrong? According to Thompson (1967:177-178), Philemon could have lived at Colossae. Many slaves who lived there had a bad reputation and behaved badly. In this situation, Onesimus could have been influenced by them. Thus Thompson suggests that Onesimus did something wrong by following their bad behaviour; specifically he stole his owner's money and then ran away.

According to Thompson (2005:195), if slaves ran away from their owners, their behaviour was regarded as a serious crime. Owners could punish them however they wished. For example, he might have by been beaten, put in chains, branded, or executed. Indeed, Onesimus as a slave could have been subjected to any of these punishments by his owner. Lightfoot ([1959] 1970:314) also states, "Roman law, more cruel than Athenian, practically imposed no limits to the power of the master over his slave. A thief and a runaway, he had no claim to forgiveness." So, when slaves ran away, they sought some place to hide and escape these punishments.² Therefore after running away, Onesimus would have tried to evade his owner, Philemon. Probably, he tried to go to

¹ Lightfoot ([1959] 1970: 312) and Kummel (1966: 245) suggest that Onesimus stole his owner's money and ran away. And Thompson (1967:175) also suggests that Phlm 18 implies that Onesimus stole money from his owner and ran away.

² O'Brien (1982:267) states, "They joined groups of robbers and brigands, attempted to disappear in the subcultures of large cities, tried to flee abroad where they might be absorbed into the workforce, or sought asylum in a temple."

Rome as quickly as possible, because Rome was far from Colossae.³ And there Onesimus met Paul. Although we do not know exactly how Onesimus knew about Paul, there are some plausible explanations. Vincent (1897:158) suggests that on some former occasion when his owner Philemon visited Paul in Ephesus, Onesimus went with his owner and saw Paul there. Thompson (1967:178) suggests that Onesimus heard about Paul's reputation while he was staying at Philemon's house, so Onesimus sought out Paul after he ran away. In addition, Lohse (1971:187) states that Onesimus could disappear in a large city. Even though Onesimus had many possible ways to avoid his owner, he chose rather to see the imprisoned apostle, Paul.

After he met Paul, Onesimus converted and was baptised (Lightfoot [1959] 1970:313). Onesimus became a believer through Paul's teaching. Paul called Onesimus as his "child."⁴ Actually, Paul wanted to keep Onesimus, because Onesimus was very useful for his ministry. In Philemon 11, Paul writes, "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me" (NRSV). Although Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him, he did not do what he wanted. Rather, Paul sent him back to his owner.

As mentioned above, the punishment of a runaway slave was really severe. Even though Onesimus repented his misdeed, he could not make good his wrongdoing. So Paul wrote a letter to Philemon to ask him to treat Onesimus as a beloved brother, not as a runaway slave.⁵ O'Brien (1982:267) states, "The apostle does not want the reconciliation

³ According to Guthrie (1970:639) and Thompson (1967:177), Onesimus lived at Colossae with Philemon, being a slave of Philemon's household, and Rome was far from Colossae. Thus Onesimus might have tried to go to Rome in order to avoid his owner.

⁴ In verse 10, the Greek word τέκνον can be translated as a son. *BDAG* (s.v. τέκνον) suggests its meaning as "one who is dear to another but without genetic relationship and without distinction in age, child." This word is also used with the same meaning in 2 Tim 1:2.

⁵ A similar case is seen in a letter of Pliny the Younger to Sabinianus. This letter indicates a plea that Sabinianus should forgive his freedman. Thompson (2005:196) states that this letter provides many other remarkable similarities in both content and rhetorical strategy with Paul's letter to Philemon. Thompson introduces Pliny's letter as follows: "To Sabinianus. Your freedman, whom you lately mentioned as having displeased you, has been with me; he threw himself at my feet and clung there with as much submission as he could have done at yours. He earnestly requested me with many tears, and even with the eloquence of silent sorrow, to intercede for him; in short, he convinced me by his whole behaviour that he sincerely repents of his fault."

between Philemon and Onesimus to collapse because of any demand for compensation, and so he asks that any outstanding damages resulting from Onesimus' flight (or absence) be charged to his own account." Paul could command Philemon to release Onesimus with his apostolic authority, but Paul rather asks for Philemon's consent.⁶

In summary, O'Brien argues that Onesimus was a runaway slave. Onesimus was a slave of Philemon working for the Philemon's household. However, he did a wrong deed, so he ran away from his owner. Thereafter he met Paul who was in prison, and Onesimus became a believer through Paul. Onesimus now helped Paul in his ministry. Although Paul preferred to keep Onesimus with him, Paul sent Onesimus back to his owner with a letter in which Paul suggests that Philemon forgive his runaway slave.

2.2.2 J. G. Nordling

Nordling also accepts the position which suggests that Onesimus was a runaway slave. Nordling (1991:107) insists, "The runaway slave hypothesis seems quite plausible if Paul can be permitted to have described Onesimus's past crimes against his master in an oblique and euphemistic manner." Nordling focuses on certain Greek words to explain Onesimus' identity: ἀνέπεμψα (v. 12), ἐχωρίσθη (v. 15), περί (v. 10), ἠδίκησεν (v. 18)

Nordling argues with Winter who insists that Onesimus was a dispatched slave. Firstly, Nordling argues the Greek word ἀναπέμπω (v. 12). Winter (1987:7) insists that this word has a legal meaning, and interprets this word as meaning "Paul is not sending Onesimus back, but is referring his case to the proper, higher authority." According to Winter (1987:7), this word is used for referral of a case from a lower to a higher court in the NT period. Thus Winter believes that the word ἀναπέμπω has a technical meaning. She also finds this meaning in the passage of the trial of Jesus in Luke 23:7, 15. Nordling (1991:108) however, does not agree with Winter's opinion and suggests that

⁶ v. 14, "but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced" (NRSV).

the Greek word ἀναπέμπω is used as a technical term, this word can also be translated literally. In addition, in Luke 23:7, 15, Jesus merely was sent back for trial. Therefore, the Greek word ἀναπέμπω can be understood as “to send back” rather than “to send up.”⁷

Secondly, the occurrence of ἐχωρίσθη is important (v. 15). Winter (1987:10) mentions that Paul’s use of the passive voice of the verb was intended to express God’s agency. She asserts, “The aorist passive ἐχωρίσθη (v. 15) may refer either to the original separation of Onesimus from the Colossae household when he was sent to Paul, or to the indefinite separation that will result from Paul keeping him.” Her point is that this use of the passive voice of the verb implies that Onesimus was taken away through God’s authority. However, Nordling (1991:109) suggests that this expression is a “euphemism” for ‘runaway.’ Thus, “he was separated from you” (NRSV) can be understood as an oblique expression of Onesimus’ illegal flight from his owner.

Thirdly, the meaning of the Greek word περί (v. 10) is ambiguous. Winter (1987:6) translated the phrase παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου as “I ask you for my child” and also insists that Onesimus is “the object of the request” in this sentence. Here Winter (1987:6) distinguishes between the παρακαλῶ...περί construction and the παρακαλῶ...ὑπέρ construction, and insists that these two constructions must be used in different ways. Therefore Winter insists that the phrase must take the word ὑπέρ to express the meaning ‘on behalf of.’ However, Nordling translates verse 10a as ‘I am appealing to you on behalf of my child’ even though the word περί is used in this verse. Although NT grammarians acknowledge the distinction between περί and ὑπέρ, they also suggest that they can be used together as the same in meaning semantically (Nordling 1991:111). Thus, it is difficult to distinguish the meaning between ‘for’ and

⁷ Even though the basic meaning of ἀναπέμπω is ‘send up,’ according to *BDAG* (s.v. ἀναπέμπω) this word does not translate as ‘send up’ in the NT. Rather this word is used as ‘send back’ in Phlm 12 and Luke 23:11, 15.

‘on behalf of.’ Therefore, considering the letter to Philemon as a legal summons seems rather dangerous.⁸

Lastly, Nordling focuses on the word ἠδίκησεν (v. 18). This word indicates what Onesimus did wrong to his owner. The word ἀδικέω generally means harm or injury, together with its meaning being connected with financial fraud. Therefore, scholars suggest that Onesimus did wrong things before he ran away. In addition Nordling (1991:109) states that stealing and flight normally occurred together. Accepting his explanation, this supposition that Onesimus stole Philemon’s property before running away, is credible.

In summary, Winter is understanding the Greek words as commercial and legal terms in Philemon. Thus Onesimus cannot be a runaway slave in Winter’s position. However, Nordling suggests that these words ἀνέπεμψα, ἐχωρίσθη, περί, ἠδίκησεν can be understood idiomatically rather than understood as commercial and legal terms. In this theory, Onesimus can be regarded as a runaway slave.

2.3 A Second Viewpoint: Onesimus as a Dispatched Slave: S. B. C. Winter

In this viewpoint, Onesimus was not a runaway slave but a dispatched slave. Accordingly, Onesimus was sent by Philemon or a church community to help the imprisoned Paul. Some scholars therefore think that Onesimus served in a specific role on behalf of Philemon’s congregation.⁹

⁸ *BDAG* (s.v. περί) also supports this opinion. *BDAG* explains, when the Greek preposition περί is used “with certain verbs and nouns such as ‘ask,’ ‘pray,’ ‘prayer,’ etc., περί introduces the person or thing in whose interest the petition is made. Thus it takes the place of ὑπέρ.”

⁹ The church’s ministry is mentioned in Philippians. According to Winter (1984:203), the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to Paul to meet Paul’s need. In the same way, Onesimus also was sent by his owner to aid Paul.

Winter is representative of those who understand Onesimus as a dispatched slave. Winter (1987:1) presents four different aspects against the former viewpoint mentioned in the previous section.¹⁰ Winter's four points are: (1) this letter was written not to a person but to a church.¹¹ (2) Onesimus was with Paul in prison because he was sent there by the Colossae church. (3) Paul wrote a letter asking for Onesimus to be released because Paul needed Onesimus for his ministry. (4) Paul, therefore, suggested that Onesimus should be treated as a brother, not as a slave.

Winter understands that Onesimus was a person who worked for a house church in Colossae, and he was a slave. However, in this position Onesimus was not a runaway slave. He was sent to Paul from the church.¹² Winter (1987:2) suggests that commercial and legal technical terms in the letter to Philemon are used to support the notion that Onesimus was not merely a runaway slave.¹³ In addition, she states that philosophical terms are also used in the text such as *παρρησία* (v. 8), *τὸ ἀνήκον* (v. 8), *γνώμη* (v. 14), *κατὰ ἀνάγκην* (v. 14), *κατὰ ἐκούσιον* (v. 14). These commercial and legal technical terms and philosophical terms demonstrate that this letter contains, not only private characteristics, but also public characteristics (cf. section 2.2.2 above).

Winter (1987:3-4) explains certain Greek words to support the idea that the letter functions as a public epistle of thanksgiving: *ἀκούων* (v. 5), *ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως* (v. 6), *εἰς Χριστόν* (v. 6).¹⁴ Firstly, *ἀκούω* indicates that Onesimus brought news from Colossae. Winter (1987:3) states, "It indicates direct reporting by Onesimus." Secondly,

¹⁰ Basically, Winter (1987:2) insists that the recipient of the letter to Philemon is not Philemon but Archippus.

¹¹ Lohse (1971:190) asserts, "Apphia, Archippus, and the entire 'house community' are named along with Philemon as recipients of the letter. Their names are mentioned because the matter that the apostle is dealing with is not just a personal affair that concerns Philemon alone. Rather the decision that must be arrived at is a concern of the entire community."

¹² Winter (1987:3) states, "It is proposed that Onesimus was with Paul in prison because the former had been sent by the congregation in Colossae."

¹³ For example, *εἰς Χριστόν* (v. 6), *παρακαλῶ* [τινὶ Περὶ τινος] (v. 9, 10), *ἀνέπεμψα* (v. 12), *κατέχειν* (v. 13), *ὑπέρ σου* (v. 13), *γνώμης* (v. 14), *ἀπέχης* (v. 15), *ἐχωρίσθη* (v. 15), *κοινωνόν* (v. 17), *ἠδίκησεν* (v. 18), *ὀφείλει* (v. 18), *ἐλλόγα* (v. 18), *ἀποτίσω* (v. 19), *προσοφείλεις* (v. 20) (Winter 1987: 2).

¹⁴ In general, vv 4-7 are known as a thanksgiving section in Philemon (Vincent 1897; Kummel 1966; Guthrie 1970; O'Brien 1982, etc).

the phrase ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως (v. 6) refers to the recipient's partnership with Paul. Winter (1987:3) says, "It has been given concrete expression in the former's sending Onesimus to Paul." Thirdly, Winter (1987:4) asserts that the phrase παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν means that the good deed the Colossae church has done that benefited Paul and the saints, was for Christ.

Winter (1987:6-10) focuses on three phrases to explain Paul's requests.¹⁵ These three phrases are found in v. 10, v. 12, and vv. 13-14. Firstly, in the former viewpoint, verse 10 (παρακαλῶ περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου) has been translated "I ask you on behalf of my child." However, Winter distinguishes the meaning of the preposition περί from ὑπέρ.¹⁶ Therefore Winter (1987:6) believes that the Greek word περί must be translated as 'for,' not as 'on behalf of.' Παρακαλῶ [τινὶ] περί τινος is a formula in which the noun following the preposition is the object of the request. Thus Winter (1987:6) translates this verse as "I ask you for my child."¹⁷

Secondly, Winter discusses verse 12 (ὃν ἀπέπεμψά σοι) which is translated "whom I am sending back to you" in the previous position. Winter (1987:7) suggests that the Greek word's (ἀναπέμπω) primary meaning is 'to send up.' This is obviously its primary significance and in the New Testament period it was commonly employed to indicate the referral of a case from a lower to a higher court. Therefore, Onesimus is not being sent back to his owner, but is referring his case to the proper authority.

Thirdly, Winter focuses on verses 13-14. Winter (1987:7) rejects the traditional position which is translated as "whom I would have liked to keep...but I did not want to do anything without your consent." Paul's action in verse 13 is modified by his subsequent action in verse 14, and verse 14 gives Paul's reason for sending Onesimus back to Colossae. However, Winter (1987:8) suggests that verses 13 and 14 present

¹⁵ Here some overlap with 2.2.2 above is required.

¹⁶ In the previous viewpoint, there are not different meanings between περί and ὑπέρ. According to the first viewpoint, the preposition περί can be translated like ὑπέρ with the same meaning semantically.

¹⁷ Vincent also supports Winter's opinion. Vincent (1897:188) states, "The word is chosen with rare tact. He does not say 'he ran away,' which might excite Philemon's anger, but 'he was separated,' and, by the use of the passive, he puts Onesimus' flight into relation with the ordering of Providence."

simultaneously opposed considerations in Paul's mind. Thus these verses give Paul's reason for sending the letter. In addition, Winter (1987:9) suggests that Paul's use of *κατέχειν* with *διακονῆ* in v. 13 shows that he intends Onesimus to remain with him to assist in public church service.¹⁸ Thus the verb *διακονέω* in Phlm 13 must refer to Christian ministry. Finally these two verses can be translated as follows: "whom all the time I intended to retain in my service in order that he might minister as your representative in the bonds of the gospel; but I did not wish to do anything without your consent, in order that your good deed might not be by compulsion, but voluntary."

Fourthly, Winter (1987:10-11) asserts that Paul's use of the passive voice (*ἐχωρίσθη*) of *χωρίζω* in verse 15 suggests that Onesimus has been taken away through God's authority and she also proposes that the prepositional phrase *ἐν κυρίῳ* in verse 16 gives a sense of Christ's lordship. According to Winter (1987:11), in verse 16 Paul makes it clear that Onesimus is not a slave anymore.

Lastly, Winter (1987:11-12) suggests a "consensual association"¹⁹ from verses 17 to 22. According to Winter (1984:204), Onesimus is no longer to be treated as a slave within the Christian community. Winter (1987:11) insists that consensual *societas* was a form of partnership contract for the purpose of pursuing a specific goal under Roman law. Thus verse 17 can be read as an explicit appeal to such a *societas*. In this paradigm, Paul wishes Onesimus to be treated as an equal partner. Accordingly, Paul suggests a new relationship between Onesimus and his owner. Winter (1987:12) asserts that Paul suggests a new paradigm for the relationship in Christ as *societas* as the grounds for his request, and at this point Paul asks Philemon to release Onesimus as a slave in order to serve the church with Paul. Paul uses the language and the form of a public document in his request for Onesimus.

¹⁸ Lohse (1971:201) indicates, "It is true that 'to retain, to keep' (*κατέχειν*) also occurs as a technical term in the context of the sacral rights and duties of asylum where *κατοχή* means that the deity has sequestered the one entering. Nevertheless, "there is no doubt that *πρὸς ἑμαυτὸν κατέχειν* in the context of Paul's letter can only mean 'to retain with me'."

¹⁹ Winter (1987:11) calls it '*societas*,' and she also understands this concept in the Greek word *κοινωνία*.

Wansink (2007:1233-1234) follows Winter's opinion and points out the limits of the runaway slave, and suggests the estranged slave hypotheses. According to Wansink, firstly Onesimus could not be a runaway slave. The reasons are as follows. If Onesimus ran away from his owner, his owner probably would not know where he was. However Wansink asserts that Onesimus' owner knew that Onesimus was with Paul. Thus Onesimus would not run away from his owner in order to escape into prison. Secondly, Onesimus could not be an estranged slave. If Onesimus was estranged from his owner, he needs reconciliation with his owner. In this sense, his conversion seems to be opportunistic or fake. And even though Paul asks that Philemon welcome Onesimus, and supports him, Paul does not request forgiveness for Onesimus. These are some reasons according to which Wansink opposes the idea that Onesimus was a runaway slave or an estranged slave. Therefore, Onesimus could be a dispatched slave who was sent by Philemon to serve Paul while Paul was in prison.

In summary Winter's opinion is that some of the language used in this letter has public meaning rather than personal meaning. This means that Onesimus' role is a public role to serve in public and church ministry. In this sense, Onesimus does not have any fault, rather Paul has the fault: Onesimus stayed away longer because Paul kept the dispatched slave.

2.4 A Third Viewpoint: Onesimus as an Estranged Slave: B. M. Rapske

The third viewpoint suggests that Onesimus was not a fugitive or dispatched but an estranged slave. In other words, Onesimus did something wrong to his owner and then he sought out Paul who was a friend of his owner in order to recover his relationship with his owner, Philemon. This interpretation was originally suggested by Lampe, accepted by Rapske, and by Bartchy (1992a:307), who also agrees with this opinion. According to Bartchy, Onesimus' goal was not to run away from his owner, but rather to return to his owner's household under improved conditions.

Rapske (1991:195-197) discusses Lampe's opinion as follows²⁰: Onesimus' departure was not blindly running away from his owner, but purposefully running to a friend of the owner (*amicus domini*), because Onesimus needed Paul's intercession to recover the relationship with his owner.

Bartchy (1992a:308) formulates Lampe's scenario thus:

Lampe acutely observes that this decision created a delicate situation: Onesimus, who was not yet a Christian, hoped to gain advantage by persuading one honoured Christian teacher to put pressure on another Christian. Onesimus' initial trust in his owner's friend and "partner" (v. 17) clearly bore surprising fruit: Paul led him to become a Christian (v. 10), a "usefulness" (v. 11) that Philemon had been unable to achieve in his own household. And Paul himself offered to make good whatever loss Onesimus had caused Philemon (vv. 18-19). With these results in view, Paul appealed to Philemon to receive Onesimus back into the household as he would Paul himself, without mentioning directly the anger that had to be put aside and the forgiveness that was needed.

According to Rapske (1991:187), based on verse 10 Onesimus was with Paul in prison. There are a number of possibilities as to how Onesimus could have been with Paul in prison.²¹ In addition, Bartchy (1992a:309) proposes that Onesimus was a slave of Philemon, and he did something to wrong his owner. Perhaps he caused some serious loss to his owner. As a result, the relationship with his owner broke down. So Onesimus went to Paul as Philemon's friend to attempt to recover the relationship.²²

²⁰ According to Bartchy (1992a:308), Lampe's scenario has been evaluated as the most adequate context for explaining the relationships between Onesimus, Paul, and Philemon in juristic terms.

²¹ The possibilities are as follows: (1) Onesimus was with Paul as a messenger who was sent by his owner and the church; (2) Onesimus who is a fugitive is captured by authority and imprisoned; (3) the fugitive Onesimus was found by one of Paul's associates and was sent to prison; (4) Onesimus ran away from his owner, and then went Paul to hide (Rapske 1991:187).

²² According to Bartchy (1992a:309), Paul was in prison because of his public activities as a believer.

Rapske (1991:197-198) explains that Onesimus was not a fugitive. According to him, if a slave ran away to protect himself from some damages or loss, then the slave was not a fugitive. However, if the slave does not return to household, then the slave is obviously a fugitive. Rapske (1991:197) also states, “The principle can hold *even when a slave is fleeing the wrath of his master.*” In such circumstances the slave may run away from the owner without the owner’s permission. In this sense, Onesimus chose the same way, and then he attempted try to find someone who could intervene between himself and his offended owner. It fits with this that Paul sent an epistle with Onesimus because Paul needed to calm the owner’s anger.²³

Bartchy (1992a:309) insists that Onesimus was not a believer before he met Paul. Just as Philemon became a believer through Paul, so Onesimus became a believer by Paul’s ministry. Rapske (1991:201-202) states, “...Paul’s influence over his master would have been clearly evident to Onesimus from the fact that the whole household has been restructured so as to serve this new religion...”

