



Forward thinking from Philemon ...

## Fellowship of Your Faith

Christianity is designed to move from the concept to the appropriate action. For example, God so loved the world [concept] that He gave His only begotten Son [action]. Paul thus was very complimentary toward Philemon, noting that "I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints." There must have been action on Philemon's part, or there would have been nothing for Paul to hear about. His direct action, both love and faith, was directed toward the saints in Colossae, and thus an exhibition of his love and faith toward the Lord

Jesus Christ.

- **Effective** — An underlying principle of the faith of Christ is that saints are saved to serve. Philemon was this type of saint, and Paul was willing to petition the Almighty on behalf of his friend and brother in Christ: "I pray that the fellowship [sharing] of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake" (Philemon 1:6). The Christian life is fraught with many challenges; often saints are persecuted for their faith or ostracized by their families, there are financial and health issues, there are concerns for children or other family members, there are challenges within the local congregation... Hence it is very encouraging to the brethren if there is within the church a solid citizen of heaven, a stalwart of the faith whose rocklike steadfastness really strengthens the other Christians. Thus Paul was desirous that Philemon's faith could be shared in by the other brethren, and that they would thus be encouraged. This becoming "effective" in the fellowship of the faith would not be possible were it not predicated on "knowledge." The apostle's prayer is on point and illustrates the relationship of this "knowledge of every good thing which is in you" and the development of the faith of saints like Philemon. The goal, understandably, is that Philemon's faith ultimately be "toward Christ," or as translated, "for Christ's sake."

- **Refreshment** — The apostle Paul was on the cutting edge of the spiritual revolution that Christ was bringing into the world. He was challenged in reaching his kinsmen according to the flesh — the Jews — and straining forward in reaching the Gentile world. Every little bit of positive news, then, would have been of major encouragement to the apostle. "For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love," he remarks, "because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother" (Philemon 1:7). Paul, a bond-servant of Christ, willingly laid down his life for the individual brethren and for the churches. It is therefore understandable that he would have "much joy and comfort" in the honest love which Philemon was exhibiting toward the saints in Colossae; his and Christ's efforts were thus being multiplied. Furthermore, the hearts of the brethren were being "refreshed" — the saints were being greatly encouraged through this great man of faith.

All motivation at some point must come from within the individual. The great motivators of this earth have always had the ability to empower and encourage their teams, their troops, or their associates. How much greater, then, would it be to be involved in motivating the spiritually resurrected army of God, the mighty marching tide that is the only grouping that can carry the gospel to the ends of the earth! It is worthy of note, therefore, that Paul would say of Philemon that "the hearts of the saints" had been refreshed through him, and that the apostle would at that point significantly add the appellation, "brother."

These statements by the apostle are not flattery; they are honest and straightforward expositions of the character of this Philemon. Paul has a purpose, however, for bringing forth the characterizations of his fellow worker for the kingdom; he has an appeal that he wants to make, and he is hopeful that his positive comments will elicit a similarly positive response from this honorable brother in Christ.

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