

Philemon 1:4-7

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Paul commends Philemon for his faith in Jesus and his service toward other believers. Paul tells him that he thanks God for the blessing Philemon is to the church and that he continues to pray that Philemon's faith and knowledge will become even more effective in doing good.

Paul began his commendation of Philemon by telling his brother in *Christ* how appreciative he is of Philemon's active *love and faith*. Paul is so full of gratitude for Philemon that he tells God how thankful he is for his friend *in my prayers*. Paul views Philemon as a Godsend. Even as far away as Rome, *I [Paul] hear reports of your [Philemon's] love and faith which you [Philemon] have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints*. Philemon's faithfulness is noteworthy. Paul likely heard of Philemon's *faith and love* from Epaphras when he came to visit the apostle in his imprisonment (Colossians 1:7).

Paul told Philemon, that even as *I thank my God always* for Philemon's *love and faith* he also prays for his *brother in Christ*.

I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become more effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

The Greek word translated as *fellowship* is "koinonia" (G2842). It describes an intensely close relationship between one or more people who have partnered together for a common goal. "Koinonia" is one of the terms descriptive of living the abundant life or entering the kingdom that Paul and John use in their letters (1 Corinthians 1:9, Ephesians 3:9, Philippians 1:5, 1 John 1:3-7). The Gospel brings unity and *fellowship* between followers of Jesus and one another.

Paul prays for *the fellowship* of Philemon's *faith*. Paul could be addressing the *fellowship* between Philemon's inner self (*every good thing which is in you*) and his *faith*, praying that this *fellowship* would get increasingly intimate, such that there would be complete unity in truth between Philemon's motivations and perspectives and the choices he made. This would mean Paul was addressing the *fellowship* between Philemon's faith in Christ, and *every good thing* which was in him and Philemon's life, work and ministry with others. This would elevate Philemon's effective work *for Christ's sake*. Throughout Paul's writings it is clear that his overriding objective was to please Christ (Philippians 3:8-10) and he prays that Philemon's *faith* will become even more *effective* so as to please Christ.

The Greek word translated as *knowledge* is "epignosis" (G1922). It describes an intimate, experiential knowledge or relationship. The idea it conveys here is awareness, familiarity, or realization of *every good thing which is in you*. This would include the indwelling Holy Spirit, as well as the fact that Philemon was made a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). When this is united with *faith*, which is a choice made of the will, it results in an effective life lived in obedience to Christ, and who Christ made us to be in Him. This makes a believer's life more *effective*. That increase in efficiency requires *knowledge of every good thing which is in us*. Paul

here addresses not only redeeming self-image, but also fully understanding the gifting and capabilities Jesus has placed within.

Therefore, Paul was praying for Philemon to become even more aware of the potential goodness of the gospel and its transforming power in his life and in the lives of those he interacts with. He was praying that Philemon's ministry in the gospel would become even *more effective* because of the increased *knowledge* Paul prayed he would receive. And that all of this continuing increase would please Jesus more and more.

Paul then told Philemon that he has found *much joy and comfort in your love*. Philemon lived generously. This *love* is the Greek word "agape" (G26). "Agape" is a choice to seek another's best interest. *Agape* is based on values. Philemon loved God by loving others. Philemon was a pillar of the church in Colossae. And Paul was encouraged by his life of service. Paul found assurance in Philemon's dependable *love*. Paul heard how *the hearts of the saints have been refreshed* and renewed *through* his faithfulness. The word *saints* refers to someone who is set apart for special service, which here applies to all the believers in the church who met at Philemon's home.

Every believer is set apart for special service through the blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:2). Philemon might have *refreshed the hearts of the saints* through teaching, exhortation, or service. The picture Paul paints is of Philemon as an accomplished minister of Christ. The *saints* meeting in his house also received *comfort in Philemon's love*. This again could refer to Philemon's teaching, exhortation, or service.

Paul continues his theme of believers being a part of God's family and refers to Philemon as *brother* for the second time. This emphasizes again that Paul is appealing to Philemon as an equal rather than as a superior. The pains to which Paul goes in order to avoid lording over Philemon is notable. Here Paul is practicing the attitude for elders instructed by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5:1-3, where Peter tells elders not to lord over those under their care.

Biblical Text

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. 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.