In spite of Paul’s imprisonment, Paul still had authority as an apostle. Paul influenced Onesimus to become a believer. The slave Onesimus was impressed as a result of Paul’s authority which influenced the life of his owner and the household as well.

In summary, according to this position Onesimus was not a fugitive but an estranged slave. After he did something wrong, Onesimus avoided his owner to protect himself. Onesimus sought Paul as a friend of Philemon to mediate between his owner and himself. Paul’s role was that of an intercessor in this context. Onesimus became a believer while he was with Paul. And Paul sent Onesimus back to his owner with a letter to re-establish their relationship.

²³ Rapske (1991:198-199) introduces two epistles to suggest these *amicus domini* relationships. The one is the relationship between Vedius Pollio and Augustus, the other is the relationship between Sabinianus and the younger Pliny. According to Rapske, both the case of Pollio’s slave and the case of Sabinianus’ freedman demonstrate that the prospect of a ‘happy return’ is increased if a slave goes to an *amicus* who is well known to the owner. In particular, Rapske (1991:198) says, “The case of Sabinianus and Pliny should not be rejected because the plea is on behalf of a ‘freedman’ (*libertus*) and not a slave. The conditions of contract between freedmen and their former owner - and now patrons - often left them in a state scarcely better than slavery.”

2.5 A Fourth Viewpoint: Onesimus as an Estranged Brother:

A. D. Callahan

This interpretation introduces a new approach towards defining Onesimus' identity. The former three interpretations have the same basic perspective of Onesimus' identity, that is, Onesimus is a slave. However the new thinking about Onesimus' identity is promoted by Callahan. He proposes that Onesimus is a real brother of Philemon.

Callahan (1993:357-358) suggests that Onesimus is a fugitive, but there is no evidence of flight in Philemon, nor is any rationale offered in the text for Onesimus' irregular departure. Callahan's opinion opens up a new possibility for Onesimus' identity.

G. Bourne (1845) and J. G. Fee ([1848] 1969) both support this interpretation. Bourne (1845:4) believes that there is not the slightest possibility that Onesimus was the slave of Philemon, nor that Philemon was his owner. Fee ([1848] 1969:113) also proposes that Philemon and Onesimus were actually brothers. He suggests that there is evidence in Philemon that Onesimus was a natural brother of Philemon. To Paul, according to Fee, Onesimus was a beloved brother in the Christian sense. And to Philemon, Onesimus was not only a beloved brother in the Lord, but also a beloved brother in the flesh.

Although verse 16 says, "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother," Callahan (1993:370) suggests two different senses in which to interpret verse 16: the 'consanguinary sense' and the 'religious sense.' Callahan focuses on the Greek word *ὡς* in verse 16a.²⁴ NRSV translates verse 16 as "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave." However, Callahan (1993:362) indicates that the key word in this verse is not *δοῦλος* (a slave), but *ὡς* (as). Callahan insists that *ὡς* indicates a virtual state of

²⁴ οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ δοῦλον...(NA²⁷)

affairs. In addition, in verse 17b, Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus ‘as me’ (ὡς ἐμέ). Therefore, Callahan (1993:362) suggests that in verse 16a ὡς indicates that Paul is speaking not of Onesimus’ actual status, but of Onesimus’ virtual status in Philemon’s eyes.

Callahan (1993:372) also suggests that Paul wanted to say that Onesimus was a beloved brother, not a real slave to Philemon. Thus the main focus of the verse 16b is not on ἀδελφός, but ἀγαπητός. Callahan (1993:372) says that ἀγαπάω which appears in the salutation (v. 1), thanksgiving (vv. 5, 7), and the main body (vv. 9, 16b), points to the challenge to Philemon’s capacity to love as the issue that has occasioned his letter. Lewis (1991:234) points out that love, which is the chief virtue of the Christian community, figures prominently in Paul’s discussion with Philemon (vv. 1, 5, 7, 9, 16). Thus Callahan (1993:372) asserts that fraternal love is indeed a leitmotif of the letter to Philemon. Paul was encouraged by Philemon’s love, and this love also encouraged Paul to make a request on behalf of Onesimus. Paul as an apostle was sending Onesimus to Philemon in the place of Paul himself, because Onesimus served Paul in the work of the gospel.

Furthermore, Callahan (1993:374) interprets verses 18-19 in the ‘accounting terminology.’²⁵ These words indicate that Onesimus is in debt to Philemon, but it does not imply that Onesimus has stolen Philemon’s property. Martin (1991:332-333) suggests that the Greek word εἰ in verse 18 indicates a simple condition, thus it does not present a reality. Therefore the accounting language could be used as the anticipated expense of Onesimus’ travel and lodging.

In summary, Paul wanted Philemon to accept Onesimus as a brother, just as Philemon had accepted Paul. According to Callahan (1993:376), Paul in his letter to Philemon tried to dismiss an enmity dividing a Christian family. Therefore Paul insists that

²⁵ For example, these words ὀφείλω (v. 18. ‘to owe’), ἐλλογέω (v. 18. ‘to charge’), ἀποτίνω (v. 19. ‘to pay back’) are used with the meaning of accounting terms in this context.

Onesimus has to be received as a beloved brother. At this stage, Paul explains the relationship not between a slave and an owner, but between estranged Christian brothers.

However, Callahan's perspective is almost a singular position. Most scholars do not agree with Callahan's opinion that Onesimus was a real brother of Philemon. Mitchell (1995:147-148) as representative, criticizes Callahan's perspective as follows: firstly, Callahan (1993:362) insists that $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ in Phlm 16 indicates a virtual state, not an actual state of Onesimus. However, the Greek word $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ does not clearly indicate this, either lexically or in common Pauline usage. According to *BDAG* (s.v. $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$), $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ can be used to describe how a "person, thing, or activity is viewed or understood as to character, function, or role." Thus $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ can be used to indicate Onesimus' actual status. Secondly, Callahan (1993:372) focuses on fraternity. However, Paul uses slavery language for the new relationship of those in Christ. Thirdly, Callahan (1993:374) says that Phlm 18 does not present a reality. However, Phlm 18 can be a real condition, and shows that Paul recognises that "the protasis is not outside the realm of possibility." In addition, Mitchell (1995:148) asserts, "the fact that Onesimus was Paul's apostolic envoy does not mean that he was not a slave." For these reasons, Callahan's perspective cannot be accepted as a credible explanation of Onesimus status or position.

2.6 Summary

So far, four points of view have been considered by scholars regarding Onesimus' identity. Firstly, O'Brien and Nordling suggest Onesimus is a runaway slave. This viewpoint is supported by many scholars in preference to the other viewpoints. According to this viewpoint, Onesimus was a runaway slave having done something wrong to his owner, and became a believer through interaction with Paul. Secondly, Winter insists that Onesimus was a dispatched slave. Onesimus was sent to Paul in prison by his owner and church to aid him. Thirdly, Rapske proposes Onesimus as an estranged slave. According to this view, Onesimus did not run away; he went to Paul to avoid his owner temporarily. Thus Paul functioned as an intercessor in this context.

Fourthly, Callahan regards Onesimus as an estranged brother. In this interpretation, Onesimus was not a slave, but an estranged brother who had done something wrong to his brother Philemon.

In the past, many possibilities were offered to explain Onesimus' identity. However the consensus concerning Onesimus' identity is that Onesimus was a slave. Thus, understanding Onesimus as a slave could be an important issue because we may achieve insights into how slaves were treated in the social milieu of the first century C.E., and also in Christian contexts. Slaves might be understood differently in Christian contexts. Onesimus was a Christian slave; therefore, we need to understand slaves in both the social sense and the religious sense, especially in Paul's perspective. How was a slave as a believer understood in Roman society in first century C.E.? And furthermore, how were slaves as believers understood in the Christian communities? More particularly, how did Paul think about slaves in the Christian context? For understanding this topic, three texts, namely 1 Cor 7:17-24, Gal 4:21-5:1, and Phil 2:6-11 will be examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERM ‘SLAVE’ IN 1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24, GALATIANS 4:21-5:1 AND PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11: A SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL INTERTEXTUAL APPROACH

3.1 Introduction

From a historical point of view, slavery was one of the established social institutions in the first century C.E. And from a social viewpoint, slaves played an important social role, and the relationship between owners and slaves can be viewed in a particular social area such as the household. In this chapter, sources concerning slavery as a social institution in first century C.E. will be provided to elucidate slavery/slaves in a social sense. In addition, it will also try to understand that several Pauline letters are to be understood within the context of the historical background of first century C.E., because Paul was influenced by various social and historical factors of the day.

In this chapter the subject of the slave will be examined more comprehensively by considering other Christian texts such as 1 Cor 7:17-24, Gal 4:21-5:1 and Phil 2:6-11, in which the theme of slavery/slaves occurs. The concept of the slave is seen clearly in the way Paul understands and uses the term ‘slave’ in terms of his own perspective. For understanding Paul’s thinking about slaves and slavery, it is necessary firstly to understand how a slave was generally understood in the first century C.E. Slavery was a social institution. Slaves were the property of their owner. Therefore they had to obey their owner’s orders. In other words, the owners of slaves possessed other human beings. However, slavery also could be understood in another sense, namely the metaphoric understanding of slaves in the Christian communities. The question is whether a slave

who had the opportunity to become a believer as Onesimus did obtain a different or simply a metaphorically other identity in the early Christian communities. Paul in his letter suggests a new thinking concerning Christian slaves. Apparently Paul did not try to destroy the social rules and the social order: rather, he seems to try to understand slavery in terms of his theological thinking.

3.2 Regarding Methodology: A Social and Historical Intertextual Approach

The intertextual approach is one element of Robbins' socio-rhetorical criticism. According to Robbins (1996:3), intertexture focuses on a "configuration of phenomena" that take place outside of the text. He claims that a text's quality can be enriched by using this approach. There are many factors outside the text such as language, culture, people, phenomena, and events. Considering these factors will contribute to a better understanding of the meaning of the text.

Robbins (1996:3) suggests four aspects in the intertextual approach: Oral-scribal, Cultural, Social, and Historical intertexture. According to Robbins (1996:40-53), oral-scribal intertexture focuses on the specific use of language. Oral-scribal intertexture particularly involves a text's usage of any other texts outside of itself. Robbins here suggests five basic ways in which a text uses language that exists in another text. These five ways are recitation, recontextualisation, reconfiguration, narrative amplification, and thematic elaboration. Recitation is related to the transmission of speech or narrative from oral or written tradition. Recontextualisation indicates wording from a biblical text. Reconfiguration focuses on the relation between the new event and a previous event. Narrative amplification is the enlargement of a brief narrative into an expanded form. Often the expansion is achieved by integrating other texts that are recited, recontextualised, or reconfigured. Robbins also suggests thematic elaboration as an alternative term to narrative amplification. The major argumentative devices for elaborating the theme or issue are rationale, argument from the opposite, analogy,

example, embellishment, confirmation, encomium, and authoritative testimony. Robbins (1996:53) states, “An elaboration incorporates such a wide range of resources from textual, social, and cultural traditions that ancient rhetoricians considered an elaboration to be a complete argument.”

Cultural intertexture concerns the insider’s cultural knowledge that is known only by people within a particular culture, and includes scripts, codes, systems, and myths, etc. (Robbins 1996:58). According to Robbins, cultural intertexture generally appears through reference, allusion, and echo. Reference is a word or a phrase that points to a personage or tradition known to people on the basis of tradition. Allusion is a statement that presupposes a tradition that exists in textual form, but the text, being interpreted, is not attempting to recite the text. The text with both reference and allusion interacts with phrases, concepts, and traditions that are “cultural” possessions. Echo is a word or phrase that evokes, or potentially evokes, a concept from cultural tradition. In other words, an echo does not contain either a word or phrase that is indisputably from one particular cultural tradition only.

Social intertexture concerns phenomena such as clothes, the structure of families or households, political arrangements, military activities, and distribution of food, money, and services (Robbins 1996:3). Social intertexture refers to the use, reference, or representation of various forms of social knowledge. Social knowledge is accessible to people through general interaction with other people of the same region (Robbins 1996:62). In addition, Robbins categorises social knowledge according to four categories: social role or social identity, social institution, social code, and social relationship. Social role is indicated by words like soldier, shepherd, slave, and athlete, and social identity indicates Greek, Roman, and Jew, and so forth. Social institution refers to empire, synagogue, trade worker’s association, and household. Social code presents matters such as honour or hospitality. Lastly, social relationship indicates patron, friend, enemy and kin, and so forth.

Historical intertexture focuses on events that have occurred at specific times in specific locations (Robbins 1996:63). “Interpreting” a historical event requires knowledge of

social, cultural, and ideological phenomena operative in it. In this sense social and cultural phenomena are very important to the understanding of historical events.

Among these elements, social and historical intertexture will be particularly observed in this chapter. Slavery was an important institution during first century Roman history. Slaves played an important role also in the social economy of the day. Therefore an understanding of slaves as on one level human beings within the social and historical environment is required. In addition, slaves can be understood in specific groupings of society such as Christian communities. For example, Paul asked Philemon to treat Onesimus, who was Philemon's slave, like a brother (Phlm 16). Slaves could be understood with reference to membership of specific social groupings whilst retaining their general social identity as slaves. In this sense, consideration of three other Pauline letters will be helpful in coming to understand how he understood slaves theologically. Therefore, social and historical intertexture is appropriate in order to understand the term 'slave' in this chapter.

3.3 Understanding Slavery in the First Century C.E.

In the early Greco-Roman world, slavery was a social institution (Harrill 2003:576). Bartchy (1992b:69) points out that Greco-Roman society, and economy, came to rely on persons in slavery. Thus slaves could be seen everywhere. In addition Harrill (2003: 576) notes that slavery was supported by Roman law as an institution of the nation, and slavery consisted in one person being subjected to the power of another.²⁶ According to Bartchy (1992b:67), a third of the urban population were slaves.²⁷ Slaves were the

²⁶ Harrill (2003:576-577) suggests two approaches to define slavery: the conventional approach and the sociological approach. He (2003:576) suggests the term "chattel slavery" in applying the conventional approach. This term relates to ownership of a human being as a thing that can be bought and sold. In the sociological approach, slavery is a more dynamic process of domination. In this viewpoint, slavery is defined as 'social death,' which Patterson (1982:38) refers to.

²⁷ Harrill (2003:579) agrees with Bartchy's opinion. Harrill suggests that a third of the population in urban areas were slaves, but in other places the slave number was less than in urban areas. Walvin (2007:8) also states, "one-third of the population of Rome were enslaved." Rupprecht (1993:881)

essential work force in the first century C.E. Tsang (2005:41) also maintains that slave labour was an essential part of Greco-Roman life. Bartchy (1992b:66) states, “Slavery was an especially important form of compulsory labour in which part of the population legally owned other human beings as property.”

Osiak (1992:175) distinguishes two types of slavery in the Greco-Roman world. The one type is agricultural, industrial, and penal slavery, and the other type is urban household, business, and imperial slavery.²⁸ The first type relates to the large agricultural estates and involves condemned criminals or prisoners of war. The second type relates to the urban situation. Urban slaves had many more benefits than other slaves. Most urban slaves were included in their owner’s household. Thus they could have some advantages over agricultural, industrial, and penal slaves. Bartchy’s description indicates these advantages. Slaves could have had the opportunity for education. Thus many slaves in Roman society were educated and competent people, in some instances slaves were better educated than their owners. As a result of education, many slaves were tasked with social functions (Bartchy 1992b:66, 70). In addition slaves could own property, even their own slave, and they could accumulate funds which could be used to buy freedom for themselves (Bartchy 1997:1099). Thompson (2005:202) claims that agricultural slaves were regarded as a lower class of slaves, whereas household slaves enjoyed more pleasant conditions.²⁹

How then did people get slaves or how did people become slaves? Harrill’s (2003:579) answer is that the Romans collected slaves from all over the Mediterranean world. He

suggests that about 85-90 percent of the inhabitants of Rome and the peninsula of Italy were slaves, or of slave origin, in the first and second centuries C.E.

²⁸ In addition, Rupprecht (1993:881) distinguishes the eastern origin of the slaves from the north and western regions. According to him, Romans preferred slaves of eastern origin. Slaves from the north and the west were given the most difficult tasks. As farm labourers they worked in “chain gangs” by day and were housed in “work-houses” at night. However, slaves of eastern origin had different life styles in Rome. They were involved in Roman society as household servants, librarians, teachers, accountants and estate managers.

²⁹ Bartchy (1992b:66) says, “In the Roman tradition, slaves on the one hand were rigorously regarded in much legislation as things (*instrumentum vocale* - a “speaking tool”), yet on the other hand they were regularly treated as well as free human beings and were normally granted Roman citizenship when set free, as happened regularly.”

mentions in addition that the slavery system in Roman society was free to import slaves from abroad. This is but one of the ways of getting slaves. Patterson (1982:105) enumerates eight sources of slaves in the first century C.E., as follows: capture in warfare, kidnapping, tribute and tax payment, debt, punishment for crimes, abandonment and sale of children, self-enslavement, and birth.³⁰ There were no restrictions to becoming a slave. This means that even freepersons could become slaves in seven of the various ways listed above. Harrill (2003:579) believes that ancient slavery was not based on race or skin colour. Bartchy (1992b:66) also asserts that in first century slavery racial factors played no role.

Each of these sources of slavery will now be detailed. Firstly, from among these sources, birth was the essential method of established enslavement under the Empire. According to Bartchy (1992b:66-67), the children of women in slavery became the original source of slavery by the first century C.E. However, there were some simple procedures related to becoming a slave. Buckland (1908:398) states that children who were born from a female slave became slaves, whatever the status of father. Barrow (1928:14) also states that becoming a slave had nothing to do with the status of father, so that even though the father was not a slave, the child became a slave if the mother was a slave. Tsang (2005:40) comments, "If the slave woman gained her freedom prior to the birth of her child, the child was born free because she gained her freedom prior to giving birth. Otherwise, if the baby was born before she gained her freedom, and even if the father was a free man, the child remained a slave." Patterson (1982:139) also expresses this principle as follows "Patrilineal for the free, matrilineal for the slave." Thus, because becoming a slave was related to the status of mother, birth as a means of enslavement became the main source of slaves.³¹

³⁰ Harrill (2003:579) also lists many ways to produce slaves such as natural production, capture in warfare, imports from overseas trade, kidnapping, brigandage, piracy, infant exposure, and the punishment of criminals.

³¹ Barrow (1928:14) asserts, "The change from enslavement without the Empire to enslavement within the Empire, and from enslavement by capture to enslavement by birth, is of the utmost importance, and has far-reaching effects both upon the history of slavery and the history of the Empire."

Secondly, according to Patterson (1982:105-131), capture in warfare was a major means through which to become a slave. Barrow (1928:1) also suggests that the beginnings of slavery was from the enemy conquered in war. In Barrow's perspective, both foreigner and the citizen could become slaves through this means.

Thirdly, kidnapping was also considered as a method of acquiring captives. Patterson (1982:115) comments that kidnapping was, like capture in warfare, an important means of enslavement. This kidnapping happened commonly as an essential method of enslavement among all the ancient and medieval slaveholding societies of the Mediterranean.

Fourthly, tribute and tax payment were related to warfare. However, sometimes the vassal state offered voluntary tribute to prevent attacks or simply to give goodwill in behaviour to the more powerful state. In this process, some people became slaves by voluntarily or passively being donated by their owner. Thus the tributary slaves were persons who were paid by another vassal state in an international pecking order. In addition, according to Patterson (1982:122-123), the Roman economy was "a money economy", and tribute payment in cash were preferred.³²

Fifthly, debt was also an important cause of enslavement. According to Patterson (1982:124), poverty occurred so severely that people placed themselves under slavery because they could not afford to repay their debts. Bartchy (1992b:67) also comments on the enslavement of debtors by their creditors. In this sense, slaves were considered as things or property in Roman law (Osiek 1992:176).

Sixthly, penal-punishment for crimes was one of causes of enslavement. People who were convicted of crime often were made slaves.³³ According to Turley (2000:56),

³² According to Bartchy (1992b:69), much wealth and the leisure were produced by slave labour. Bradley (1997:57-80) also notes that slaves could be found at all economic levels of society.

³³ Patterson (1982:126-127) states that penal slavery was practiced as a major source of slaves in the pre-modern slavery system, and also mentions that in some oriental societies like Vietnam, Korea, China, penal slavery was an important source of enslavement.

“Penal slavery has been less common because it was usually imposed only for extremely serious or capital crimes.”

Seventhly, abandonment and sale of children occurred due to poverty.³⁴ Turley (2000:54) suggests that for centuries children were more widely exposed and abandoned in the Mediterranean world. According to Barrow (1928:9-10), even though rejected children never became slaves in classical law, the sale of a child was possible.

Lastly, poverty was the main cause for people selling themselves into slavery.³⁵ However, Patterson (1982:130) suggests that sometimes people sold themselves for political reasons. According to Bartchy (1992b:67), some people sold themselves to pay debts, or to climb to higher social position, or to get jobs, or to have a more secure life. Patterson (1982:130) also states, “Strangers who found themselves cut off from their kinsmen(sic) in tribal societies often sought self-sale into slavery as the only path to survival.” Some people used to sell themselves in order to avoid either military service or prohibitive taxes.

