

Philemon 1:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee,
knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

Analysis

Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee—πεποιθώς τῇ ὑπακοῇ σου ἔγραψά σοι (pepoithōs tē hypakoē sou egrapsa soi, trusting your obedience I wrote to you)—πείθω (peithō, trust/be confident) perfect participle indicates settled confidence. ὑπακοή (hypakoē, obedience/compliance) assumes Philemon will do right. This demonstrates leadership wisdom: expressing confidence in people's virtue often produces it (Pygmalion effect). Paul hasn't commanded explicitly (v. 8-9), but confident assumption exerts moral pressure.

Knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say (εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω ποιήσεις, eidōs hoti kai hyper ha legō poiēseis)—ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω (hyper ha legō, beyond what I say) suggests Paul expects Philemon to exceed minimal requirements. Some interpreters see hint toward manumission (freeing Onesimus), though Paul doesn't explicitly demand it. ποιήσεις (poiēseis, you will do) is confident future—Paul presumes Philemon's gracious response, not merely hopes for it.

Historical Context

Ancient rhetoric distinguished letter types: commanding, requesting, commending. Paul blends them masterfully—appearing to request while assuming compliance. The phrase "more than I say" allows multiple interpretations:

1. forgive completely

2. free Onesimus
3. send Onesimus back to Paul (v. 13-14 suggested Paul's desire).

Ancient hearers would recognize Paul's diplomatic pressure while preserving Philemon's dignity through free choice.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Do you respond to spiritual appeals by meeting minimum requirements or exceeding expectations?
2. How does expressing confidence in others' obedience and virtue affect their actual behavior?
3. What is God asking you to do "beyond what I say"—exceeding explicit commands through generous love?

Interlinear Text

πεποιθώς	τῇ	ὑπακοῇ	σου	ἔγραψά	σοι	εἰδώς	ὅτι
Having confidence	G3588	obedience	in thy	I wrote	unto thee	knowing	that
G3982		G5218	G4675	G1125	G4671	G1492	G3754
καὶ	ὑπὲρ	ὃ	λέγω	ποιήσεις			
also	more than	G3739	I say	do			
G2532	G5228		G3004	G4160			

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 2:3 (Parallel theme): And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all.

2 Thessalonians 3:4 (Parallel theme): And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

2 Corinthians 7:16 (Parallel theme): I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things.

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