

EPISTLE TO PHILEMON

The Art of Christian Persuasion

Inverted Parallelism of Philemon

- A 1 **Paul**, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and **Timothy** our brother, to **Philemon** our beloved brother and fellow worker,
2 and to **Apphia** our sister, and to **Archippus** our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3 **Grace to you** and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B 4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my **prayers**, 5 because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; 6 **and I pray** that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.
- C 7 For **I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love**, because the **hearts of the saints have been refreshed** through you, brother.
- D 8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to **order you** (ἐπιτάσσειν σοι) to do that which is proper,
E 9 yet for love's sake I **rather appeal to you**—since I am such a person as **Paul**, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—
F 10 I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus, 11 who **formerly was useless to you, / but now is useful / both to you and to me**.
G 12 And I have **sent him back to you** in person, that is, *sending* my very heart,
H 13 whom I wished to **keep with me**, that in your behalf he might **minister to me in my imprisonment** for the gospel,
I 14 **but without your consent I did not want to do anything, that your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion** (κατὰ ἀνάγκην), **but of your own free will** (κατὰ ἐκούσιον). — **Point of Turning**
H' 15 For perhaps he was for this reason **parted from you** for a while,
G' that you **should have him back** forever,
F' 16 **no longer as a slave, / but more than a slave, a beloved brother, / especially to me, but how much more to you**, both in the flesh and in the Lord.
- E' [Me: The appeal:] 17 **If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.** / 18 But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, **Paul**, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it
D' (lest I should mention to you that **you owe to me even your own self** as well).
C' 20 Yes, brother, **let me benefit from you** in the Lord; **refresh my heart** in Christ.
- B' 21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.
22 And at the same time also prepare me a lodging; for I hope that through your **prayers** I shall be given to you.
- A' 23 **Epaphras**, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do **Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke**, my fellow workers.
25 The **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

source: L J Hooge at <https://biblicalchiasmus.wordpress.com/category/n-t/philemon/> with minor additions by R. C. Lewis

Kinds of Christian Pressure: How Paul Put Pressure on Philemon's Free Will

1. **Sympathy Pressure**: "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus" (1a); "the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus" (9b–c). "Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment" (10b). "that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel" (13b)
2. **Co-worker or Partner Pressure**: "Timothy, our brother" (1b). "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers" (23–24). "If then you regard me a partner [κοινωνός], accept him as you would me" (17).
3. **Family Pressure** (if Apphia and Archippus are Philemon's wife and son): "Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier" (2a–b).
4. **Church Pressure**: "to the church in your house (2c). 5. **Spiritual Warfare (Comrade in Arms) Pressure**: "Archippus our fellow soldier" (2b).
6. **Prayer Pressure**: "I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers" (4). "and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake" (6). 7. **Christian Character Pressure**: "because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints" (5). "because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother" (7b). "so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will" (14b). 8. **Friendship (I Want to Be or Remain Your Friend) Pressure**: "Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you . . . I appeal to you for my child Onesimus" (8–10a). "but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will" (14).
9. **Spiritual Father Pressure**: "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten" (10a–b). "I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart" (12). "(not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well)" (19c).
10. **Fellow Believer (Brother in Christ or Body of Christ) Pressure**: "who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me" (11). "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord" (16).
11. **Personal Desire and Need Pressure**: "whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel" (13).
12. **God's Will Pressure**: "For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever" (15).
13. **Financial Pressure** (here restitution): "But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account" (18). "I will repay it" (19b).
14. **Personal Request Pressure**: "I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand" (19a). "Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ" (20).
15. **Confidence and Expectation (I Know You'll Come Through and Not Disappoint Me) Pressure**: "Having confidence in your obedience [ὑπακοή here is "compliance" (Thayer) to a request or a "reply made to a question, answer" (BDAG), since Paul is making an appeal instead of an apostolic command (cf. 8–10a, 14)], I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say" (21).
16. **Personal Presence Pressure**: "At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your [plural ὑμῶν refers to the church in Colossae] prayers I will be given to you" (22).