A crucial feature of slavery in the first century C.E. was the manumission of slaves.³⁶ According to Bartchy (1997:1099), urban and domestic slaves could have an opportunity to be manumitted by their owner when they reached the age of 30 years.³⁷ Harrill (1995:4) distinguishes the difference in the meaning between manumission and

³⁴ Patterson (1982:129) mentions that child exposure became an important cause of enslavement in the ancient Mediterranean, and also during the Roman period as well.

³⁵ Harrill (2003:580) suggests that slaves were bought or sold by auction which took place at either a seasonal market or a year-round slave emporium.

³⁶ Osiek (1992:176) identifies four formal means of manumission such as enrolment on the list of citizens, by the legal claim that the person had been wrongfully enslaved; by testament, either publicly or privately, with or without conditions, and adoption by a citizen, which carried with it automatic manumission. These four formal means could be applied when the owner was a citizen. Osiek also describes informal ways of manumission such as the simple declaration of intent in writing, orally before peer witnesses, and from the time of Constantine, a declaration before church officials.

³⁷ Harrill (2003:580) asserts that manumission was a legal procedure. Rupprecht (1993:881) also says that slaves could have a chance to be set free when they reached age thirty under Roman law. In addition, Osiek (1992:176) notes that female slaves frequently became freed persons through marriage to their former owner. However, slaves were not allowed to marry legally in Rome, even though common-law marriages were encouraged (Turley 2000:58).

emancipation. According to Harrill, “Manumission means the formal and informal procedures and ceremonies performed by a master, legally recognised within a give society, to effect a slave’s liberation. Emancipation means the liberation of slaves done without the observance of any manumission procedures and regardless of the slaveholder’s interest.” After manumission the freed slave could enter into a “patron-client relationship” with the former owner (Harrill 2003:580). Even though slaves were freed by their owners, slaves as clients retained a particular relationship with their owner as patron (Osiek 1992:176). Bartchy (1992b:71) states that manumission was a general event of urban daily life, and was expected by both owners and slaves. In addition, manumission was regarded as a reward for their faithful work (Bartchy 1992b:70).³⁸

Bartchy (1997:1099) sums up as follows: “Slavery then was a fundamental aspect of daily life in the early Roman Empire, and virtually no one questioned its morality.” In addition, Harrill (2003:585) relates that most slaves lived and died under a brutal system. As a result, Patterson (1982:13) defines slavery as “the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonoured persons.”³⁹

According to the above, slaves were an important component or group in the first century societies, and the relationship between urban slaves and their owners was generally formed within the household. In the case of urban slaves, they lived within a household, and could have the opportunity to be manumitted from slavery according to the system of the time. This means that slaves could be upgraded in their social status by permission of their owners in the first century slavery system. After manumission a slave, received a new social status as a freed person. This enabled them to live as freed persons, not slaves. This fact indicates that a change of social status is possible in a first

³⁸ Harrill (2003:581) also says, “...many Romans saw manumission as the customary reward for their deserving urban slaves.” Bartchy (1992b:71) interprets slaves’ manumission in 1 Cor 7:21-24 and in Phlm 18 in terms of early Christianity. In these texts, Paul mentions the possibility of Christian slaves’ manumission.

³⁹ According to Patterson (1982:51), although they are not biologically dead, slaves in effect are socially dead compared to the free population: “The essence of slavery is that the slave, in his social death, lives on the margin between community and chaos, life and death, the sacred and the secular.”

century social perspective. From a theological perspective, Paul's understanding of 'freedom' in the Pauline community can be understood as similar in idea as in the slavery context, because the Pauline community was of course part of the first century social and historical context. In particular Paul used the term 'freedom' to convey the idea to believers that being 'in Christ' implied a change of one's status, and was possibly in a theological perspective whatever their present social status is. In this sense, three of Paul's letters mentioning slavery/slaves are examined in the following section to investigate Paul's understanding concerning the notion of freedom from a theological perspective.

3.4 The Understanding of Slavery in NT Contexts⁴⁰

3.4.1 The understanding of the term 'slave' in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

17 However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. 20 Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called. 21 Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. 22 For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. 24 In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God. (NRSV)

⁴⁰ The following texts are arranged according to canonical order.

Basically, this section concerns the social status of the human being. In this section two concrete examples are introduced which are related to social status. According to Kistemaker (1993:229), Paul's intention is to stress the Christian's responsibility towards God through these two examples in this paragraph. These two illustrations are particularly concerned with the theme of freedom versus slavery. This section has a chiasmic structure (Collins 1999:274; Horsley 1998:102). Three verses (vv. 17, 20 and 24) which have similar content recur. In these verses the call of God appears repeatedly. Verse 20 is the centre of this structure (Thiselton 2000:551). The main theme of the structure is God's calling.⁴¹ The illustrations are placed respectively between verse 17 and verse 20, and between verse 20 and verse 24.

Some scholars (Conzelmann [1969] 1975:9; Kistemaker 1993:229; Soards 1997:148; Collins 1999:276; Sampley 2002:880; Thiselton 2006:110) try to understand these illustrations in the Christian context. According to verse 17, the word was given to the church. It implied that the recipients were believers, and the group of believers. Therefore, these two illustrations represent how people were to be treated in the Christian community. In other words, what Paul tries to say is limited to believers. In addition, Horsley (1998:100) claims that, through this section, Paul tried to overcome the "basic social-economic power relations" which were governed people's lives in the Roman society.

The first illustration which is presented in verses 18 and 19 concerns the relations between "the circumcision" and "the uncircumcision." Here Paul introduces the distinction between Jew and Gentile. Jews had the sign of circumcision, but Gentiles did not, and generally, Jewish people distinguished Gentiles from Jews by the sign of circumcision. However, according to Paul in verse 19, circumcision is nothing, and also uncircumcision is nothing (Sampley 2002:880). If they belong to God, even though they are Gentiles, they do not have to undergo physical circumcision. In this sense both circumcision and uncircumcision achieve nothing. Basically, Paul's thinking is based on

⁴¹ In addition, Collins (1999:274) considers verse 17 as the main theme to Paul's theology of vocation.

the call of God. People who are called by God follow only God's words. Kistemaker (1993:230) asserts, "When God calls a person to a life of fellowship in Christ, the distinctives that separate a Jew from a Gentile are no longer valid." Thiselton (2000:551) suggests that Paul stresses "an eschatological status" to insist that believers do not have to change their social position, because they live as Christians. As a consequence, as Kistemaker (1993:231) states, the distinction between those who are circumcised and those who are uncircumcised has no significance in Christian faith. The crucial premise is not the relations between people, but rather that believers belong to God.

The second illustration, introduced in verse 21, presents the term 'slave' clearly. Firstly, in verse 21 Paul says to slaves that even though they were slaves when they were called by God, they do not have to worry about their social status. Kistemaker (1993:232) understands this sentence as that Paul seems not to be interested in breaking down the order of society. Collins (1999:280) also states that in verse 21 Paul is referring to a real situation in Corinth: specifically, Paul intends to emphasise that the first thing is to be a believer.⁴² In addition, Braxton (2000:221) asserts that the call of God in verse 20 creates the ἐκκλησία. Therefore, "called in the Lord" could be understood as entering the ἐκκλησία (Braxton 2000:228). As a result, remaining in the call of God means to stay in the ἐκκλησία. Therefore, in this sense, staying in the ἐκκλησία can be understood to be staying in the Lord as a believer. In this situation, one's social status is not important. Ultimately, if someone enters the ἐκκλησία, the person is no longer a slave. Therefore, even though slaves may be concerned about their manumission from slavery, Paul tries rather to emphasise being in the ἐκκλησία as a believer rather than focusing on their manumission (Kistemaker 1993:232).⁴³ In addition these verses recognise an actual

⁴² Braxton (2000:221) suggests that in verse 21 δοῦλος ἐκλήθης seems to indicate that "the calling of God and one's social state are differential realities."

⁴³ Conzelmann ([1969] 1975:127) suggests that the discrimination between freedom and slavery in the church is of no significance. However, in another way Braxton (2000:224-225) suggests that Paul would allow the manumission of slaves in some circumstances. According to him, Paul accepts the manumission of slaves to avoid some problems like πορνεία (sexual immorality), disharmony, improper qualities in terms of the values of the ἐκκλησία. And the πορνεία could be a hindrance for slaves who wanted to be in the ἐκκλησία. Under these conditions, manumission may have been considered a necessity for being in the ἐκκλησία.

social status, thus the reference to manumission of slaves could be possible.⁴⁴ However, even though the probability of the mention of manumission is supported positively by some scholars, both Conzelmann and Collins suggest the focus of this verse rather to be that the person who accepts the calling of God can experience true freedom (Soards 1997:148). Thus Paul did not intend to imply upward movement from an actual lower social status. Whatever the circumstances, slaves or free believers can equally serve the Lord (Thiselton 2006:113). In this perspective, being in the Lord can transcend social conventions (Soards 1997:148).

Secondly, a paradoxical concept appears in verse 22. Paul says, “For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ” (NRSV). In other words, a Christian slave is a freedman in the Lord, and a freeman is a slave of the Lord. Some scholars (Conzelmann [1969] 1975:128; Kistemaker 1993:234; Soards 1997:148; Collins 1999:277; Braxton 2000:228; Thiselton 2000:560) agree that Paul wrote this sentence in the light of slavery understood in theological metaphorical terms. Conzelmann ([1969] 1975:128) understands freedom as separation from sin in the eschatological sense. Therefore, as Thiselton (2006:113) observes, whatever their situations, believers can rejoice in being freed from sin. Kistemaker (1993:234) also suggests that Paul understands true freedom as that which can be obtained only in Christ, rather than in social status.⁴⁵ Soards (1997:148) also states that the call of the Lord to believers creates true freedom, and this freedom in the Lord transcends social status. In addition, Sampley (2002:880) believes that the distinction between social slavery and freedom is not an important matter in the Lord. Therefore, in the theological context, Christian slaves became freed men by the call of God, even though their actual social status was slaves. The reason is that God

⁴⁴ Paul also might think of this topic in the light of the social conditions of the times because the freeing of slaves was not an unusual practice in first century Corinth (Collins 1999:276, 281). In particular, Collins (1999:281) suggests that verse 23 refers the practice of manumission. In addition, Conzelmann ([1969] 1975:128) also believes that verse 23 develops the motif of manumission. However, even though slaves were manumitted from the owner, they still had a relationship with their owner as that of client-patron. Thus the manumission of slaves would not have created serious problems in Roman society.

⁴⁵ Kistemaker (1993:231) suggests that the call of God relates to spiritual rebirth and this spiritual rebirth has to be understood not only in the relationship between God and human person, but also in the relationships between humans.

had freed them. By contrast, social and political freemen could become slaves of the Lord. These are the senses in which the paradoxical viewpoints may have been accepted in church communities. In addition, however, Paul sometimes attempted to understand this paradoxical view in the social context of first century Corinth. In the Greco-Roman world, freeing of slaves was understood as a concept of sacral manumission (Collins 1999:280).⁴⁶ Paul was thoroughly aware of the social significance because he uses the term “freed person” in the context of the social situation as applying to the relationship between an owner and a slave. Braxton (2000:230) also suggests that in verse 22, Paul treats the actual slave situation in the ἐκκλησία. According to Thiselton (2000:560), the status of slaves is determined by the slaves’ placement. In other words, it is critical to understand who a slave belongs to.

Thirdly, verse 23 describes how Christian slaves became freedmen in Christ. Actually, we have to die because of our own sin. However, we were bought with a price by Christ. Jesus died instead of us for our sin, and paid our price through his death. Christ saved us from sin. By Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, we are manumitted from sins. We were slaves of sin before, but now we are the offspring of Christ. In other words, we are slaves of Christ. As a result, we come to belong to Christ. Therefore a believer cannot be the slave of a human being as mentioned in verse 23. They belong to God as soon as they become believers. According to Thiselton (2006:113), believers represent the slaves of Christ, therefore believers are protected by Christ and Christ always takes care of them. In addition, Collins (1999:280) suggests that the metaphor of sacral manumission presents redemption, which implies the salvation of believers. Thiselton (2000:506) particularly, suggests that Paul uses the slave image to focus on the metaphor of the salvation of believers by “upward mobility.” In the sense of Paul’s theological negative perspective, being a slave of Christ was equal to changing his/her status from to positive.

⁴⁶ Collins (1999:280) explains “sacral manumission” as “a custom whereby slaves were freed by means of a fictive sale to a god.” In addition, Braxton (2000:228) suggests that the meaning of ‘freedmen of the lord’ is that “If the church sponsors the manumission and enables a *stauliber* to fulfil his conditions for manumission, then according to Roman law, such a person would quite literally be a freedman of the ἐκκλησία.”

Thus, as Sampley (2002:882) states, all believers are of equal status by the price paid by Christ. Therefore Paul emphasises that believers are not the slaves of men.⁴⁷

Through two illustrations Paul emphasises that freemen and slaves all are free in the Lord because Jesus Christ has provided what it took to buy their freedom. Obviously, Paul seems not to have any intention of destroying the social order and thereby changing the slaves' status. Paul tries to treat Christian slaves within the accepted framework of the social environment. Paul did not overlook the fact that slaves could have an opportunity of receiving freedom according to social custom. As recorded in verse 17, this epistle was written for all the churches in Corinth. Paul's focus on freedom is about spiritual freedom, not social freedom. In the text, no intention to break the social structure appears. Paul rather seems to accept slaves' current status in society. This indicates that Paul's main concern regarding freedom is about their spiritual state, not about their physical state. Ultimately, Paul's opinion on freedom is that all people are one in the Lord, and should be fully accepted in the Christian community, albeit not necessarily the case in general society.

3.4.2 The understanding of the term 'slave' in Galatians 4:21-5:1

21 Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. 23 One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. 24 Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the other

⁴⁷ However, Paul does not try to change the social order. Horsley (1998:101) states, "Paul's statement that circumcision (or uncircumcision) is "nothing" would have been unexceptionable to the Corinthians. His comment that "obeying the commandments of God is everything," moreover, indicates that for Paul "the Law" was still valid as an ethical code to guide community life and social relations." In addition, Braxton (2000:224) comments, "Nowhere does Paul in Corinthians 7 argue against change of status in principle."

woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written, “Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children, burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs; for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous than the children of the one who is married.” 28 Now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac. 29 But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the scripture say? “Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman.” 31 So then, friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman. 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (NRSV)

A second text mentioning slaves is Gal 4:21-5:1. Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians to inform them that true freedom is in Christ. Judaizers suggested the law as the means to salvation and therefore, emphasised the keeping of the law. In contrast, Paul suggests that true freedom lies in faith, not in keeping the law.⁴⁸ According to Dunn (1993:94), keeping the law cannot satisfactorily provide freedom: no one can experience true freedom through the law. Thus Paul uses this story to warn Judaizers who asserted the necessity of keeping the law faithfully in combination with faith.

Paul explains true freedom through the story of Hagar and Sarah. Dunn (1993:98) observes that Paul’s central word in this story is freedom. In particular, the relationship between freedom and slavery is introduced directly in the Hagar-Sarah story.⁴⁹ This story is well known, particularly as an allegory (Hendriksen 1968:179; Cousar 1982:103; Longenecker 1990:199; Dunn 1993:95 Tolmie 2005:167; Punt 2006a:96).⁵⁰ Tolmie (2005:167) suggests that the reason Paul uses allegory is to introduce the

⁴⁸ Additionally, the Stoics insisted that freedom comes from individual self-mastery (Cousar 1982:109).

⁴⁹ The Hagar-Sarah story based on Gen 21:10.

⁵⁰ Soulen and Soulen (2001:4) identifies two sides of an allegory, namely, an allegorical representation and an allegorical interpretation. An allegorical representation meant “the presentation of spiritual or moral truths in the guise of concrete images and events,” and an allegorical interpretation is that “the text to be interpreted says or intends to say something more than and other than what its literal wording suggests - that it contains hidden within it a deeper, mystical sense not directly disclosed in the words themselves.”

distinction between spiritual freedom and spiritual slavery. Two kinds of children appear in this story. The one is Ishmael, and the other one is Isaac.⁵¹ Ishmael is the son of Hagar, and Isaac is the son of Sarah. According to Longenecker (1990:199), the line of Hagar and Ishmael represents the sonship of slavery, and the line of Sarah and Isaac represents the sonship of freedom. In addition, the line of Sarah and Isaac indicates the promise of God of freedom. Therefore, freedom is highlighted in the line of Sarah rather than in the line of Hagar.⁵² Hansen (1989:141) states that this story suggests the relations between promise and law, and between flesh and spirit, and between freedom and slavery. According to Cousar (1982:103), Hagar is still in slavery, so she is not a part of Abraham's true family which means she has no part in Abraham's inheritance. However, what Paul tries to say through this story is that the people of God rely not on inheritance in only the physical sense, but on receiving the promise of God by faith.⁵³

As noted, this story has to be taken as an allegory as Paul indicated in Gal 4:24. An allegory has an internal meaning as well as the external meaning, and these meanings of this story should be distinguished.⁵⁴ The internal meaning of this story is that true freedom is not in the law but in Christ. This story focuses on freedom, and that freedom comes from Christ. In this sense, true freedom in Christ can be understood differently, at a level between the physical and the spiritual. In this passage, some Greek words can be understood allegorically. For example, ἡ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ (“the Jerusalem above,” v. 26) which contrasts with τῆ νῦν Ἱερουσαλήμ (“the present Jerusalem,” v. 25) represents freedom in Christ in the spiritual sense. And ‘the Jerusalem above’ is related to spiritual birth which is represented as Isaac (Ebeling 1985:234). In addition, Hansen (1989:149) notes the present tense ἐστίν (“is”) in verse 26. According to him, this present tense

⁵¹ The name of Isaac is mentioned in Gen 21, but the name of Ishmael is not. In addition, Gen 16 is part of the story of Hagar and Sarah. In Gen 16:11, 15, 16, the name of Ishmael is appeared.

⁵² Longenecker (1990:218) suggests that Hagar and Ishmael are related to Abraham in some digressive manner as compared to Sarah and Isaac.

⁵³ Punt (2006a:96-97) also asserts that “God’s people” is not based on physical descent from Abraham, and all people have the potential to be children of Abraham, even Gentiles.

⁵⁴ These two meanings, an internal meaning and an external meaning, can be related to the concepts suggested by Soulen and Soulen (2001:4). For example, an internal meaning relates to an allegorical interpretation, and an external meaning relates to an allegorical representation.

indicates that “the apocalyptic image of the eschatological heavenly Jerusalem is considered by Paul to be a reality now being experienced by the Galatian believers.”

The same pattern appears in verses 23 and 29. Punt (2006b:107) compares Ishmael (κατὰ σάρκα γεγέννηται) with Isaac (τὸν κατὰ πνεῦμα). Ishmael was born to represent the natural pathway, but Isaac was born to represent the spiritual pathway which means Isaac was born according to the promise of God. Thus Isaac is described as the offspring of the promise of God. Ebeling (1985:234) also asserts that κατὰ σάρκα means “the absence of the promise.”

Scholars suggest verse 30 as the climax of this passage (Hansen 1989:149; Longenecker 1990:217; Hays 2000:306). Paul quoted this verse from Gen 21:10. In Gen 21:10 Sarah asked Abraham to throw Hagar and her son Ishmael out. This means that the son of a slave-woman cannot be an inheritor together with the son of a free-woman. In Paul’s reading, Judaizers who follow the law are described as “the sons of a slave woman.” They were the troublemakers among the Galatian believers, because they confused believers in the Galatian churches by suggesting the keeping of the law as being necessary for salvation. Bruce (1982:225) also believes that bondage and freedom cannot exist together, for which reason Paul recommends the driving out of Judaizers from the Galatian congregation.

Finally, Paul summarised his allegory in verse 31. Paul emphasised that we are not the sons of a slave woman but the sons of a free woman. This verse makes the status of believers who live in Christ clear. Believers are the offspring of God, and are also freed persons from sin, in the Lord. Therefore, freedom in Christ protects believers from the yoke of the law (Hendriksen 1968:188). Finally, true freedom is only in Christ and in the covenant of God.⁵⁵

In Gal 5:1 Paul explains again where freedom comes from, and emphasises that freedom comes from Christ. The essence of the freedom is Christ. Therefore, if one is in Christ,

⁵⁵ As Ridderbos (1953:183) states, people cannot do anything to receive freedom by their own efforts.

one can receive freedom. Gal 5:1 serves as the conclusion of this story.⁵⁶ Paul insisted that Jesus set us free from the slavery of sin, so we must not submit again to a yoke of slavery.⁵⁷ Guthrie (1969:135) states that we are spiritually the offspring of free women, because Jesus set us free. Therefore Paul advised that we have to stand fast in this freedom, not returning to the yoke of slavery.

In this passage, it could be interpreted that being under the law is being in slavery. What being under the law is in Galatians, is submitting to the social institution, especially, the Jewish social institution. However, the law cannot give freedom and salvation: only Christ can give freedom and salvation. So Paul says to the Galatian believers “do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1).” In Gal 5:1 ‘a yoke of slavery’ describes keeping the law. The reason provided by Paul in Gal 5:1 is that the law cannot give true freedom to people; nor can it give salvation. The function of the law was to help people to know that all humankind are sinners, and also to clarify their identity as Jews compared to Gentiles (Hansen 1997:218). The status of Jews was in the upper classes of the times. Therefore, Jews considered people who did not follow the law as slaves. For this reason, Jews tried to separate themselves from Gentiles because Gentiles did not follow the law. Thus in their viewpoint, Jews who are following the law are freemen, but Gentiles who are not following the law are slaves. However, Paul insisted rather that being under the law is living in slavery, and also stated that being in Christ is living in freedom and salvation. Being in Christ implies becoming a believer. Therefore, believers are free in this sense.

