

# Chiasmus in the New Testament

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## Explanation

Chiasmus and several varieties of inverted parallel structures are found in many places in the New Testament. In reading Bible commentaries, students will often encounter figures displaying chiastic patterns. The following charts offer a few samples of such literary arrangements. Chart 15-18 lays out the elegant configuration of the Hymn to Charity (*Agape*) found in 1 Corinthians 13; Paul may have imported or modified this poetical unit from some other source. Chart 15-19 helps a reader to follow the logic of the Epistle to the Galatians, focusing especially on the central chiasm in Galatians 4:1–7. Chart 15-20 gives an overview of the letter of Paul to Philemon. The argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews also has a central pivot point, drawing attention to Jesus Christ as the new High Priest. These and many other examples show that Paul and other writers of the New Testament were skilled writers, conversant with the literary styles of their day.

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## References

- John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinley, *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1999), 116–45.
- Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942).
- John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the New Testament,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim, Germany: Gerstenberg, 1981), 211–49.
- On chiasmus in 1 Corinthians, see Lund, 176; Welch, 215–16; in Galatians, see Welch, 214; in Philemon see, Thomas Boys, *Tactica Sacra* (London: Hamilton, 1824), 65–67; Lund, 219; Welch, 225–26; in Hebrews, see Welch, 220.

# Chiasmus in Philemon

**A** Epistolary (1–3)

**B** Paul's prayers for Philemon (4)

**C** Philemon's love, faith, and hospitality (5–7)

**D** Paul could use his authority (8)

**E** But prefers to make supplication (9–10)

**F** Onesimus a convert of Paul's (10)

**G** Paul has made Onesimus profitable (11)

**H** Receive Onesimus as Paul's own bowels (12)

**I** Paul retained Onesimus as Paul's  
minister in the bonds of the Gospel (13)

**J** Without Philemon's willing consent Paul will not require  
Philemon to take Onesimus back (14)

**J'** Perhaps the reason Onesimus left was so that Philemon could  
take Onesimus back forever (15)

**I'** Not as a servant but as a brother in the  
Lord (16)

**H'** Receive Onesimus as Paul's own self (17)

**G'** Paul will repay any wrong Onesimus has done (18–19)

**F'** Philemon indebted as a convert to Paul (19)

**E'** Paul makes supplication to Philemon (20)

**D'** Although he could ask for obedience (21)

**C'** Paul requests hospitality of Philemon (22)

**B'** Philemon's prayers for Paul (22)

**A'** Epistolary (23–25)