Notes

1. The center of the inverted parallelism (I, verse 14) is the emphasis or most important point Paul wants Philemon and his readers to understand: he's not giving an apostolic command (ἐπιτάσσω) but desires a free will (ἐκούσιος) gift of love from Philemon. The point of turning (H') moves from his appeal (παραικαλέω) for Onesimus (A–I) to confidence his appeal/request will be granted (H'–A'). In this Epistle Paul applies a lot of pressure to persuade Philemon to forgive, love, and free Onesimus to be his helper.

2. Some examples of putting maximum pressure on free will to do the right thing:
a. **Ten Plagues of Egypt**: Terrible plagues devastated Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to let Israel go (Ex 7:14–12:36). God hardened Pharaoh's heart (free will, 10:27) to prolong the punishment in order to demonstrate His superiority over the many gods of Egypt (7:3–5; 10:1). The plagues and hardness of heart were acts of grace intended to bring about repentance and conversion to Yahweh—to facilitate not just compliance but repentance and the salvation of Pharaoh and the Egyptians (14:4; cf. 12:38).

b. **Blessings and Curses (Five Cycles of Discipline) of the Mosaic Covenant**: Each cycle of discipline is seven times worse than the preceding (Lev 26). The fifth cycle—national destruction, death, captivity, exile, and dispersion—is 2401 times worse than the first.

c. **Divine Discipline, Social Separation, Excommunication, Promise or Loss of Present Blessings, and Promise or Loss of Eternal Rewards**: God puts a lot of pressure on us to live godly lives—to confess our sins, stay in fellowship, be filled with the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, acquire the fruit of the Spirit, grow in the Word, grow in faith, use our spiritual gifts, do good works, pray without ceasing, love one another, *et al*.

d. **World during the Tribulation**: The seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments in the Book of Revelation put tremendous pressure on unbelievers to repent and be saved. This pressure is God's grace (cf. 2 Pet 3:9). There's nothing wrong with pouring maximum pressure on someone's free will to help them make the right decisions—God does.

3. **Principle**: Pressure does not nullify free will. Pressure is compatible with free will because you can always say "No!" no matter how much pressure is exerted. So use as much pressure as needed to persuade people to do the right thing. Maximum pressure is desirable if the consequences are severe. Or you may choose no pressure at all to see what their real free choice is.

4. **Application**: a. There are many godly and ungodly ways to apply persuasive pressure. Examples of godly pressure are present in this Epistle. b. Persuasion may be a carrot or a stick: the blessings of the Old Covenant were carrots and the curses were sticks. c. To harden the heart is compatible with "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet 3:9 KJV). d. How much pressure should be exerted by pastors and churches on free will giving? Note that Paul exerts *much* persuasive pressure for the gift of Onesimus but *no* command or force (compare ἀνάγκη "forcibly, by force" [LSJ] in Phm 14 and 2 Cor 9:7). The root ἀνάγκη- has a wide range of meaning that includes pressure or compulsion of all kinds: pressure from necessity or circumstances (Rom 13:5; Heb 7:12), financial pressure ("the pressure of expenses" P Flor II. 86.9), persuasive pressure (Lk 14:23; Gal 2:3, 14), entreaties or requests (Mt 14:22), "inducements . . . custom . . . duty" (GELNT), religious duty (1 Cor 9:16; 1 Pet 5:2), commands (2 Cor 9:7; Phm 14), threats, physical force, and violent compulsion (2 Macc 6:18; 8:24; Acts 26:11), distress, tribulation, and suffering (Zeph 1:15 LXX; Lk 21:23; 2 Cor 12:10), captives bound with iron chains (3 Macc 4:9), and torture (2 Macc 7:1; 4 Macc 4:26; 'instruments of torture' Plb 15.28.2). "On the whole, the spectrum of meaning for this word group is very wide" (EDNT). "ἀναγκάζω is to cause or compel someone in all the varying degrees from friendly pressure to forceful compulsion" (TDNT).