To sum up, this passage presents what true freedom is for Paul. Paul explains true freedom by comparing faith and the law using the Hagar-Sarah story in which freedom is illustrated through the distinction between the son of the promise of God, and the son of a slave. In Jewish thinking, freedom exists in the law and is achieved through keeping the law. However in Paul’s thinking freedom is in Christ and people can

⁵⁶ Guthrie (1969:135) states that this verse is connected with previous verses. In addition, Fung (1988:216) suggests that this verse is not only a summary of 4:21-31, but also an introduction of Galatians 5.

⁵⁷ Hays (2000:306) understands the sense of the yoke as in the teaching of Torah. In this sense, “the yoke provides stability and guidance, rather than being something to chafe against.”

receive true freedom only from Jesus Christ, and also can be saved from sin by Christ. Thus we become the sons of the promise through Christ, even if we were the sons of slaves before. Dunn (1993:94) suggests that “Faith in Christ is now sufficient to ensure the relationship of all to God as sons,” and Hendriksen (1968:192) proposes freedom as “the state in which a person is walking and living in the spirit (Gal 5:25).” As Ridderbos (1953:186) points out, we can receive true freedom through “Christ’s redemptive work.” What Paul is confirming is that, if both Jews and Gentiles are in Christ, they all receive the same freedom. For Paul freedom does not mean a change of social status, but informs people that they are the sons of God. In the light of this viewpoint, the identity of Onesimus as a slave can be examined. Before becoming a believer he was in slavery in terms of the social institution. He belonged to his owner’s household. Thus he would work in his owner’s household, and also worked for his owner. He was under social rule, and had to be subject to social law. There was little future for him; thus he worked for an opportunity of physical freedom from his owner. However, he should have true freedom: that does not mean physical/social freedom in Christ after becoming a believer. Having come to faith in Christ, he became a member of the Christian family. Even though that could not change his actual social status he, as a believer, would experience the true freedom which comes from Christ, and also have salvation. He could also become a useful assistant in Paul’s ministry.

3.4.3 The understanding of the term ‘slave’ in Philippians 2:6-11

6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (NRSV)

MacLeod (2001:308) regards this paragraph (especially, verses 5 to 11) as a “magnificent Hymn.” According to Holloway (2001:122), verses 6 to 11 play a role as a bridge to connect verses 1 to 4 and verses 12 to 18. Paul seemed to have a good relationship with the Philippians. For Paul, the Philippian believers were like the motive power of his ministry as described in Phil 1:3-5.⁵⁸ The Philippian believers were particularly significant to Paul, thus Paul wrote this passage to encourage the believers of Philippi how to live as believers. Paul’s basic purpose was to warn against destruction of the unity of the church (Peterman 1997:117-118; Fowl 2005:11). For this reason Paul instructed the believers of Philippi by presenting Jesus’ humility in taking the form of a slave, as an example.⁵⁹

What then were Paul’s concerns? MacLeod (2001:310) speculates about the type of problems which the Philippian believers might have had. The possible problems were attitudes such as being unloving, selfish, divisive, arrogant, and so forth. Such selfish ambition was directly contrary to the attitude of Jesus portrayed in 2:6-11 (Peterman 1997:118). In addition, Peterman (1997:117-118) mentions that Paul worried about the personal quarrels which destroyed the peace of the Philippian church. Thus Paul’s purpose in this context was to introduce the serving behaviour of Jesus as an example for the believer to follow (Combes 1998:132). Thus, Paul exhorts the believers of Philippi to live as believers. In this sense verses 6 to 11 are very important because Paul instructs the believers of Philippi in a theological sense. Hooker (2000:502) suggests that, in Phil 2, Paul focuses on the idea of Jesus’ change in status, the change being the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus is God, and has the form of God (v. 6). However Jesus gave up the form of God, and took rather the form of a slave (v. 7). According to Peterman (1997:118), Paul emphasizes Jesus’ behaviour of emptying himself by contrasting the previous verse (v. 6), which presents the essence of Jesus as God.⁶⁰ In other words,

⁵⁸ Paul addresses the Philippian believers as follows: “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil 1:3-5, NRSV).

⁵⁹ According to Phil 1:1, this letter was sent to believers who live in Philippi. Thus the recipients of the letter were Philippian believers. This could mean that the interpretation of this section would be acceptable in the church community rather than in society as a whole.

⁶⁰ According to verse 6, Jesus is in the form of God, and is equal with God.

Jesus relinquished the power of heaven as God. In this sense, MacLeod (2001:321) states that “the term δοῦλος emphasises that Christ entered the stream of human life as a slave, a person without advantage, with no rights or privileges of His own, for the express purpose of placing Himself completely at the service of all humankind.” Wick (1955:49) also interprets Jesus’ emptying himself as giving up his “divine rank.” However, here the meaning of the humility of Jesus can be understood in the theological sense by means of the slave metaphor. Therefore metaphorical interpretation will be needed to understand the meaning of the term ‘slave’ used in this passage.

Firstly, the image of the slave could represent the image of humility that Jesus portrayed. In verse 7, we have to focus on the meaning of Jesus’ humility rather than on the change of Jesus’ status itself. Verse 7 expresses the figure of Jesus taking the form of a slave with four words: κενόω, μορφή, ὁμοιώμα, and σχῆμα. Basically these words are used to describe the human nature of Jesus. Firstly, MacLeod (2001:317-319) suggests that the verb κενόω (“to empty”) has to be understood metaphorically rather than literally. If this word is understood literally, Jesus’ emptying himself could be construed as abandoning his divine character; however Paul did not say that Jesus gave up his divine essence by his emptying of himself. Even though Jesus has the essence of a man, Jesus still has the essence of God. The emptying represents rather the lowering of status (MacLeod 2001:319).⁶¹ Secondly, Boice (1971:138-139) discusses the word μορφή (“form”). Boice states that this word has two different senses in Greek, and is used to indicate the “inward character” of Jesus, as well as the “outward character.” Therefore, Christ became a man who combines both senses when Jesus took the form of a slave, namely Jesus has the nature of the human and also has the nature of God. MacLeod (2001:319) expresses the emptying as “His humiliation.” For Christ as God, taking the form of a slave itself is humiliation. Generally, slaves have to submit to their owner’s orders. In this way Jesus as a slave submitted to God’s word. God’s word was that Jesus must empty himself and to die for sinners. Thirdly, Paul used the Greek word ὁμοιώμα (“likeness”). According to Boice (1971:139), this word refers to the outward appearance

⁶¹ MacLeod (2001:319) recalls Thomas Aquinas’ opinion about the meaning of κενόω as follows: “...thus He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, not losing the form of God. The form of a servant was added; the form of God did not pass away.”

of humanity. The word ὁμοιώμα was used to describe the human nature of Jesus (MacLeod 2001:322). In addition, MacLeod (2001:322-323) states that Jesus' human nature had "all the potential for physical, mental, social and spiritual growth that is proper to humanity." Therefore, ὁμοιώμα in this sentence is used to express Jesus as being thoroughly a man. Lastly, Boice (1971:139) points out that Paul used the word σχῆμα ("outward form"). Boice suggests that this word refers to outward, physical likeness. It indicates that Jesus appeared as man in the full physical sense.⁶² Therefore Jesus as a man has both the outward form and also human feelings and emotions inwardly. Consequently, Jesus has the thorough form of a man, as well as the essence of God.

What then does the taking of the form of a slave by Jesus mean? Here the main focus has to be Jesus' obedience. By taking the form of a slave, Jesus perfected willing obedience and love (Combes 1998:132). In other words, Jesus as a slave obeyed God who is the owner. This obedience is represented by the change of Jesus' status. Wicks (1955:49) explains Christ's attitude to God as being one of absolute submission. In the social sense, a slave has to submit to his/her owner. In the first century C.E., slaves always belonged to their owner or owner's household, and also worked for their owner. They had always to have a relationship with their owner. The relationship between them could not be separated in social life. Obedience was one of the features of slavery. The climax of Jesus' obedience was his death on the cross (verse 8). Fowl (2005:99) states, "crucifixion of Jesus was the most humiliating form of state-sponsored execution." In addition, Bloomquist (1993:167) asserts that verse 7 appropriately describes the "suffering of God's servant" in the light of the "servant's mission."

Secondly, a shift of the subject appears in verse 9 (Fowl 2005:100). In other words, God's activity for Jesus is apparent in this verse. In verse 7, the subject was Jesus who changed his status of God to become a slave. However, in verse 9, the subject is God.

⁶² In addition, Hooker (2000:509) believes that Paul used the Greek words μορφή and σχῆμα differently. According to her, the word μορφή is used to express Jesus' deity, and the word σχῆμα is used to express the human nature of Jesus. The Greek words here are used together in the same sentence, indicating that Jesus is not only God, but also a man.

God exalts Jesus' status again from slave to God. Bloomquist (1993:163) introduces this change of the subject as an "abasement-exaltation pattern." Jesus' exaltation is a result of God's grace. In this relationship between God and Jesus, we could infer the relationship between a human owner and his slave. In the first century society, slaves could receive a favour from their owner because they belonged to their owner, and owners usually took care of them. Sometimes, slaves could be released from slavery by their owner's favour. Slaves could thus have the opportunity of change of their social status. The change of slaves' status only took place by the goodwill of the owner, just as Jesus was exalted by God. Even though Jesus obeyed God through taking the form of a slave, in his death, Jesus could recover his original status.

Ultimately, the relationship between an owner and a slave is apparent through Jesus' obedience and God's behaviour to Jesus. The image of slavery is used in order to express the lowest status in society. However, God highly exalted Jesus. Jesus recovered again his power as God. God made everyone who is in heaven and on earth obedient to Jesus. To sum up, the character of a slave can be explained as being appropriate to describe Jesus' obedience in that Jesus took the form of a slave (verse 7) and died on the cross (verse 8), and the character of an owner can be described through God's behaviour in exalting Jesus (verse 9).

Three of Paul's texts have a common idea concerning freedom. Firstly, the first two Pauline letters, 1 Cor 7:17:24 and Gal 4:21-5:1, deal with the notion of freedom. Obviously, these letters were written for believers in Christian communities in the first century C.E. Thus these letters would reflect Paul's theological perspective on freedom, rather than primarily or exclusively a social perspective. Nevertheless, we assume that the matter of freedom in Paul's community can be considered also and carefully from a social perspective, because Paul's community was formed in the same social environment as first century Roman society. Thus even though the distinction of understanding the nature of freedom can exist between two perspectives such as a theological and a social perspective, a points of connection can be identified. In Paul's theological thinking there was no slave in Christ, in other words, everyone has freedom

in Christ. Thus, Paul did not accept the distinction of social rank between people. Paul's primary thinking concerning human beings was that everyone is equal in Christ.

If we expand Paul's understanding of freedom to the social level, slaves could have obtained freedom from slavery in society. To be sure, Pauline communities were also part and parcel of the first century social structure. Thus, if Paul acknowledged freedom in his Christian community, it can mean that Paul also would have supported freedom of people, even slaves in the social structure.

Secondly, Paul's letter to the believers of Philippi provides an understanding of the relationship between owners and slaves through elucidation of the relationship between God and Jesus. The relationship between God and Jesus in God's household represents well the relationship between owners and slaves in the household. All persons as slaves belong to God as the owner just as slaves belonged to their owner in first century society. In addition, the taking of a slave's form by Jesus and recovery of His form as God can indicate the change of status from slave to freed person. According to the example of Jesus, in Christ every person changed his/her status from slave to freed person through Jesus' redemptive work. It means that all persons are equal. In other words, the opportunity for freedom can be fully provided to slaves in first century Roman society.

Ultimately, and not denying remaining complexities, Paul's three letters provide clues for an understanding of freedom, and for the possibility of change of social status based on Paul's theological understanding in first century Roman society.

3.5 Paul's Perspective on Slavery/slaves

Slavery occurred as a common institution in the Roman period. As Harrill (2003:589, 598) observes, Paul accepted slavery as a reality of everyday-life in Roman society. Paul's underlying motive is not to destroy slavery as a social institution.

We need to focus primarily on texts which were written by Paul in order to understand Paul's stance on slavery. Three of these texts have been examined above. Through the following brief review of these texts we can observe his stance concerning slavery more closely.

Firstly, 1 Cor 7:17-24 defines who true freepersons are. Two illustrations are introduced to present Paul's theological thinking about social status. In this passage Paul does not envisage a differentiation between circumcised and uncircumcised, and between the free man/woman and slave in the theological sense. Therefore, in Paul's theological thinking, the differentiation of status between the free man/woman and the slave is meaningless in Christ, because all people are one in Jesus Christ. Paul also asserts that we get true freedom only in Jesus Christ. According to Briggs (2000:120), Paul simply tried to express "manumission" of slaves in terms of his theological understanding. Paul's basic thinking is not negative towards slavery as such. Harrill (2003:588) also asserts that Paul was not opposed to slavery as "an institution or ideology." Even though the manumission of slaves in the sociological sense could be gently suggested as indicated by Conzelmann and Collins, Paul does not seem to promote the literal manumission of slaves strongly. Rather he emphasises that believers have to focus on their spiritual status rather than their secular social status. In 1 Cor 7:17-24, Paul focused on who free persons are in his theological perspective.

Secondly, Paul explained true freedom in Gal 4:21-5:1. This passage also clearly presents true freedom in the theological sense. In order to receive freedom, two factors, namely the law and faith must operate. Paul merely mentions how we are to treat slavery in the social sense in this passage. Paul's concerns are focused rather on believers who are part of the church community. So Paul introduces the Hagar-Sarah story to indicate what true freedom is. In this passage Paul compared faith with the law to elucidate true freedom. The son of the promise is compared with the son of the slave. In this comparison, Paul emphasised that true freedom is only found in Jesus Christ, not in keeping the law. The Galatian believers were gentile believers. Theoretically, a Gentile in the understanding of Jews could not have salvation. However, even though

they were Gentiles, they now have become believers. Therefore they are in faith and also have become the sons of the promise. Consequently, in the theological sense, in Christ there is no discrimination between freemen/women and slaves. In other words, slaves also could be free persons in Christ. In Paul's perspective, slaves are people who are not in Christ. In this context, for Paul, freedom is not about the social status but about the spiritual status of people. Thus if people follow the law like the Jew who is possessed by the law, they cannot become freepersons, because the law cannot give true freedom and salvation. Paul connected slavery with the law in order to state the incompetency of the law, and in this passage Paul asserts rather that true salvation and freedom are in Christ above.

Thirdly, Phil 2:6-11 shows the features of an owner and a slave through comparison with the attributes God and Jesus. Paul introduces the incarnation of Jesus. According to this passage Jesus emptied himself, and took the form of a slave to show his humility. Taking the form of a slave particularly, is to indicate the human nature of Jesus. Jesus is God; nevertheless he abandoned the character of God. In this passage, Jesus as a man who does not have God's power, compares with a slave who is in the lowest social rank. The character of Jesus as a human being, and those of a slave are quite similar. Jesus obeyed God's word. The figure of Jesus as a slave describes the obedience that a slave always had to serve his/her owner. And God's grace to Jesus is shown clearly through restoring the status of Jesus as God. Here God's grace to Jesus can be described as that of an owner granting a favour to his slaves, and taking care of them as well.

In Pauline perspective, all Christians theologically are slaves in Christ (Briggs 2000:118). This means that believers always belong to Christ, and believers in Christ can receive the true freedom. Rupprecht (1993:882) also has the same view as Briggs. In this sense Paul called himself a slave of Christ to demonstrate that he is a believer, even though he was not socially of a low level as a slave is.⁶³

⁶³ For example, in Phil 1:1 and Rom 1:1 Paul introduces himself as a slave of the Lord. Through Gal 1; 2 and Phil 3 we have insight into Paul's background.

As the result, Paul tries to understand the theme of slavery in the theological sense, even though he did not ignore slavery as a social institution. Basically, Paul's essential thought on slavery is based on church communities, so the theme of slavery in Paul's perspective will need to be interpreted as metaphor rather than literally.⁶⁴ Byron (2004:124) suggests that Christ is described as a slave of God in the New Testament. Jesus obeyed God's word. Jesus was sent by God to serve sinners and died for them. Jesus' death is a good example of complete obedience. By Jesus' death people were saved from sin. People had to die for their own sin, but Jesus died instead of them. Jesus obeyed God like slaves obey their owner. In addition, Briggs (2000:118) refers to baptism. In the theological sense, baptism is death with Christ. Those who die with Christ gain a new life, and they now become "slaves of righteousness," as well as becoming freedmen from sin.

Rupprecht (1993:882) further suggests that the recognition of a metaphor is necessary in order to understand Paul's thought on slavery. In this perspective, Rupprecht introduces three factors, namely Redemption, Justification and Reconciliation, needed to understand the concept of slavery as metaphor. Redemption means that Jesus liberated believers from their sin; justification conveys that the freedom which believers have is the perfect freedom which can manumit from the bonds of sin; reconciliation implies that slaves receive their own rights and privileges which allows them to live as members of society by manumission: so they who become believers also become members of God's family.

3.6 Summary

In Paul's perspective there is no rank or status on the basis of social, economic and religious levels within the Christian community (Rupprecht 1993:882; Heyer 2000:186).

⁶⁴ Byron (2004:124) suggests that "Paul's metaphor of slavery should be located within the 'slave of God' traditions of early Judaism rather than Greco-Roman slave practices."

This does not mean that Paul ignored the social order or institutions. Paul fully recognised slavery as a social institution in his time. However, Paul tried to explain freedom in his theological paradigm. Three texts – 1 Cor 7:17-24, Gal 4:21-5:1, and Phil 2:6-11 – all support Paul’s interpretation of true freedom. Paul’s perspective on freedom was primarily theological. In a social perspective, the matter of the manumission would be important for slaves. Manumission from slavery could be a desirable reality for slaves. Nevertheless, Paul tried to explain what true freedom is. For Paul the answer was that true freedom is being in Christ. No one else can provide true freedom. True freedom comes only from God. Anyone who is in Christ can receive true freedom, even though their social status is that of slavery.

The following chapter will discuss the meaning of slavery as a literary metaphor. Slavery as a literary metaphor can contain various meanings: it can imply that the meaning of slavery in the social context can provide various interpretations of slavery/slaves in the theological context. Therefore the understanding of slavery as a literary metaphor would help to understand Onesimus’ identity in the letter to Philemon as a son or a brother, not simply a slave.

CHAPTER 4

ONESIMUS AS A SLAVE IN THE LETTER TO PHILEMON: A SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL INTERTEXTUAL APPROACH

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on Onesimus as an individual and a slave as he appears in the letter to Philemon. In the previous chapter, we have examined slavery in Roman society of the first century C.E., as well as in Christian literature such as 1 Cor 7:17-24, Gal 4:21-5:1, and Phil 2:6-11. In these texts, the theme of slavery can be understood according to two perspectives, namely a theological perspective and a social perspective. These two perspectives can be applied to the Philemon letter in order to define the identity of Onesimus as a slave. For example, Onesimus is presented as a slave of Philemon, but Paul called Onesimus a son in Phlm 10; furthermore Paul asked Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother in Phlm 16. In a general sense Onesimus was but one of many slaves in Roman society; nevertheless he also had occasion to be treated as a son or a brother in the Christian context. Even though he was treated as a slave before becoming a believer, after he became a believer and according to the letter he could be thought as a son in relation to Paul and as a brother in relation to Philemon, as well as still being a slave in the social sense in the context of the Christian church to which Philemon belonged. Thus these two verses (Phlm 10 and 16) provide a helpful clue to understanding the identity of Onesimus. If Onesimus was considered as a brother of Philemon, not a slave of Philemon, it could introduce a new topic such as the manumission of Onesimus. In other words, the interpretation of the slave as a literary metaphor can be understood with various meanings, and as well as functioning as a useful means to define the identity of Onesimus. Comparison with Paul's other letters

which were considered in the previous chapter could also provide a clue as to how Onesimus' identity as a slave can be understood in the Christian context. Therefore, this chapter will focus on an attempt to describe the identity of Onesimus as a slave as portrayed in the letter to Philemon.

4.2 Regarding Methodology: A Social and Historical Intertextual Approach

This chapter, like the previous chapter, will also follow social and historical intertexture as a methodological framework. The major goal of the intertexture approach is to focus on phenomena outside of the text (Robbins 1996:40). Thus, many elements which are outside of a specific text can provide insights towards understanding that text. Slavery is one example of such a social system in the Roman world. We would therefore correctly approach the point of this dissertation, which tries to demonstrate Onesimus' identity, through considering slavery in Roman society as well as understanding it in the Christian community.

In general slavery was prevalent as a social institution of the first century C.E., thus slavery based on the social background can be explained reasonably as a societal phenomenon. An investigation into slavery in terms of its various social and historical concomitants can help to understand the position of slaves in the first century C.E.

Onesimus is presented as a slave in the letter to Philemon. This implies that the identity of Onesimus can be understood in a particular community such as the Christian community. As observed in the previous chapter, the meaning of slavery could be interpreted variously in a Christian context: Onesimus became a Christian slave after meeting Paul. In practice Paul's standpoint on freedom was different from the current understanding in the social sense. Therefore Onesimus could be treated as a slave in the social sense of the word, but he also can be treated as a believer in the theological sense. Actually, slaves belonged to their owners in Roman society, but they could become

freedmen by being set free from slavery by their owner, since the manumission of slaves was allowed in the first century C.E. Therefore the understanding of social factors such as Roman law could provide insights to help define Onesimus' identity. However Onesimus belonged to the Christian community as well as to the Roman society. Therefore in bringing these two perspectives, viz. a social and a theological perspective into an appropriate hermeneutical relationship, Paul's thinking on slavery can be explored more closely.

This chapter will focus particularly on Onesimus' identity as a Christian slave in the Christian community. Even though Paul wrote this letter to the owner of a slave in Roman society, and also uses the term 'slave' in this letter, he would have been influenced by his theological convictions when he wrote the letter. To understand this letter an understanding of the Christian context in the first century Roman society is required, but first the literary quality of the concept slavery requires our attention.

4.3 Slavery as a Literary Metaphor

In the previous chapter slavery has been discussed according to a social perspective. From this perspective, the life of slaves generally was tragic. They could have no normal life style as free people do. They were sold and bought like products by free people. Consequently, they were not treated as complete human beings.

However, a different strategy on slavery is suggested here, namely, to investigate slavery as a literary metaphor in Paul's letter to Philemon. In this strategy, the action of a slave could be interpreted in various ways, also going beyond the social sense. In particular, the understanding of the slave as a literary metaphor could provide a new understanding concerning slaves in the biblical context, and thus help us to understand Paul's perspective concerning slavery. The slave as a literary metaphor appears clearly

in Paul's writings. For example, Paul calls himself a slave of Christ.⁶⁵ However this does not mean that Paul was an actual slave in Roman society. It means that Paul was a believer, thus Paul expressed himself as a slave of Christ in a theological sense. Combes (1998:77) says that the metaphor of slavery is used in Paul's writing to present "a pattern of faith" for all believers. In fact, Martin (1990:135) suggests, "This central image, the slavery of Jesus, ruled Paul's worldview."

Martin (1990) explains slavery as literary metaphor. He suggests some examples of literary expressions concerning the slave. Firstly, slavery is described as unconditional obedience (Martin 1990:50-51). In some of Paul's letters slavery was used in a negative way: Rom 8:15, 21; Gal 4:3, 24-25; 5:1. However Paul mostly uses unconditional obedience in a positive way. For example, Paul suggests unconditional obedience to God as an instrument righteousness in Romans 6:13. Christians are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves of God. Therefore, they have to live for God and for ministry to God from that point on.⁶⁶ In addition, Combes (1998:131-132) asserts that Phil 2:7 presents the humility and obedience metaphor of Jesus: by taking the form of a slave, Jesus completes his obedience to and love of God.

Secondly, slavery as a literary metaphor presents a title of leadership (Martin 1990:52-54). The metaphor concerning the leadership appears diversely in Christian texts as follows: (1) In Matt 21:33-41, the householder rents out his vineyard to tenant farmers, and the owner installs a slave to take care of his vineyard during his absence. In this passage the slave appears as the "financial agent" of the householder. (2) In Luke 12:41-46, a slave is used to express leadership within the church, namely as a "church leader." In this passage a slave is described as the "managerial slave." In this sense the slave shares the owner's status and power, as well as managing other slaves in the owner's household (Combes 1998:79). (3) In Acts 16:17, a slave is described in the role of

⁶⁵ In Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Gal 1:10 Paul refers to himself as a slave of Jesus.

⁶⁶ Combes (1998:82-83) also suggests two aspects of the slavery metaphor. On the one hand, the negative metaphor is introduced by him, for example, in Gal 4: 21-31 where slavery appears against the promise of God, and in 1 Cor 7:21-23 where slavery appears against freedom. On the other hand, the metaphor is introduced in a positive sense with slavery that represents slavery to Christ or to righteousness.

“apostle” as God’s agent. In this sense, Paul considers his ministry as slavery for the Lord. (4) When Paul calls Epaphras (Col 4:12) and Timothy (2 Tim 2:24), he uses the expression, a “slave of Christ.” In the light of this, the metaphor of a slave at times indicated a Christian leader as borne out by Titus 1:7, which portrays church leaders as slave managers within the church.

Thirdly, sometimes the slavery metaphor as “slave of Christ/God” relates to a “patronal society” (Martin 1990:56-60). Paul described himself as “a slave of Jesus Christ” in Rom 1:1.⁶⁷ In the patronal society of the Roman world, slaves always related to their patron, in other words they could play a role as a representative of their patron. Slaves in the patronal society relied on the power and authority of their owner. Thus slaves would prefer to have been enslaved to an upper-class person rather than being a slave of the lower-class. In the end, the power and authority of patrons could influence slaves. Therefore a slave’s status was decided according to the household which the slave belonged to. In this understanding, the phrase “slave of Christ” has the meaning of authority and power. In this sense Christ is a patron, and believers belong to Christ as a patron. Thus a believer as a slave of Christ is a representative of Jesus Christ. Even though the normal sense of slavery implies the concept of labour, toil, or the unconditional obedience to an owner, slavery as a metaphor can suggest the meaning of the role of an agent as an indubitable, authoritative representative of an owner (Martin 1990:60).

Fourthly, slavery as metaphor can be used to present “salvation” (Martin 1990:61-64). In early Christianity, the image of slavery functioned to describe not only moral obligation, but also salvation. For example, Paul uses the metaphor of slavery as salvation to express conversion in 1 Thess 1:9. Paul advises the Thessalonians to give up following idols, and return to God, and also to become slaves of the living and true God. In 1 Cor 7:23, Paul states that Jesus bought believers for a price. This means that believers came to be released from sin by the death of Jesus Christ. Before Jesus bought believers, believers were slaves of sin. However, after Jesus paid a price for believers,

⁶⁷ In addition, many versions such as KJV, NIV, NLT, NRSV and RSV, translate the Greek word δούλος in Rom 1:1 as “a servant.” Thus there is no differentiation made in meaning between a slave and a servant.

believers came to receive true freedom as a spiritual freeperson in Christ. In this sense, salvation is described as upward mobility within slavery. Martin (1990:68) states, “The term ‘slave of Christ’ could be understood as a positive metaphor for salvation as social mobility and power by association.” However, this verse is not understood as the changing of social ranking. Ultimately, Paul did not insist on the abolition of slavery as a social institution.

Lastly, slavery as a literary metaphor can be used paradoxically to describe a “friend” of Jesus Christ and the “recipients of the prophecy.” For instance, in John 15:14-15, a slave is described as a “friend” of Jesus Christ. A person who follows Jesus’ command is not a slave, but his friend.⁶⁸ And in Rev 1:1; 22:6, slaves also are identified as being the “recipients of the prophecy.” God gave the revelation to show his slave what soon must take place.

In summary, as observed so far, the term ‘slave’ can be comprehended in various ways metaphorically, especially in Paul’s thinking. The term ‘slave’ as a literary metaphor can express: unconditional obedience to God, a title of leadership in churches, a slave of God, and salvation. The understanding of the metaphorical meaning could be important to understand Paul’s thought concerning slavery. Understanding slavery as a literary metaphor can help us to comprehend Onesimus’ status as a slave. Particularly, the identity of Onesimus as a slave could be differently interpreted in the Christian community, for example Paul called Onesimus a son and a brother. In a social and physical sense Onesimus could not be a son or a brother, because he was a slave of his owner. However if slave is interpreted as a literary metaphor, it could have some parallel possibilities to be interpreted as a son or a brother in the biblical context. Therefore, when slavery is interpreted as metaphor, it can provide many more possible interpretations concerning the identity of Onesimus.

⁶⁸ According to Martin (1990:53-54), the concept of slavery is not used with a positive meaning in John. Rather, John avoids using this word to indicate disciples. However, an exception even it slightly ambiguous appears in John 15:14-15. In addition, the Pauline writings also often use the image of slavery to indicate vice and sin (e.g., Rom 6:16; Gal 5:1) (Osiek, 1992:177).

Consequently, in a literary perspective slavery/slaves as metaphor can be understood as analogous to a theological perspective in the light of the Christian context. Paul's metaphorical understanding of the term 'slavery/slaves' can be used positively in a Christian context in contrast to the social sense, such as when Paul identified himself as a 'slave' of Christ, even when he was not an actual slave in the social sense. As observed in the previous section, a metaphorical interpretation of the term 'slavery/slaves' can have various meanings and can provide insights towards understanding Onesimus' position in the Christian community, in contrast to the general society. In this sense, Onesimus' identity can be dealt with in both society and the Pauline community. The Pauline community was a Christian community; thus Paul's usage of Onesimus' identification, as a son or a brother, should be understood first metaphorically in the Christian context, even though Onesimus' actual social status was that of a slave in first century society. Therefore, it is plausible that in Paul's letter to Philemon Onesimus' identification as a believer could have had metaphorical or theological as well as social connotations – to this investigation our attention now turns.

4.4 Understanding the Term 'slave' in the Letter to Philemon

The usage of the term 'slave' in verse 16 could have importance in terms of reflecting the two contexts. On the one hand, this term's use might entail the existence of slavery in the social context; on the other hand, this term's use might entail the necessity of a deeper comprehension concerning the slave concept in the biblical context. In particular, in the letter to Philemon, Paul's understanding of slavery is theological, which in turn is based on his understanding of slavery as an actual social institution.

Firstly, O'Brien (1982:269) postulates that slavery is not mentioned directly in the letter to Philemon. Nevertheless the term 'slave' does appear in the text. The term 'slave' is mentioned twice in verse 16.⁶⁹ The usage of the term 'slave' might simply reflect that

⁶⁹ *BDAG* (s.v. δοῦλος) presents the meaning of slave simply as "male slave as an entity in a socioeconomic context," and states that, "'servant' for 'slave' is largely confined to Biblical translation."

the system of slavery existed in the first century C.E. It is well recognised that slavery was a prevalent social institution in the Ancient Near East; therefore the use of the term 'slave' indicates that the system of slavery indeed existed in that society at that time. The dating of letter to Philemon to the first century C.E. is generally accepted.⁷⁰ Thus Paul's use of the word 'slave' indicates that Paul would have recognised slavery as an actual social institution existing in his day; consequently, the term 'slave' would be used naturally by Paul. In that context, slaves were considered as an item of their owner's property, and were also treated like articles which could be bought or sold by freemen. And slaves fitted into the socio - economic labour system. Thus, Thompson (1967:179) states that the slave would be employed "in industry, in administration and in private households."⁷¹ Those who worked in an owner's household played an important role for the household economy. Onesimus also might have been a slave of Philemon's household and might have served as a house-worker for his owner. In the household, slaves could receive favours which enabled them to live as human beings. Thus, the social context focuses on the feature of actual slaves' lives in contrast to a theological understanding of the concept.

Secondly, the use of the term 'slave' might indicate the sense which has to be recognised within the biblical context, especially in the letter to Philemon. Specifically, O'Brien (1982:286) explains the use of the word 'slave' in verse 16 as being contrasted with the phrase "a beloved brother" for emphasis. Thus Paul intends to concentrate on the "beloved brother" rather than on the 'slave.' O'Brien thus argues that Onesimus was a beloved brother in Paul's perspective.⁷² Even though Paul understood slavery as a social institution of the period, in his theological thinking Paul's use of slavery as metaphor shows that his understanding of slavery was not to reduce it to understanding

⁷⁰ Generally, it is accepted that this letter was written about 60-63 C.E. (Muller [1955] 1983:28; O'Brien 1982:269; Felder 2000:884, etc.). Therefore, this letter reflects the social circumstances of the first century C.E.

⁷¹ In addition, Thompson (2005:198) observes that the letter to Philemon does not deal with the negative sides of the slavery.

⁷² However, in this context "a beloved brother" does not mean that Onesimus was a physical brother of Philemon as Callahan (1993:357-376) suggests. This expression indicates rather that Onesimus should be incorporated like a brother into Philemon's household in the love of Christ.

it as a social concept. The expression presented in Philemon 16 would be a good example.

The second position particularly, could provide insights to define the identity of Onesimus as a slave. This position provides a clue as to how Onesimus should be treated in the Christian community. Onesimus was categorised as a slave before he became a believer, but after he became a believer he was no longer a slave in Paul's perspective. Onesimus became a believer through Paul, even though his social status was still that of a slave. Thus a new relationship came to be constructed between Philemon and Onesimus in the Lord. They are no longer in an owner-slave relationship. Paul suggests rather that they are brothers in Christ. In this sense, a new understanding of relationship is created concerning the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus.⁷³ As Guthrie (1970:640) observes, Paul changed the character of the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus in terms of the owner-slave context.

However, Paul's letter to Philemon is dealing with the real social status of Onesimus in first century Roman society. In other words, Paul's expressions of identity for Onesimus in Phlm 16 indicate that a new relationship between Philemon and Onesimus should be formed anew in the Philemon's household, as also in a Christian community. In the sense of the Christian community, Paul's asking for Onesimus could be acceptable to Philemon, because Philemon's household was based on Christ's love and was also the meeting place of the local believers. In the biblical context Onesimus already received freedom by becoming a believer. Paul applied this simple model to Philemon's household. In a Christian community, Christ's love should, for believers, be the first principle concerning people's behaviour in interaction with others, even in the wider society. Thus Onesimus should be treated as a (spiritual) brother in a Christian community based on Christ's love. In addition, first century Roman society supported manumission of slaves from the slavery system. Thus, Paul would suggest that Christ's love has to be practised by believers in terms of a change of Onesimus' social status.

⁷³ In addition Thompson (1967:179) states, "The Stoics recognised the slave as a member of the city of gods and men. At the end of the first century C.E. Dio Chrysostom, the Greek author, points out that the distinction between slave and freeman has no basis in nature."

Ultimately, Onesimus' status could be reconstituted as a brother, not a slave, in a new relationship with his former owner.

Consequently, the identity of Onesimus can be defined more clearly by understanding two contexts, namely the social context and the Christian context. The following section will focus directly on the understanding regarding Onesimus' description as presented in the letter to Philemon.

4.5 Understanding Onesimus as a Slave in the Pauline Perspective: from δούλος to ἀδελφός

In Paul's letter to Philemon, Onesimus' name first appears in verse 10.⁷⁴ As mentioned in the chapter 2, most scholars (Vincent 1897; Thompson 1967; Lightfoot [1959] 1970; O'Brien 1982; Lampe 1985; Winter 1987; Melick 1991; Nordling 1991; Rapske 1991; Bartchy 1992a, etc.) regard Onesimus as a slave.⁷⁵ Therefore it would seem to be accepted that Onesimus' social status was that of a slave in Philemon's household. Verse 16 would seem to indicate that Onesimus is a slave; according to Fitzmyer (2000:114), this expression indicates the real legal status of Onesimus in social life.

However, Paul suggests a new aspect regarding Onesimus' identity in the letter to Philemon. Paul wrote the letter to Philemon asking him to treat Onesimus as a brother in Christ, not as a slave (Phlm 16). Onesimus, as a slave of Philemon's household, probably wronged Philemon in some way. After he did wrong, he ran away. After leaving his owner, apparently he appealed to Paul to intervene with Philemon. Onesimus met Paul who was in prison, and thereafter became a believer through Paul's intervention, that is Onesimus became a believer in Jesus Christ. After he became a

⁷⁴ The name Onesimus is found also with Tychicus in Col 4:9.

⁷⁵ These scholars differ merely in their viewpoints concerning what type of slave Onesimus was. For example, some scholars regard Onesimus as a runaway slave, some scholars describe Onesimus as a dispatched slave, some scholars consider Onesimus as an estranged slave.

believer, a change in Onesimus' identity was suggested by Paul. In his letter to Philemon, four phrases in particular were used to indicate Onesimus' identity. These four words give a clue as to how Onesimus, who was changed from a non-Christian slave to a Christian slave, was considered as a brother of Philemon in the Christian community. The four phrases are as follows: my child (τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου v.10), my heart (τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα v.12), a beloved brother (ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν v.16), a partner (κοινωνόν v.17).

To begin with, Paul called Onesimus 'my child' (τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου) in verse 10. This designation of Paul concerning Onesimus is based on Christian love and fellowship (Wilson 2005:350). Felder (2000:899) suggests furthermore that Paul's request to Philemon was based on the love of Christ, not the social institution. For Paul, Onesimus was his spiritual child that Paul begot in his imprisonment (Vincent 1897:185). In this context the relationship between Paul and Onesimus could be explained in the image of spiritual parenthood (O'Brien 1982:291).

In other letters, Paul described himself as the father with regard to the Christian community: for example, 1 Cor 4:15 and Gal 4:19.⁷⁶ Thus a special relationship like the father and son relationship could be envisaged between Paul and Onesimus in the Christian community. Therefore, the identity of Onesimus as a (spiritual) brother within the community could be suggested in terms of the understanding of the new relationship between Paul and Onesimus. If Onesimus was Paul's spiritual son, then he also could be Philemon's brother in the Christian community (O'Brien 1982:291).

Secondly, Paul called Onesimus not only a 'child' but also his 'heart' (σπλάγχνα) in verse 12. In particular, this word σπλάγχνα ("my very heart," RSV) can be treated together with another word κοινωνόν ("a partner," RSV) in verse 17. These two words present the identity of Onesimus as a substitute on behalf of Paul himself. According to Muller ([1955]1983:182), Paul's expressions such as 'heart' presents the apostle's love for and attachment to Onesimus. The Greek word σπλάγχνον was used in verses 7, 12,

⁷⁶ In addition, Paul calls Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 1:2) and Titus (Titus 1:4) his child.

and 20, and in these verses the words show how much emphasis Paul placed on personal love. In addition, the Greek phrase τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα could mean “my very self” (O’Brien 1982:293). Thus Köster (1971:555) asserts, “It is as if Paul, in the runaway slave, came to Philemon in person with his claim to experience love.” Therefore even though it was Onesimus who came to Philemon, Philemon should welcome him as Philemon would welcome Paul. Secondly Onesimus was considered as a partner (κοινωνός) in verse 17. In particular, this concept can be thought of in regard to the spiritual bond of a common faith. Wilson (2005:357) states, “The appeal is to what Paul and Philemon share in common as Christians, and not as those legally bound to each other.” In general, partnership was applied to pecuniary contributions, business transactions like a business-partner. However their fellowship in Paul’s thinking is grounded in the faith. Thus their relationship contains the love and liberality of Christ. Therefore the refusal of Paul’s request could not be contemplated in Christian faith (Vincent 1897:189). In the end, if Philemon considers Paul as a partner who shares the love of Christ in faith, Onesimus as Paul’s child should be treated as a brother in Christian friendship and fellowship (Muller [1955] 1983:187). Paul concentrated on the potential spiritual relationship between Philemon and Onesimus. In this spiritual relationship, Philemon and Onesimus can be brothers and partners. For example, Paul also called Titus a “fellow-worker” in 2 Cor 8:23. In this understanding Paul suggested that Philemon has to receive Onesimus as he receives Paul, because returning Onesimus was equivalent to sending Paul himself back to Philemon (O’Brien 1982:299). Thus Paul’s request can mean that Onesimus should be treated as a “fellow-Christian” of Philemon (O’Brien 1982:299).⁷⁷ These two words show that in Paul’s views Onesimus should be considered as a Christian fellow in the Christian community.

Lastly, according to Wilson (2005:355), verse 16 is the climax of Paul’s plea. Paul’s appeal was that Onesimus should be considered as a “beloved brother” (ἀδελφὸν

⁷⁷ According to O’Brien (1982:299), “if the suggestion about κοινωνός having the nuance of ‘co-worker’ is correct, then Paul’s expression here may mean he wants Onesimus to be accepted back both as a Christian and as Paul’s colleague.”

ἀγαπητόν).⁷⁸ In Paul's theological perspective Onesimus was a beloved brother rather than a slave. Fitzmyer (2000:32) also states that the slave was considered not only as a man but also as a brother like any fellow Christian in the letter to Philemon.⁷⁹ The matter of social and physical freedom would not be important in this sense. Even though Onesimus was a slave of Philemon, he also became a member of God's family in the Christian context by becoming a believer. Therefore, Onesimus, as well as Philemon were incorporated in the body of Christ. In consequence, both Philemon and Onesimus belonged to the same Lord, and a new relationship between Philemon and Onesimus is formed between them as brothers, not as an owner and a slave (O'Brien 1982:270). The new relationship between Philemon and Onesimus is formed in faith, and the relationship between them in faith transcends their old relationship as an owner and a slave. Thus, for Paul, the matter of manumission was not an important issue (Wilson 2005:356). In addition, according to Wilson (2005:356), verse 16 describes Onesimus' current position clearly by considering the meaning of two Greek phrases, namely, ἐν σαρκί and ἐν κυρίῳ (v. 16). According to Wilson, Onesimus was a beloved brother in the physical sense (ἐν σαρκί) as well as in the spiritual sense (ἐν κυρίῳ). In other words, Onesimus' status was presented at the "ordinary human level" in ἐν σαρκί ("in the flesh"), and also is presented as a new status with ἐν κυρίῳ ("in Christ"). Paul's purpose in this letter was to state that "a Christian in a vulnerable position should be treated as a brother in Christ by a fellow Christian" (Thompson 2005:199). In this sense, Onesimus as a believer, should be considered as a fellow believer as all other believers in the community. When Onesimus converted as a believer, he experienced the same grace and mercy of God as when Philemon converted. Therefore, Philemon had to receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ (O'Brien 1982:301).

Here, two particular opinions are found concerning the possible manumission of Onesimus. The first perspective is negative regarding the manumission of Onesimus

⁷⁸ Dukes (1985:115-117) discusses Paul's use of the term ἀδελφός. Paul used this word to describe the intimate fellow workers (e.g. in Galatians), fellow believers (e.g. in Romans), and brothers (e.g. in Rom 8:29). Paul's frequent use of this word is to describe family fellowship.

⁷⁹ According to Wilson (2005:355-356), ἀδελφός was commonly used to express fellowship or comradeship, even before the Christian era.

from slavery. This perspective tries to understand the identity of Onesimus in the theological sense: Paul did not strongly appeal for the manumission of Onesimus from slavery. Rather Paul tried to understand slaves' status based on their spiritual freedom rather than on actual, literal social life. Wilson (2005:356) states that Paul's main concerns would not have been the manumission of Onesimus; Paul would not be concerned whether or not Onesimus was to receive his freedom. According to O'Brien (1982:269, 303), Paul did not ask that Philemon should receive Onesimus as a freed man, or that Philemon should free Onesimus immediately on his return. Paul focused rather on brotherly love in Christ.⁸⁰ For Paul, receiving a freed Onesimus would be important, but the more important concern would be his having become a believer. In Paul's perspective, although Onesimus' physical freedom was valuable, Paul focused more on changing Onesimus standing with Christ (O'Brien 1982:270). Felder (2000:885) also suggests that Paul's main focus in this letter is not on the institution of slavery. According to Felder, Paul's focus is rather on the power of the gospel which can transform and reconcile human relations. In addition, Thompson (2005:217-219) states that some terms which were used by Paul such as 'my child' (v. 10), and 'my very heart' (v. 12) indicate that Paul appealed to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, but this does not allow us to assume that Paul asked for the manumission of Onesimus. Paul simply emphasised the changed situation in which Onesimus is considered to have moved from a slave to a beloved brother in Christ. Therefore, the word 'slave' no longer represents "degradation," or "abuse" (Thompson 1967:180). Consequently, even though Onesimus was still a slave of Philemon after becoming a believer, Paul focused more on Onesimus' spiritual position as a believer because he was a freedman in Christ.

The second perspective is positive regarding the possibility of the manumission of Onesimus. This perspective holds that Onesimus would have become a freedman in the theological sense, and it would also see Paul's response as gently suggesting the manumission of Onesimus in the social sense. In this way Fitzmyer (2000:32) asserts that verse 21 is Paul's implicit request for the release of Onesimus who was a Christian

⁸⁰ Therefore Paul believes that God deals equally with an owner and a slave, and as a result both owners and slaves all are servants of Christ. Slaves could be freedmen, and owners could be slaves in Christ (O'Brien 1982:269).

slave. Onesimus could have been free in the Christian community, but he could also be free in society as well. Paul's request is plausible, because the manumission of slaves was not an unusual event in the first century C.E. (e.g., Osiek 1992:176; Bartchy 1992b:71; 1997:1099; Harrill 2003:580, etc). Martin (1991:136) also focuses on the verse 21 to suggest the manumission of Onesimus. According to Martin, "verse 21 does contain an undertone of hope that Philemon will agree to the manumission of the slave." In addition, Melick (1991:337) suggests that Paul did not concretely request Onesimus' freedom, but that he suggested in verse 16 how Christians ought to behave in the situation, namely that believers know what they have to do as a believer; therefore Philemon as a believer would know what he has to do for his slave Onesimus (Melick 1991:367-368). Thus, although Paul did not directly ask for the freedom of Onesimus, the manumission of Onesimus is suggested subtly in Paul's request. Melick (1991:368) recognises that Paul emphasises that Onesimus had to be treated impartially like all other freemen.

Onesimus had constraints on having his freedom. However, Paul's theological perspective transcends the limits which bound Onesimus in terms of the social structure. Paul was a believer, and a free man, as well as a Roman citizen.⁸¹ Although Paul accepted the Roman social institution, Paul wanted to focus more on the relationship in faith. In other words, Paul's concern was that Onesimus received spiritual freedom when he became a believer even while he was still a slave. The words which were used by Paul in the Philemon letter show Paul's viewpoint on slavery. In Paul's theological perspective a slave could be a son, a beloved brother and a partner as well. For Paul the matter of the actual status in social life was a secondary consideration in the Christian community. Rather Paul thought that every person should be treated equally in the Lord. Before becoming a believer Onesimus was "useless", after he became a believer he became a useful man, as his name indicates.⁸² Onesimus was a non-Christian slave, but he is now a Christian slave. Therefore Onesimus became a freed man spiritually because he became a believer.

⁸¹ In Acts 22, when Paul went to Jerusalem, he was arrested there, and was examined by flogging. This time Paul presents himself as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25).

⁸² The meaning of 'Onesimus' is "profitable" or "useful" (O'Brien 1982:302).

Paul's perspective, as reflected in his letters, was a thorough theological perspective. Although Paul recognised slavery as a social institution, it would not seem that Paul asks strongly for Onesimus' freedom from Philemon. Paul focused more on the spiritual meaning of freedom. For Paul the main issue was whether Onesimus was in Christ, or not.

4.6 The Letter to Philemon Compared with 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, Galatians 4:21-5:1 and Philippians 2:6-11

These four letters have been written by the same author, namely by Paul. Therefore Paul's theological thinking is reflected in these letters. In addition, all the four letters deal with the topic of slavery at some point. Thus, these letters could be expected to provide a coherent overview of Paul's theological perspective on slavery. His attitude concerning the slave which is presented in the letter to Philemon could be understood more readily through the understanding of these other texts.

Firstly, 1 Cor 7:17-24 refers to "true freedmen/women." In this passage two illustrations are introduced to explain true freemen/women and true freedom, as follows: the relationship between circumcision and uncircumcision, and between freedom and slavery. In these illustrations, circumcision was used as a criterion which would distinguish the Jew from the Gentile, and freedom was a basis which could distinguish free men/women and slaves. This passage refers to an actual social status. However the image of slavery which was used by Paul in this passage should be understood as a theological metaphor rather than as a real social status, because this letter's recipients were believers. Thus this letter could be accepted reasonably by the Christian community. Paul focused on the faithful freedom coming from God. In Paul's perspective free persons are the people who are called by God and belong to Christ. Therefore Paul defined the term 'freedom' according to a religious context, not the social setting.

Secondly, in Gal 4:21-5:1 Paul focused on true freedom in contrast to the law. In Paul's thinking true freedom is only in Christ. Paul stressed strongly that the law cannot give salvation. The only means is Jesus Christ, not in following and keeping the law. Paul tried to illustrate freedom through the Hagar-Sarah story. This Hagar-Sarah story shows the faith aspect of freedom based on the promise of God. In the story Hagar and her son Ishmael represent the law, and Sarah and her son Isaac represent the promise of God. Believers can receive true freedom and salvation when they are in Christ. One who is in Christ can have salvation and true freedom by Jesus' redemptive work, whether one is a Jew or not, and whether one is a Gentile or not. Freedom in this passage is not described as physical freedom. Rather, freedom is described as spiritual freedom. Thus in Paul's perspective the matter of freedom in the light of actual social status cannot be the main point, and the social status of people in terms of free or slave cannot function as a standard of satisfaction in life. True freedom is not formed on earth, but comes from heaven. Therefore Paul's focus on freedom is on spiritual freedom rather than on actual social freedom.

Thirdly, Phil 2:6-11 mentions the incarnation of Jesus. In this passage, two particular factors are presented to describe the relationship between God and Jesus: Jesus' obedience and God's behaviour. The incarnation of Jesus represents obedience to God. Even though Jesus was God, Jesus obeyed God's word, namely Jesus abandoned himself to obey God's order regarding even his life. However Jesus' exaltation by God represents the recovery of his status from the form of the slave. Jesus' obedience to God's word can be recognised as the image of slavery, and God's behaviour to Jesus can be illustrated as the metaphorical image of the owner. Therefore the images of owner and slave can be applied to the image of God and Jesus.

Lastly, the letter to Philemon introduces Onesimus. As we have already observed in a previous section, Onesimus is identified as an actual slave of Philemon's household by many scholars. Onesimus worked in Philemon's household. At some stage he wronged Philemon, and then ran away. Thereafter, Onesimus met Paul in prison, and he became a believer. Onesimus, who became a believer, possibly might have supported Paul's

ministry in the gospel. At this point Paul wrote a letter to Philemon to establish Onesimus' identity. Paul suggested a new title to Philemon for Onesimus. The new title was "brother." Onesimus was a slave before leaving his owner, but now he comes back to his owner as a brother in the spiritual sense. Paul asserted that all believers are one in Christ. Even though Onesimus was still a slave of Philemon in the social sense, Paul tried to focus more on his spiritual status. Therefore Onesimus should be a brother of Philemon in Paul's thinking. However, if Onesimus' identity is derived from first century Roman society, the possibility of the actual social freedom of Onesimus could be suggested indirectly (Bartchy 1992b:71; 1997:1099). Thus, the likelihood of the mention by Paul of the change of Onesimus' status should not be ignored. Nevertheless Paul, in his theological perspective, laid his main concern on Onesimus becoming a believer rather than on the change of Onesimus' social status.

A point in common across these four texts is that all mention the slave concept, and are also written by the same author. These letters are dealing with slavery as primarily a theological notion rather than a social concept. Although Paul could have been influenced by the social factors of Roman society, he did not try to apply the social factors in his theological thinking. For example, Paul did not directly mention the manumission of slaves in his letters. Therefore the meaning of slavery should be understood metaphorically in the Paul's perspective. If slavery can be understood as a metaphor in these letters, the matter of the actual manumission of slaves does not have to be taken seriously. In Paul's understanding freedom was understood as separation from sin, and true freedom comes only from the heavenly owner, God, not from the earthly owner. In Paul's perspective a true freeperson is a person who belongs to God and God's household. Therefore in church communities, any discrimination between an owner and a slave is not significant because in Christ they all can be called freemen/women through Jesus' redemptive work. In this perspective, Onesimus was theologically a freed man as well as having gained the meaning of his name, namely "useful."

4.7 Summary

In Paul's theological viewpoint, freedom was not on an actual manumission but was based on spiritual freedom. Therefore the matter of the change of slaves' status is not Paul's main point. Paul's main focus is whether one was in Christ, or not. In Paul's perspective a truly free person is one who is in Christ. Only those who are redeemed by Jesus' death can receive true freedom. Therefore Onesimus can be a freedman as well as a slave of Christ in Paul's theological thinking. When Paul described Onesimus as a brother, Onesimus would be a spiritual brother of Philemon rather than a physical brother. In the Christian context the concept of slavery can be understood as a metaphor in these texts.

However, the matter of the manumission should not be excluded from slaves' expectations in the first century social perspective.⁸³ As mentioned in previous chapters, first century Roman society can be termed a slave society. This would mean that slavery would have been included in the specific social mentality of first century Roman society. Thus Paul might be influenced by a first century social ethos when he prescribes the relationship between an owner and a slave in the Christian community. Undoubtedly, for Paul, change of the social status probably was not the most a fundamental concern.⁸⁴ Slavery was one of many social structural systems in the first century C.E. Thus the reconstitution of the relationship between an owner and a slave in their everyday life would be familiar events concerning social power. In other words the matter of the manumission of slaves would be a sensitive topic to owners at least, because that relationship was sustained by the social standards. Therefore the following chapter will

⁸³ Because, under Roman law, when a male slave was manumitted from the slavery, he would receive his freedom, and also would gain his citizenship in some exceptional cases, that is, he fully became a Roman citizen (Lyll 1984:42).

⁸⁴ However, even though the matter of the manumission was not the Paul's main concern, Paul did not exclude the possibility of the manumission of Onesimus because of his ministry. The change of Onesimus' social status could have made Paul's ministry more effective than it was when Onesimus was a slave. Onesimus, as a freed man could help Paul's ministry more powerfully, and also could work for the gospel. In this sense, Paul might well have written a letter to Philemon to ask for the freedom of Onesimus. Accordingly, Paul may have subtly suggested the manumission of Onesimus, even though mention of the freedom of Onesimus is not presented directly in the letter to Philemon.

attempt to understand slavery in the first century ethos. In addition it will also try to show how Paul describes the relationship between an owner and a slave in the Christian community because the members of Paul's community also would be influenced by first century social ethos.

CHAPTER 5

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHOS AND IDENTITY: AN IDEOLOGICAL TEXTUAL APPROACH

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to understand, not only the nature of slavery within the first century, but rather the identity of Onesimus who was a believer and also a slave as it related to the first century ethos of the Mediterranean world. According to Schütz (2006:289), ethos is understood as “character” or “habitual way of life” in the classical world. In this definition, ethos can be explained as consisting of various kinds of elements which comprise that specific ethos such as social and cultural factors, life style, spirit of the age, attitude of life and disposition (Troost 1983:108). Thus the notion of ethos is complex, interwoven, and reciprocally constituted in the first century C.E.; no single element can be separated from any of the others.

In the previous chapters, slavery has been evaluated in a general social sense and also a theological sense. Who was a slave in the first century Roman society? How was a slave treated in that social structure? And how was a slave considered in the Church community? At this stage, a synthesis from both the social perspective and the theological perspective on slavery is needed to elaborate the identity of Onesimus, because slavery could be understood literally in the social context, as well as metaphorically in the Christian context. In other words, Onesimus was a slave in the sense of the general social situation, but, as a believer, his life could have had wider significance beyond slavery in the light of Christianity. Even though a slave could be accepted positively as a brother in the Christian community, this principle might not be

accepted positively in the actual social structure because of the problem of social rank. In other words, although Paul could accept a slave as a brother in Christ's love, it did not mean that Paul's thinking would necessarily have been accepted universally by his contemporaries.

In general, slavery was incorporated in the social systems of the first century C.E. This implies that our focus has to be concentrated on first century Roman society itself to understand slavery in the first century ethos, viz. slavery has to be understood as part and parcel of the social system of those days.

Therefore this section will focus mainly on the practical position of slaves as members of households in first century Roman society.⁸⁵ In this sense, the identity of Onesimus as a slave can be described in the Christian context, but it can also be considered in the social context. In Paul's theological perspective, Onesimus could have freedom in a spiritual way without actual manumission from slavery. In Paul's understanding, freedom meant, amongst other things, separation from sin. Thus a person who became a believer could have freedom as Onesimus did. The social status of Onesimus was that of a slave of Philemon's household, nevertheless he probably helped Paul's ministry after he became a believer through Paul. However the role of Onesimus in Philemon's household raises a question regarding whether Onesimus worked as a slave or as a freed man. This is the possible scenario that Paul seems to be suggesting in his letter, namely, that Onesimus be set free in order to help him. But until that moment the role of Onesimus in Philemon's household would be that of a slave who took care of housework; in contrast the possible future role of Onesimus in the Christian community would be a co-worker of Philemon who might help Paul's ministry. In this sense, the role of Onesimus indicates the characteristics of both a slave and a freed man. Finally, this chapter will attempt to understand the identity of Onesimus in the interrelationship between the Roman social context of the first century C.E. and Paul's perspective(s) found in his letter to Philemon.

⁸⁵ Slaves always functioned in context of the *familia* (household, family), and the *familia* was a common subject in the Greco-Roman and early Christian traditions (Tsang 2005:28).

5.2 Regarding Methodology: Ideological Textual Approach

The ideological textual approach⁸⁶ will be used to understand the situation of Philemon and Onesimus in terms of the understanding of slavery in the first century ethos. Ethos itself relates to ideology, in other words, the ethos presents the ideology of the age when ideology is understood broadly as worldview, rather than simply in relation to politico-economic theory. Basically, an ideological textual approach can concentrate on how the meaning of the text is understood by people who live during a specific time. According to Robbins (1996:95), ideological texture focuses on people, viz. this texture concentrates on the bias, opinions and stereotypes of particular writers and readers. In particular, Robbins (1996:95, 110) maintains that the ideological analysis focuses on people within the group because people's ideology concerns other people. Thus, ideology reflects a certain train of thought shared among people on specific events or a specific social system like slavery, and in this sense the thought of people on particular topics in the particular time is based on an ethos. Therefore, ideology reflects "the needs and interests of a group or class at a particular time in history" (Davis 1975:14).⁸⁷

As mentioned above, ideology appears through people's thinking and within the understanding of the society itself, which means all structural elements of that society, for example, culture, custom, spirit, and life pattern, etc. These elements are interconnected within the society, and influence the people of the society to establish

⁸⁶ The methodology used in this chapter is the ideological textual approach of Robbins. Robbins' ideological textual approach needs to be distinguished from an ideological critical approach. In general, the ideological critical approach can be explained as follows: the ideological criticism uses literary critical methods within a historical and social scientific frame in order to read biblical texts (Yee 1995:146). And, according to Yee (1999:535), ideological criticism is influenced by three factors of biblical interpretation, namely, the author, the text, and the reader. Particularly, ideological criticism entails an extrinsic analysis and an intrinsic analysis. An extrinsic analysis focuses on the social relations like family, status, class and gender and forces such as technology, politics, law and education. Thus an extrinsic analysis of biblical texts focuses on the category of power. An intrinsic analysis focuses on literary critical methods - intrinsic analysis investigates the text's reproduction of ideology in the text's rhetoric.

⁸⁷ In addition, Thompson (1984:3-4) suggests two meanings of the term 'ideology': a neutral conception and a critical conception of ideology. According to Thompson, the neutral conception of ideology relates to a "social action" like a social order; the critical conception of ideology is linked to "the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power."

their own ideology in the specific times. In this sense, slavery then reflects a certain perception of the world and life in the first century Roman society. How did people regard slaves in their lives? And how did the broader ethos of the time influence people in slavery? And how did slavery influence the ethos of the times?

As Osiek and Balch (1997:174) explain, slavery was a common institution of Greco-Roman society. This means that slavery occupied a significant part of the Roman economy, and the association of them could not be separated. Tsang (2005:41) also explains slavery as a cultural construct, in other words slavery was based on the social structure, and reinforced by the increase in the slave population. Slave labour, for example, influenced the economy because slaves constituted up to a third of the total population. According to Tsang (2005:41), slave labour was an essential part of Roman social life. Furthermore the slaves took care of all kinds of work in society as did free persons. Ultimately, slave labour provided an advantage to the social economy of Rome. In particular some slaves would be incorporated into the household, and those who were in the household would be treated as a part of household (Punt 2009:446-462).⁸⁸ The obligation of these household slaves was to take care of housework and to serve their owner. From time to time, slaves were allowed to act as business agents for their owner. In the first century C.E., slave-owners normally had the duty to take care of their slaves, thus they had to provide the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter (Bradley 1997:81). Thus the relationship between a slave-owner and a slave was close, being mutually dependant. This fact suggests the possibility that Onesimus could have been considered as a member of Philemon's household, and as such he would be under Philemon's care. In the worldview of believers, slaves could be considered as brothers and sisters because they received the same faith from God and believed in one God. However, even though they became believers, their social status either as an owner or as a slave, would not be changed. The difference of their social rank would still be exercised in the wider society. Therefore more practical information on the relationship between an owner and a slave will be needed to understand slavery in first century Roman society. Ultimately, people's ideological perceptions as far as these can be

⁸⁸ Even though slaves could not be considered part of the family, they could take part in the religious celebrations and the rituals of the household (Punt 2009:446-462).

determined will offer some clue as to how to understand slavery in these specific times. Thus an understanding of slavery based on the first century Roman society ethos might allow some positive opinion on the manumission of Onesimus as a believer in the social context in question.

5.3 The Treatment of Slaves in the Ethos of First Century Roman Society

In following up on the early discussion on the state of slavery, the focus will shift to how slaves were treated, and particularly by referring to two aspects, namely, the slaves' places in household and the possibility of being set free or manumitted.

People participate unconsciously in an ethos, yet are strongly influenced by, as well as involved in maintaining the ethos of their particular society by living in conformity with the ethos. Therefore, concentrating on the situation of slaves in various aspects of the first century society itself is the best way to understand slavery in that ethos. Two factors particularly which relate to slavery practically will provide some insights concerning how people treated slaves in what partly constituted the ethos of the first century Roman society, viz. the household and the practise of manumission. These two factors, household and manumission, could be valuable sources through which to describe the social status of the slave in the first century C.E. ethos, and also to provide a connecting point for defining the identity of Onesimus as a slave in the church community.

5.3.1 Slaves in the household

In the first century C.E., most slaves of the urban areas would relate to their owner closely within a household, in comparison to slaves of rural areas. The urban slaves

could have a close relationship with their owner because they belonged to their owner's household.⁸⁹ And these slaves in a household took care of all kinds of housework which related to the household such as food preparation, cleaning, removing waste, and caring for children. They could also have the opportunity for education and to accumulate some money. In a household, even slaves could have their own slave, and they controlled their own slaves as their owners did. In other words, slaves in urban areas were more likely to be considered as human beings in contrast to slaves in rural areas. Even though their social status was that of slaves, they could have a deep relationship with their owner in the household. Furthermore, slaves could keep this close relationship with their former owner in a new structuring of relationship after they were released from slavery. In Roman law, after manumission, the social status of slaves was changed from slave to freed person.

As mentioned briefly above, slaves in the owner's household were controlled by the owner, but the estimation of slaves of the household was high, rather than being poorly thought of, as was the case for rural slaves (Bradley 1987:79). Basically, the first century world emphasised the role of the community rather than the role of the individual, thus their identity could be determined according to their communities such as "family," or "household" (Achteimeier and Green and Thompson 2001:47).⁹⁰ Tsang (2005:22) also points out that slaves did not have an individual identity without some kind of relationship to a household. In the final analysis, the basic social unit of the Roman society can be characterised by the family existing in the form of household (Achteimeier and Green and Thompson 2001:47). Malina and Neyrey (1996:158) also described the household as the dominant social institution for most people in the first century C.E.

⁸⁹ Malina and Neyrey (1996:107) introduce Neusner's opinion concerning the concept of the household: "The household is a technical term, and landless workers, teachers, physicians, merchants, shopkeepers, traders, craftsmen and the like cannot by definition, constitute, or even affiliate with, a household."

⁹⁰ In addition Achteimeier, Green and Thompson, understand as similar in meaning, these words-"family," "kin-group," "household" (2001:47). Lyall (1984:126) also uses the term "household" in the same perspective to describe family. Osiek (1992:175) suggests two types of slaves, one type being concerned with the household.

In a basic sense, the household consisted of the father, his wife, children, slaves and others living in a house (Lyll 1984:126). Thus the concept of the household can be understood actually as a more extended group than the consanguineous family. In first century Roman society, slaves' owners relied heavily upon their slaves' labour because the owners did not always have the skills or ability to do certain housework. Household slaves took care of all kinds of housework acting as cooks, caterers and bakers, bleachers, wool-weighers, clothes-menders, weavers and shoe-makers, nurses, pedagogues, midwives and doctors, and so forth (Bradley 1997:102).⁹¹ Thus, the role of slaves was important in a household system because most of the labour was supplied by slaves. According to Glancy (2006:44), the tasks done by household slaves could be described as those of the highly specialised worker.

Where then did household slaves live? According to Glancy (2006:45), slaves lived generally with their owner in the household. In case of a larger household, the house had a separate area for slaves, but not in case of a smaller household. However, even though slaves lived in the same house with their owner, apparently private space was not given to them. The treatment of the slaves was not equal to the treatment of a full family member in the household.⁹² Even though slave's areas in Roman houses are difficult to identify precisely, the Roman domestic slaves stayed generally in one of the many small rooms called cells that Roman houses contained. These small areas were often used for storage purposes (Bradley 1997:84-85).⁹³ Furthermore if slaves had certain skills such as medical experience, or writing skills, they could develop a relationship with their owner on that basis. The special skills of a slave could provide a good bridge that could reinforce the relationship between owners and slaves. As a result, the slaves who maintained a good relationship with their owner naturally adopted much of the owner's culture (Tsang 2005:43).

⁹¹ Generally, there was no separation between the labour of slaves and the labour of free persons (Bradley 1997:65).

⁹² For example, at night slaves would sleep in a closet which was used for food storage, or sleep in a corner of an owner's bedroom. Thus, even though slaves could have their own space in a household, the circumstances were not adequate (Glancy 2006:45).

⁹³ According to Tsang (2005:43), slaves were largely restricted in their movements to the area of kitchens and bath areas in household. These areas within Roman architecture brought some advantages in that slaves could have close contact with their owners.

However, from time to time, this close relationship with an owner worked detrimentally for slaves. For example, sometimes the abusive use of a slaveholders' authority took place with regard to female slaves, and even male slaves. Sexual relationships could develop between owners and slaves. If an owner was sexually involved with a slave, the slave might receive favours from the owner in return (Tsang 2005:43).⁹⁴ Female slaves particularly had no choice in receiving or abuse favours from their owners. According to Glancy (2006:51), sometimes young men fulfilled their sexual desires with household slaves.⁹⁵ The abuse of slaves happened easily in a household because the slaves were legally the property of the owner (Tsang 2005:45).⁹⁶ Briggs (2000:115) also mentions that the bodies of slaves, including their sexual and reproductive capacities, belonged to their owner. As Punt (2010:232) mentioned, "A particular ethos of the body may have sustained a slaveholding culture, the point is really that in the first century C.E. the two cannot be divorced from one another."

However, normally household slaves were considered and treated as human beings with proper treatment like that showed to a family member.⁹⁷ Such treatment of slaves as human beings is seen in Seneca's writing: Seneca actually considered slaves as humans

⁹⁴ Many slaves were separated from their original societies, therefore their identities were directly dependent on their owners (Tsang 2005:44).

⁹⁵ Punt (2010:232) states, "The corporal vulnerability of slaves meant that slaves, male and female, were primarily bodies and had no dignity as persons, served the pleasures of others, and were bought and sold as bodies."

⁹⁶ Physical violence to slaves occurred. Wiedemann (1981:176-177) quotes Apuleius' writings as follows: "I inspected the organisation of this highly undesirable mill with a certain degree of pleasure. The men there were indescribable – their entire skin was coloured black and blue with the weals left by whippings, and their scarred backs were shaded rather than covered by tunics which were patched and torn. Some of them wore no more than a tiny covering around their loins, but all were dressed in such a way that you could see through their rags. They had letters branded on their foreheads, their hair had been partially shaved off, and they had fetters on their feet. They were sallow and discoloured, and the smoky and steamy atmosphere had affected their eyelids and inflamed their eyes. Their bodies were a dirty white because of the dusty flour – like athletes who get covered with fine sand when they fight."

⁹⁷ On the contrary, as Finley (1980:97) states, most rural slaves were disregarded. For example, from time to time slaves had been branded like cattle. In economic terms especially, slaves commonly could be bought, sold, borrowed, inherited and given as gifts (Tsang 2005:43). Some slaves in rural areas could not live fully as human beings in the slavery system. Rather they were closer to things.

(*Ep.* 47.10, 14).⁹⁸ The treatment of slaves in Seneca suggests the positive possibility that slaves could be treated as a member of the household. For instance, good owners took care of their slaves like their sons, and would also give them opportunities of adoption or becoming an heir, even though this happened rarely (Lyll 1984:125-126).

Consequently, urban household slaves generally had better conditions for their lives compared with rural slaves, and the household provided a life to household slaves that enabled them to live as human beings.

5.3.2 Manumission of slaves

The second factor concerning the treatment of slaves in the first century social ethos relates to the manumission of slaves.⁹⁹ In first century Roman society, manumission concentrated more on the control of the slavery system as a social institution rather than on the socio-ethnic issues such as attitudes toward slaves (Briggs 2000:112). According to Harrill (1995:53-54), the Romans regularly gave citizenship to freed persons who were formally manumitted by a citizen owner. Slaves could also be manumitted informally, by a private domestic gathering before friends serving as witnesses, or by a

⁹⁸ “Kindly remember that he whom you call your slave sprang from the same stock, is smiled upon by the same skies, and on equal terms with yourself breathes, lives, and dies. It is just as possible for you to see in him a free-born man as for him to see in you a slave. As a result of the massacres in Marius’s day, many a man of distinguished birth, who was taking the first steps toward senatorial rank by service in the army, was humbled by fortune, one becoming a shepherd, another a caretaker of a country cottage. Despise, then, if you dare, those to whose estate you may at any time descend, even when you are despising them” (*Ep.* 47.10).

“Do you not see even this, -how our ancestors removed from masters everything invidious, and from slaves everything insulting? They called the master “father of the household,” and the slaves “members of the household,” a custom which still holds in the mime. They established a holiday on which masters and slaves should eat together, -not as the only day for this custom, but as obligatory on that day in any case. They allowed the slaves to attain honours in the household and to pronounce judgment; they held that a household was a miniature commonwealth” (*Ep.* 47.14).

⁹⁹ Tsang (2005:49) suggests three forms of manumission: by vengeance, by census, by testament. Manumission by vengeance (*manumissio vindicta*) could free a slave who was held by a wrong procedure; manumission by census (*manumissio censu*) demanded owners to enrol slaves on the census list of Roman citizens; manumission by testament (*manumissio testamento*) could require the cooperation of the state.

letter stating that the slave was liberated (Harrill 2003:581).¹⁰⁰ Regarding manumission, Bradley (1997:10) introduces the jurist Gaius' writings with the following extract:

Someone who has more than two but not more than ten slaves is permitted to free up to half their number; someone who has more than ten but not more than thirty is permitted to free up to one-third. Someone who has more than thirty but not more than one hundred is allowed to free up to a quarter. Finally, someone who has more than hundred but not more than five hundred is permitted to free not more than one-fifth; nor does the law take account of someone owning more than five hundred to select a proportion from that number, but it prescribes that no one may lawfully free more than one hundred slaves. But if someone has only one slave in all, or two, this law does not apply and so he has full power to free. (*Inst.* 1.43)

From Gaius' writings it is evident that slavery existed in the Roman society,¹⁰¹ and that the manumission of slaves was practiced in those days. As shown in the Gaius writings, manumission was supported by the law, and slave-owners should give freedom to slaves according to the proportion of the number of slaves in their household. Thus, in Roman society slaves often could obtain their freedom from their owners and slavery, that is they could become freed persons (Bartchy 1997:1099; Harrill 2003:580). In practice, the manumission of slaves took place regularly in Roman society.¹⁰²

There is a practical example of the manumission of a slave called Tiro who was freed from his owner Cicero. A certain Quintus' letter about Cicero's slave Tiro presents a good example regarding the practice of the manumission of a slave. Quintus begins his letter as follows:

¹⁰⁰ Bradley (1997:155) recognises two kinds of manumission viz., formal manumission and informal manumission. Formal manumission means that the slave is set free and simultaneously is given Roman citizenship; informal manumission means that the slave enjoyed only "a *de facto* freedom at the pleasure of the owner and had no citizenship rights."

¹⁰¹ Gaius also seemed to acknowledge the prevalence of slavery in Roman law. "The main classification in the law of persons is this: all men are either free or slaves" (Gaius, *Ins.* 1.9).

¹⁰² According to Harrill (2003:581), manumission in fact was incorporated in Roman slavery as a structured and highly conventional practice.

My dear Marcus, as I hope to see you again and my boy and my Tulliola and your son, I am truly grateful for what you have done about Tiro, in judging his former condition to be below his deserts and preferring us to have him as a friend rather than a slave. Believe me, I jumped for joy when I read your letter and his. Thank you, and congratulations. (*Epi.* 16.6)

This letter written by Quintus proves that the actual manumission of slaves was practiced in those days. In 53 B.C.E. Cicero received a letter from his brother Quintus. According to this letter, it was written to applaud Cicero's merciful behaviour towards his slave Tiro. In this letter, the name Marcus indicates Cicero. Tiro was a useful slave. He was a slave of the household, and was also a cultured man who had literary ability (Bradley 1997:1). At some stage, Cicero manumitted his slave Tiro from slavery. Quintus heard what Cicero had done for his slave Tiro, wrote the letter to Cicero to thank him for his merciful deed. Through this example, we can assume that the manumission of slaves like Tiro's case was practiced in those days. The example of Tiro also shows that the manumission of slaves sometimes was initiated by a decision of the owners of slaves.

Another category of manumission of slaves was that slaves could be manumitted after the owner's death through the will of the owner. Some examples are as follows:

If freedom has been left to the slave in the following terms, 'let Stichus my slave be free in the twelfth year after my death', it is plausible that he is to be free from the beginning of the twelfth year, that being the intention of the deceased. (*Dig.* 40.4.41 pr.)

Aristo replied to Neratius Priscus that when a man was ordered by will to be free at the age of thirty and was condemned to penal labour in the mines before reaching that age and subsequently recalled, a legacy made to him along with his freedom undoubtedly belonged to him and that his right was not altered by the penal sentence; so, too, if he had been instituted heir conditionally; for he would even be *heres necessaries*. (*Dig.* 40.4.46)

A man who had a slave Cratistus provided in his will: 'Let my slave Cratinus be free'; could the slave Cratistus attain freedom, when the testator had not a slave Cratinus but only one called Cratistus? He replied that the mistake of a syllable was no bar. (*Dig.* 40.4.54 pr.)

According to above writings, Stichus, Neratius Priscus and Cratistus were slaves, but they were assured of freedom after their owners' death by their owner's will. In addition, Epictetus was also a slave, and was manumitted after the death of his owner Epaphroditus (Xenakis 1969:1). These examples indicate that slaves could be manumitted from slavery and often were, even after an owner's death.

The adoption of slaves was another way of manumission from slavery in Roman society. Sometimes, slaves could have the benefit of adoption by caring for their aged owners. However, only male slaves could receive this opportunity to be freed by adoption. In addition, male slaves could get this benefit when the owner had no natural male heir. Thus the adoption of slaves was a particular form of emancipation from slavery restricted to adult male slaves (Tsang 2005:55). When slaves were adopted, they changed their name to conform to the new household. Change of name indicated the shift of the identity of the slave within the new household. Therefore the adopted freed persons would have the same rights as the natural heirs (Tsang 2005:55-56), and furthermore, freed persons could be incorporated into their owner's household as a member of the family or clan of the owner's lineage (Patterson 1982:241). Ultimately, adoption was one of the ways whereby a slave's social status could change. However, manumission by adoption was an unusual event in Roman society (Patterson 1982:234).

From time to time owners used to release slaves to reduce a financial loss (Tsang 2005:53). Old male slaves could not handle housework in the same way as they had done when they were young men, and old female slaves also could no longer contribute by child birth due to their menopause. In the viewpoint of owners, these slaves were unprofitable, and were no longer needed by their owners. However the abandonment of

an old slave was complicated,¹⁰³ and for owners, manumission was the best option in this situation.

Through various sources we can assume that manumission provided an opportunity for change in social status from a slave to a freed man or woman. Glancy (2006:95) states that many slaves in Roman society were manumitted from slavery at some point in their lives. Thus the change of the social status could provide a means that enabled slaves to live as human beings in the household, and also the opportunity to have a new relationship with their former owner within a patron-client, rather than an owner-slave relationship.

In the first century C.E. context, manumission did not always indicate the complete separation of slaves from slavery (Tsang 2005:49).¹⁰⁴ Even though former slaves received freedom from their owner, this did not mean an end to their obligations to their former owners (Briggs 2000:111). Once slaves were manumitted from their owner, they no longer received duty-bound economic benefits from their former owner: they had to rely on themselves (Bradley 1987:82). Accordingly, they had to keep the relationship with their former owner in order to solve their financial problems and to sustain their lives. Therefore, at this point a new relationship was constructed between former owners and former slaves: the relationship between an owner and his slaves changed into a patron-client relationship.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ According to Buckland (1908:549), owners could eject slaves publicly because of their ill health, based on an edict of Claudius. However, this action might lead to a loss of status for the owner. If owning slaves was one way to show off their wealth, abandoning sick slaves could be a way to show owners' financial problems. Thus, the abandonment could bring shame to the owner and also tarnish his reputation.

¹⁰⁴ According to Tsang (2005:41, 47), even though many slaves were highly skilled and educated, the society did not always give them the freedom to use their skills.

¹⁰⁵ Tsang (2005:49-50) suggests two forms of the relations between former owners and their former slaves, whereby former owners controlled their former slaves: firstly, the former slaves unofficially served their former owners in some capacity; secondly, in terms of the legal obligations, the former slaves worked for their former owners, i.e. former owners became patrons, and the former slaves became clients. In this sense, the patron-client relationship was the direct result of manumission in many slave societies (Tsang 2005:57).

In this sense, slaves were still bound to their former owners. However, according to Scott (1989:205), this new relationship was more a familial relationship rather than a contractual relationship.¹⁰⁶ This new relationship implied that even though slaves were manumitted from slavery, they still kept their connection with their former owners.¹⁰⁷ Under Roman law, freed persons were required to serve their patrons within a new relationship after their manumission (Briggs 2000:111). Because former slaves could receive influence, goods, and other favours from their former owner, they would want to keep the relationship with their former owners intact (Malina and Neyrey 1996:162). Essentially, the purpose of former slaves as clients was to obtain favours from their former owners as patrons (Malina 1993:135). As a result, freed persons still worked in the same household of the former owner as they had done before their manumission. In general, clients were expected to work for the profit of the patron (Martin 1990:26).

Since Rome was a patron-client society, the official freedom carried with it the client's obligation to his patron (Tsang 2005:57). Even though their legal status was changed (Tsang 2005:57), they could not have a life of financial independence from their former owners. Consequently the life style of the manumitted slaves did not change fundamentally, even though it would change their social status. Even this new relationship still followed society's order in their relationship because clients had to serve patrons, by which means owners could maintain stability by the new structuring of their relationship (Scott 1989:206). In this sense, Glancy (2006:95) described freed slaves as the outsiders in the society. However, even though slaves could not be recognised as entirely free persons in society, they could be recognised as rising from a "nobody" to a "somebody." In other words, household slaves could be considered as human beings at least, not a "thing" in the society, even though they could not enjoy full freedom from their former owners because of the financial constraints. As a result of the change of their social status, slaves could have legal protection, even though they were socially inferior (Tsang 2005:58, 62). In addition, before manumission, slaves could not

¹⁰⁶ Scott (1989:206) asserts that slaves were legitimated by custom more than by law in the patron-client relationship.

¹⁰⁷ According to Osiek and Balch (1997:49), freed slaves continued to owe to the patron *obsequium* (obedience) and *operae* (efforts, work) under Roman law.

have their own family, but freed persons could generate their own family (Harrill 1995:55), and they could marry without their former owner's consent (Patterson 1982:241).

To sum up, slaves' lives in the first century C.E. have to be examined in terms of the concept of the household because slaves were closely associated with their owner and were considered as a part of the household.¹⁰⁸ In terms of the social economy, the role of slaves in Roman social life was important because they could handle tasks of household labour. In practice, owners needed the slaves' labour because they took care of most housework in the owner's household. Conversely, slaves also needed their owners' favour to sustain their daily life after manumission, because they did not have their own financial assets. Thus, they had to continue to belong to their owners' household even though they were manumitted from their owner and slavery. Ultimately, owners and slaves had a reciprocal relationship to each other, even though it was a very uneven relationship built on authority and submission.

This relationship between owners and slaves did not change even when slaves were released from slavery. After manumission a new relationship in the form of a patron-client relationship developed between them. In this new relationship they still kept their close relationship. However, former slaves were treated as freed persons, no longer as the slave at the former owner. In other words, the possibility existed for their social status to be raised.

In the following section, we will try to understand the identity of Onesimus as a Christian slave in the Philemon household. In general, Onesimus was known to be a slave of Philemon's household. Thus the identity of Onesimus should be understood in terms of the relationship with Philemon as his owner. In the context of first century Roman society, freedom could be given to Onesimus. Therefore, if the freedom of

¹⁰⁸ At this stage, the focus concentrates on the slaves of households in urban areas because Onesimus was a household slave of Philemon. In comparison with household slaves, other slaves who worked in mines, in brickyards, in potteries, and in rural areas could not have a close relationship with their owners like household slaves. Rather they worked to justify their living and belonged to their owners as their property.

Onesimus was carefully suggested by Paul and responded upon by Philemon, then the post-manumission relationship between Philemon and Onesimus could be understood as a patron-client relationship. The implication is that Onesimus could still keep his relationship with Philemon his former owner, as before manumission, even if Onesimus was manumitted from slavery.

5.4 The Identity of Onesimus in the Pauline Perspective

In the previous chapters, slavery has been examined from various perspectives, but particularly from two specific points of view, namely, from a theological and a social perspective. The term 'slave' can have diverse literary meanings, and also the life of the slaves of those days could be understood as one particular, social life way in the first century C.E. Mediterranean world.¹⁰⁹ The basic purpose of this work is to define the identity of Onesimus in first century Roman society and in the early Christian community. In a literal sense, to be a freed person would mean that Onesimus would have to be released or manumitted from slavery. If a slave was manumitted from his or her owner, the freed person did not have to keep a relationship with the former owner anymore. In this sense, if Onesimus was released as a freed person from Philemon's household, he would not necessarily receive any favours from his former owner Philemon. However, in first century Roman society, former slaves were still contained within the former owner's boundary in a new relationship of patron-client. In this new relationship, former slaves had a relationship with the former owner as freed persons, but their social status changed.

Although this dissertation focuses on Onesimus' fundamental identity, the identity of Onesimus is representative of the general social status of slaves in first century Roman society. In addition, Onesimus would be a Christian slave in a Christian household. Thus, by observing the identity of slaves in both social and the theological perspective,

¹⁰⁹ According to Osiek and Balch (1997:74), Greek philosophers and early Christians did not reject the institution of slavery.

we can reduce an ideological gap which appears between the social perspective and the theological perspective. However, the identity of slaves in a social sense might not be accepted as the same identity when we consider it from theological position, because the metaphor of freedom can be more broadly understood in the theological sense than in the social perspective.¹¹⁰ Therefore, this section will try to define the identity of Onesimus through harmonising the difference between the two perspectives, viz. the social position and the theological position.

More specifically, the purpose at this stage is to define the identity of Onesimus as a Christian slave in the Christian community and also to discuss the possibility of the change of Onesimus' social status in society. In this sense, two major factors, namely the household and manumission which were treated in 5.3 will be proposed to observe the identity of Onesimus with an understanding of freedom in the Christian context.

Firstly, the status of Onesimus in the household of Philemon can be considered in social terms. In this context, to be a brother can mean belonging to the household of the owner, that is, Onesimus became a member of Philemon's household. After or before manumission, in both situations, Onesimus belonged to the Philemon household. Although Onesimus would have belonged to the household as a slave before his social status was changed, he now belonged to the household as a (spiritual) brother of Philemon in Christ.¹¹¹ Because Onesimus became a believer he could enter the household of Philemon as a believer. In particular, Philemon's household was a Christian household based on Christ's love, viz., Christ as the head of the spiritual household. Therefore, a new relationship between Philemon and Onesimus could be constructed as a (spiritual) brother in Christ's love as Paul describes in Philemon 16. Once a slave entered the household, an owner took care of him or her like his own child. According to the slave system of Rome, even though Onesimus would have not been a

¹¹⁰ For example, Paul might understand the meaning of freedom based on the theological perspective, rather than in the societal sense. If so, the concept of freedom could be used more broadly than in the societal sense because the metaphorical understanding of the term 'freedom' can have various connotations.

¹¹¹ Melick (1991:365) also suggests that Onesimus became a member of the Christian household.

Christian slave, Philemon would care for Onesimus with brotherly love because Onesimus belonged to his household.¹¹²

The crucial point of this study is the identity of Onesimus, but a very important aspect of that concerns the possibility with the change of the social status of slaves. Obviously, the letter to Philemon does not describe Onesimus as a freed man.¹¹³ And also there is no direct mention in the text that Onesimus was manumitted from slavery.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the possibility of the change of Onesimus' social status can be suggested according to the known custom of society at the time. In first century Roman society, slaves still could keep the relationship with their former owner in the owner's household after being freed from slavery. This fact provides for Onesimus to have a relationship with Philemon after manumission, even though the text does not mention the change of Onesimus' social status. Thus Onesimus could maintain the relationship with his former owner, Philemon, in a new form as a freed man, and not as a slave. The new relationship offered by Paul described the relationship between a former owner, (Philemon) and a former slave (Onesimus), in the first century Roman social context. And their new relationship was suggested as being the patron-client relationship after Onesimus came back to Philemon. In this scenario the identity of Onesimus would not be a slave but a freed man in Philemon's household.

However, in the patron-client structure, although Onesimus was freed from his owner's household, he still had to serve his former owner because of his subsistence needs. By serving his former owner, he would keep living with, as well as maintain a relationship with his former owner. Consequently Onesimus still had to obey his former owner, Philemon, within the social order and Philemon also had to take care of Onesimus with brotherly love. The hierarchy would still exist within the patron-client relationship.

¹¹² In Phlm 5, Paul describes Philemon's personality. The Bible says, "Because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus" (NRSV).

¹¹³ Thompson (2005:255) asserts that Paul returned Onesimus to Philemon without the expectation of manumission.

¹¹⁴ Even though the text does not mention the possibility of the manumission of Onesimus, recently several scholars suggested positively the possibility of the manumission of Onesimus. For instance, Martin (1991:136) and Fitzmyer (2000:32) asserted that verse 21 implies the manumission of Onesimus.

According to the hierarchical system, Onesimus would regularly take care of the work of Philemon's household after the change of his social status, as he did before.

In fact, the change of Onesimus' social status could have an effect in terms of Paul's ministry. According to Paul's statement in the letter to Philemon, Onesimus would help Paul who was in prison. Paul sends Onesimus back to his owner saying, "...so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel" (Phlm 13, NRSV). Thus, Paul might want Onesimus back again to help his in his ministry (Knox 1960:25-26). At this point, if Onesimus still had to be in slavery, he could not be in a position to help with Paul's ministry freely because he belonged to his owner's household. And Onesimus would then have to be concerned with his work as a household slave. Thus a change of Onesimus' social status would be required to help Paul's ministry more effectively. As seen from the previous chapter, the manumission of slaves was supported by Roman law, and regularly practiced in the first century Roman society. Therefore, the suggestion concerning the manumission of Onesimus from slavery would be acceptable. However, the important thing is that even though Onesimus' social status could be changed from a slave to a freed person, he would not have to leave his former owner. Rather, Onesimus could become helpful in Philemon's household and also in Paul's ministry. It did not mean that the change of Onesimus' social status had to be accepted as soon as he comes back to his owner.¹¹⁵ Ultimately, the possibility of change of Onesimus' social status can be suggested positively in the societal perspective.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Glancy (2006:95) states, "Although the regularity of manumission in Roman practice promoted some incorporation of outsiders into the society, that process was by no means inevitable and was certainly not swift, more likely to occur over the span of several generations than within a single lifetime."

¹¹⁶ According to Knox (1960:85), Ignatius was sent under arrest to Rome. His itinerary passed through Asia Minor and he stopped in the cities of Smyrna and Troas. From these cities he wrote several letters, for the most part, to churches. One of letters was for the church at Ephesus, and the bishop of this church was named Onesimus. In addition, Eusebius (ca.260-ca.340, tr by Williamson, 1965), a church historian, recorded Onesimus as a "pastor" (Williamson's translation), and also states that Onesimus became a bishop. These documented instances suggest the possibility that Onesimus could have attained freedom.

Secondly, Paul's thinking regarding freedom is based on his eschatological framework (Thompson 2005:256).¹¹⁷ Thompson explains that, in the light of a theological sense, believers can receive freedom through being 'in Christ.' Freedom in this sense means spiritual freedom rather than physical freedom. Thus Paul's main concern was that believers ought to focus first on spiritual freedom. Thompson (2005:257) states that to be free is "to live with God, to participate in some way in God's life." In Paul's understanding people can only receive true freedom through Jesus Christ. For example, if anyone is in Christ, that person can become a freeperson within Christianity, even though his or her current social status may not be that of a freeperson. The freedom which comes from Christ does not separate slaves from freepersons in terms of social rank. The reason is that they believe in the same God, and they received the same freedom through Christ. Before God, all humans are sinners. As the result of their sin they have to die. However, Jesus Christ gave up his life for all humans' sin. All humans can therefore be freed from the slavery of sin. In this sense, they were one in Christ. Ultimately, the difference of the social status can be transcended through existing in Christ. In Christ both freepersons and slaves should be treated equally as human beings. In general, slaves had to serve their owner according to the social order, however in Christ they have to serve each other in Christ's love. The death of Jesus Christ presented Christ's perfect love to humans. And Jesus showed his humility by taking the form of a human, in particular the figure of the slave (Phil 2:7). Jesus Christ served people perfectly through giving up his equality with God. In this sense, as Phlm 16 states, Onesimus could be treated as a brother, not as a slave in the Christian community. Thus Onesimus received true freedom and was free in Christ when he became a believer. This freedom was spiritual freedom rather than physical and social freedom.

In the letter to Philemon, a new suggestion concerning Onesimus' status was offered by Paul. Even though Paul called Onesimus a brother of Philemon in Philemon 16, it does not mean here that Onesimus was a physical brother of Philemon, as Callahan (1993:357-358) insisted. Actually, many scholars (Hunt 1968:216; O'Brien 1982:299;

¹¹⁷ According to Thompson (2005:261), Paul's main concern regarding freedom was not to do with their actual status in human society, but with how people live their lives according to God's purpose. For believers, freedom is to become free from fear, sin, guilt, and death.

Melick 1991:365; Fitzmyer 2000:116; Thompson 2005:222) agree that Onesimus was not an actual brother of Philemon. It means rather that the status of Onesimus should be understood as a spiritual brother in faith. Thus for Paul, Onesimus was considered as a brother in Jesus Christ's love. Therefore, even though Onesimus was a slave, his actual social status would not be important in Paul's perspective.¹¹⁸ Rather, Paul's insistence was that Onesimus had to stay in Christ because true freedom is always in Christ.

The Philemon household was not only an ordinary household that simply followed the social order. Philemon's household was also a Christian household that followed Christ's love.¹¹⁹ Philemon also became a believer through Paul, and would be helping in Paul's ministry.¹²⁰ Thus Onesimus would be considered as a fellow worker of Philemon, his former owner, in the larger Christian household. Hence even though Onesimus still belonged to his former owner's household, Onesimus should be treated and considered as a fellow worker and a brother in the faith.

Furthermore, the Christian household can be symbolised as God's household. In God's household system, God is the patron, and believers are the clients. The believers as clients have to obey and to follow God's orders, and God as the patron takes care of these clients. In other words, believers should live for God, and God takes care of them as his own children. According to the letter to Philippians, Jesus obeyed God through his death on the cross. In the first century C.E., crucifixion indicated not only cruelty, but also a humiliating and shameful mode of death (Glancy 2006:100). Normally crucifixion applied to persons of low social status and slaves in particular in first century Roman society. However Jesus showed his obedience through his death on the cross in the way that slaves should obey their owners. Ultimately, God exalted Jesus again after his death. The obedience of Jesus to God presented clearly the features of the

¹¹⁸ Thompson (2005:260-61) quotes Atkinson's opinion on freedom as follows: "a theological understanding of freedom concentrates not so much on the freedom from external constraints, as on the freedom 'of the heart'; a freedom for life lived freely before that which is ultimately real - that is, God."

¹¹⁹ Muller ([1955] 1983:161) states that Philemon offered his house as a place of meeting for the believers.

¹²⁰ In Phlm 1 Paul introduces Philemon as his beloved fellow worker. According to Lohse (1971:186), Philemon seemed to be a wealthy man, and became a believer through meeting Paul.

relationship between the patron and the client. In God's household system every one is the slave of God.

Therefore the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus could be described according to a synthesis using the different perspectives. Firstly, Onesimus was a slave, and worked for Philemon's household before he became a believer. However, secondly, Onesimus could have the opportunity to become a freed person after he became a believer, as per Paul's request to Philemon. Lastly, Onesimus could still maintain the relationship with his former owner in the new relationship, and could also be considered a spiritual brother of Philemon in God's household. Therefore both Philemon and Onesimus were not only persons freed from sin in Christ, but also fellow slaves of Christ. Consequently, in the theological sense it is plausible that the Christian owner-slave relationship could be transformed in Christian communities without a political revolution.¹²¹

5.5 Summary

To explain the concept of freedom as having the same meaning in two different categories viz., a theological perspective and a social perspective, is difficult because the range of the understandings of freedom can differ.

Obviously, the social perspective places the social order central. Slavery was one of the Roman social systems in the first century C.E. In the case of owners, the slaves' labour would be important to sustain their household economy. Thus they would not want to destroy the slavery system. However, the patron-client system could obviate this problem because this system still maintained the social economy by keeping the relationship between former owners and former slaves. This new relationship gave them

¹²¹ However Guthrie (1970:640) suggested the possibility of the change of the social system. Guthrie proposes the following: "...although the existing order of society could not be immediately changed by Christianity without a political revolution, the Christian master-slave relationship was so transformed from within that it was bound to lead ultimately to the abolition of the system."

both an advantage in terms of the social economy.¹²² For owners, they would still have the former slaves' labour. For slaves they would have the new social status of being freed persons.

According to Paul's perspective, anyone could have true freedom in Christ, even though their social status was slavery. The main reason was that they belonged to God's household and would be treated by God's order rather than by the social system or the social order. For Paul, a person's current status in society was not the focus in his theological thinking. In Paul's theological perspective, even though Onesimus was still the slave of Philemon, if he was in Christ Onesimus would be considered as a freed person, and he would also be a spiritual brother of Philemon in Christ's love. The relationship between Philemon and Onesimus was reconstructed in a new way in God's household structure.

Actually the manumission of slaves was practiced in first century Roman society. Thus, according to this system Onesimus could be freed from Philemon's household by certain means; however Philemon would not forfeit his benefit because Onesimus still would be linked to Philemon, his former owner, in the patron-client relationship. In this sense, Paul asks Philemon to forgive the runaway slave, Onesimus. Philemon was also a believer; he possessed Christ's love, and faith and encouragement. Thus it would be plausible that Paul's asking for Onesimus to assist him in his mission would be granted by Philemon. In this sense, Paul might reasonably suggest the manumission of Onesimus for his ministry. As a result, Onesimus' social status would be changed physically to become a freed person in society. Thus Onesimus should be considered as a freed person in first century Roman society as well as in a Christian community. Ultimately, Onesimus as a freed person would be able to work in Paul's ministry, and could also have a new relationship with his former owner, Philemon in Philemon's household.

¹²² In some cases, slaves who belonged to a household would be protected against the risks of being sold, beaten or killed (Glancy 2006:125).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 General Summary

The main topic of this dissertation is to define the nature of Onesimus' identity as a slave in a first-century Christian community. Above all, the dissertation's point of departure concerns the identity of Onesimus as that of a slave.

Four viewpoints have been suggested in this dissertation for understanding what Onesimus' position could have been with regard to Philemon. In chapter 2 these four viewpoints were introduced as follows: a runaway slave, a dispatched slave, an estranged slave, and an estranged brother of Philemon. Clearly, the consensus of opinion is that Onesimus was a slave rather than a brother of Philemon. In this dissertation, this standpoint was consistently maintained, when examined from various viewpoints, and evaluated in terms of different positions in which Onesimus, as a slave, could possibly have formed himself. This dissertation opts for either of the following positions: a runaway slave, a dispatched slave, and an estranged slave, since the focus is on slavery, and Onesimus as a slave rather than to determine Onesimus' actions that led to the uniting of this letter.

From a social perspective, the position accepted in this dissertation is that Onesimus was a slave of Philemon's household. In chapter 3, a general, historical description of slavery was introduced in order to situate slavery in its proper first century social context. In addition, three other Pauline texts were examined with regard to the term 'slavery/slaves' in terms of the Paul's theological perspective. These three Christian texts provide important insights in Paul's theological understanding of the term 'slave':

1 Cor 7:17-24 and Gal 4:21-5:1 and Phil 2:6-11. In short, the term ‘slavery/slaves’ was often used more metaphorically than literally in these Pauline texts.

Paul’s use of the term ‘slavery/slaves’ in the texts discussed above, was interpreted metaphorically in terms of his theological understanding of slavery. For this reason, metaphorical meanings of the term ‘slavery’ were discussed in chapter 4. In this chapter the focus moved to Paul’s letter to Philemon in order to define Onesimus’ identity as a Christian slave, and also to compare the letter with the other three Pauline texts. In the end, in chapter 4 the identity of Onesimus was mainly interpreted in the theological sense.

In the last chapter, a more practical examination of slavery was provided, aligned with an appropriate understanding of the first century. Two crucial factors that were connected with slavery were described in this chapter namely, the household and manumission. In particular, the possibility of the manumission of Onesimus was considered, and suggested as a course of action suggested by Paul. Through the synthetic understanding from two different viewpoints on manumission, the social and the theological, the author tried to understand the possibility and significance of the change of Onesimus’ social status from a slave to a freed man.

6.2 Conclusion

From the societal viewpoint, the frequent and widespread manumission of slaves during the first century C.E. can be supported by Roman law. Thus the matter of the manumission of Onesimus from slavery can be entertained as a serious possibility as far as Roman slavery law in first century context was concerned. Even though the manumission of Onesimus would not be formal manumission, the possibility of an informal manumission for Onesimus was probably proposed by Paul’s letter to Philemon. In first century Roman society, slaves could be freed from slavery in an informal way by a letter which was written by an owner’s friend. In these terms,

Onesimus also could be freed from slavery by Paul's letter to Philemon. Thus the suggestion of the manumission of Onesimus might be acceptable to his owner Philemon and also to the Christian communities.

However, he would not be entirely separated from his former owner even though Onesimus could be released from slavery. Onesimus would still sustain the relationship with his former owner Philemon in a new relationship called the patron-client relationship. In general, if freed persons left their former owners and households, they would not receive favours from former owners any longer. In other words, they would have to bear the responsibility regarding their own living. Thus Onesimus would work for the former owner's household after manumission because he might need the former owner's favour to keep his living by keeping their relationship. After all, Onesimus would still belong to his former owner's household after his manumission. In Philemon's household he would take care of housework as he did when he was a slave.

Onesimus' owner Philemon, who was also a believer, also had love and faith. According to Paul's letter to Philemon, Philemon was a co-worker of Paul (v.1), and had love and faith (v. 5), and encouraged the saints in a Christian community (v. 7). According to these verses, we can assume that Philemon was a good-natured man. Such descriptions of him can also indicate that Philemon had a faithful disposition which should follow Paul's request for Onesimus. Thus Philemon would most probably have accepted Paul's suggestion that he receives Onesimus as a brother in Christ's love. Therefore, Philemon would consider his former slave Onesimus as a (spiritual) brother when he came back. In addition, after manumission, Onesimus would know what he had to do as a believer in a household. As a Christian freed person, Onesimus played an important role relating to the Philemon household as well as to Paul's ministry. In the end, as his name indicated, Onesimus would be a useful person in Philemon's household.

In the lives of first century people, slavery was accepted as a social system to sustain socio-economic life, and Paul did not try to destroy the social order. Thus Paul did not directly mention the manumission of Onesimus in the letter to Philemon. Paul rather

suggested the configuration of God's household by alluding to the obedience of Christ. When Onesimus became a believer, he came to know what true freedom is. In God's household, everyone has the same identity as God's people, namely, God is the patron, and people, even slaves are the clients in the God's household system. God's household is not a physical household. General households in Roman society were ruled by social law, but God's household was ruled only by Christ's love. In other words, there is no difference of status between people in God's household. Thus, in Christian communities, slaves should be treated righteously as human beings. However, even though Paul would focus more on spiritual freedom than on physical freedom, it is argued that he suggested the change of Onesimus' social status for the benefit and advantage of his ministry. Onesimus could even have helped Paul in terms of Paul's ministry since Onesimus had been with him in prison. Therefore, if Onesimus could have a new changed status, he could serve more effectively in Christian communities as well as in Paul's ministry. Consequently, the suggestion that Onesimus' social status should be changed can be accepted clearly in Paul's community with the support of the social institution. Therefore, Onesimus' identity could be changed and renewed as a freed man, not as a slave in Philemon's household.

However, in terms of freedom, Paul concentrated more on spiritual freedom in his theological perspective. Above all, Paul tried to understand freedom in the light of the Christian context. The understanding of Paul regarding freedom appears clearly in his three texts, 1 Cor 7:17-24, Gal 4:21-5:1 and Phil 2:6-11. According to Paul's thinking, true freedom is not about the physical concerns but is a spiritual matter. In Paul's understanding, even though one has physical freedom, one cannot experience true freedom if one is not in Christ. In Paul's perspective, those who are obsessed by sin are still slaves, even though their real social status is that of a free person.

In the Christian context Paul did not treat freedom as a social topic. Paul rather directed the concerns of people on freedom from the social viewpoint to the religious viewpoint. Paul dealt with the matter of freedom in the first instance in a Christian community. This means that Paul's main focus was to define freedom in the Christian religious sense, in Christian communities that were congregations of believers. The basic rule of

Christian communities was living according to God's word, which says that everyone is equal and one in Christ's love. But this does not mean that Christian communities ignored the social order or rule. In Christ, the social level of any person no longer had the most important meaning.

In Paul's day, slavery existed as one of the actual social systems based on the economic structure of Roman society. However, slavery does not really exist nowadays,¹²³ except as history. Nevertheless we can still apply the notion of freedom, in a spiritual sense, to our religious life in the present times. In general, nowadays everyone has freedom in terms of the physical and societal sense. In other words, people no longer belong to one another as was the case with slavery. All humans have human rights, enabling them to live as free persons. Thus, concerns regarding slavery are not treated as important issues in our lives.

However, we still use the term 'slavery' in the spiritual perspective. The term 'slavery' is particularly used in both its positive aspect and its negative aspect in Christian contexts. Firstly, the term slavery is often used with a negative meaning. For example, according to the Bible, the image of slavery is used negatively with regard to the term sin in John 8:34 and Rom 6:6, 16, 20. In these contexts, the general meaning of slavery represents separation from Jesus Christ or God's sovereignty. Thus, separation from God indicates the forfeiture of qualifying to be a child of God. Humankind cannot have any other way to become a child of God without the connection with Jesus Christ. Thus if one is separated from God, one becomes a slave of sin. Secondly, the term 'slavery' is used positively. Paul's expression is a good example of the use of the term 'slavery.' When Paul describes himself in the Bible, he describes himself as a slave of Jesus Christ or God, for example, Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1. This does not indicate that Paul was an actual slave in a physical or social sense: the image of the slave is used metaphorically in a spiritual sense. Paul's expression in these texts contains a meaning that a believer belongs to God and Jesus Christ. In other words, believers always have a relationship with God. Here Paul tries to express the relationship between Jesus Christ

¹²³ In case of the situation in Korea, slavery existed hundreds of years ago during the Cho-sun era (Yi dynasty). However, it does not exist in the present day. No one belongs to another person.

and himself by using the image of slavery. In the positive sense, the term 'slavery' occurs with an opposite meaning to the negative meaning relating to sin. In Rom 6:18, the term 'slavery' indicates separation from sin, and also becoming the slave of righteousness. Thus the meaning of a slave of God expresses that one's whole life belongs totally to God.

Today the metaphor of slavery is used almost exclusively in terms of the religious life of believers rather than in terms of actual social life. Although one tries to live as a Christian, one is tempted by many factors such as money, honour, knowledge and reputation, etc. These factors can prevent Christians from living as Christians. Christians sometimes lose their identity as a Christian because of temptation and desire. In other words, people become slaves of their desire, and they pursue the pleasures of their lives. Thus they become the slaves of life, not slaves of Christ. They lose value of the true freedom in Christ. Therefore, the image of slavery raises important questions in terms of what the identity of a Christian is, and how Christians ought to live as slaves of Jesus Christ during their lifetime. In addition, the image of slavery suggests an obvious relationship between Christians and Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ is the lord of Christians, and Christians are slaves of Jesus Christ. Those who are called the slaves of Jesus Christ are free persons. They can experience true freedom in Jesus Christ.

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