

“The Features of Faith”

Philemon 4-7

Theme: How we live is dependent on what we believe.

I. The Compassion of the Believer – vv. 4-5a

A. The Response to the Testimony of Compassion – v. 4

1. We come now to Paul's specific approach to Philemon as he appeals to him to forgive Onesimus.
2. In doing so, Paul reviews the characteristics of believers, or the “**Features of Faith**,” that characterize those who know and love Christ Jesus.
3. Paul begins by encouraging Philemon by stating: *“I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,”*
4. In the next verse, Paul’s thanksgiving is due to how Philemon loves people and trusts in the Lord.
5. Paul declares here that there are no shortcomings evident in Philemon so that every time he *“makes mention”* of him, he can *“thank my God always.”*
6. Philemon was one of those lay leaders in the church in Colossae who was so faithful, consistent, selfless, and serving that everyone who knew them was grateful to the Lord for them.

B. The Report of the Testimony of Compassion – v. 5a

1. Paul said, *“... because I hear of your love ... toward all the saints;”*
2. The structure of this verse is a form of polished Greek – using a literary device known as “chiasm” or **ABBA**, where the 1st and 4th things mentioned go together, and the 2nd and 3rd things go together.
 - A – *“... of your love ...”*
 - B – *“... of the faith ...”*
 - B – *“... toward the Lord Jesus”*
 - A – *“... toward all the saints”*
3. Thus, the *“love”* mentioned here is *“toward all the saints.”*
4. *“love”* [ἀγάπη] – is the love of self-sacrifice where the one loving places the welfare of the loved above their welfare because of their

esteem, affection, or high regard you have for them.

5. Note the preparation Paul is making by stating that Philemon's love is *"toward all the saints"* – it is inclusive and non-discriminating, enabling even a "slave" like Onesimus to be included.

II. The Confidence of the Believer – v. 5b

A. The Faith in the Savior

1. Additionally, Philemon's *"faith toward the Lord Jesus"* causes Paul to *"thank God"* when he *"makes mention of [him] in [his] prayers."*
2. In this context, *"faith"* [πίστις] refers to the confidence a person places in Christ Jesus as personal Savior from the guilt, power, and penalty of their sin – *Ephesians 2:8; Acts 10:43*.
3. Paul is reminding Philemon that no sinner merits the forgiveness of sin but gains it through God's grace and the work of Christ on their behalf – regardless of social station, race, gender, or sins – cp. *Acts 10:34-35; Galatians 3:28*.

B. The Faithfulness to the Savior

1. Additionally, one's faith in the Savior is displayed in one's faithfulness to the Savior.
2. *"toward the Lord Jesus"* demonstrates that Philemon's faith is not a mere profession but results in actions that demonstrate his submission to the Lordship of Jesus.
3. Because of the forgiveness of sin that Philemon had received from the Lord, he could grant to others who are also in the Lord – *Colossians 3:13*.

III. The Concern of the Believer – v. 6a

A. The Interest in Others

1. As Paul has recognized the authenticity of Philemon's faith and the excellence of his reputation, he now expresses that Philemon's influences on others extend even further.
2. He said, *"... and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective ..."*
3. "fellowship" [κοινωνία] – a term that describes the participation with others in a close relationship, to enter into others' lives and

share in their experiences, challenges, joys, sorrows, and trials.

4. There is no room in the Christian faith for people who are isolated or individualistic; that is, self-reliance is one sinful excess, and presuming on others is the other.
5. Neither of these things fit – Paul expresses to Philemon his desire that Philemon engage others with interest and concern.

B. The Influence on Others

1. When we do so, the result is that *“your faith may become effective”* [ἐνεργής] – energized or powerful in its influence on others.
2. Genuine Christian fellowship causes each individual to be raised in focus on something greater than themselves – ultimately on the Lord Jesus Christ, resulting in greater sanctification.
3. In our text, Paul is alluding to the power that will result if Philemon enters into the challenges and struggles of Onesimus – evidencing the presence of Christ in incomparable ways.
4. Paul reminds Philemon of the powerful influence he can have on others by following the example of Christ in relating to others within the church – even converted slaves.

IV. The Comprehension of the Believer – v. 6b

A. The Acquaintance with the Truth (of forgiveness)

1. This next feature of the faith is the ability to discern how the truth affects us – *“... through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you ...”*
2. “knowledge” [ἐπίγνωσις] – describes knowledge that is experiential and full – referring to what Philemon has himself experienced.
3. In the context of this book, it is the reality of the forgiveness of trespasses and sins Philemon has committed to which Paul refers.
4. Philemon’s faith will become ever more effective or powerful as he comprehends all Christ has done for Him.

B. The Application of the Truth (of forgiveness)

1. Now, Philemon is being called upon to do what has been done for him.
2. Paul calls upon Philemon to take the knowledge of his obligation to

forgive and transfer it through practical application to his ability to forgive the offenses of others – namely Onesimus.

3. Philemon knew that God had forgiven him on behalf of Christ, and he knew that we ought to forgive even as we have been forgiven, but until he does forgive, his faith is not as powerful, nor his influence as significant as when he does forgive.
4. We cannot be acquaintances of the truth alone; we must be appliers of the truth in our own lives – then our faith is effective, and we experience the power of God in our lives.

V. The Commitment of the Believer – v. 6c

A. The Motivation of Christ's Glory

1. Of course, our motivation to do this is the glory of Christ itself – “... *for Christ's sake.*”
2. The goal of all we do as believers is to bring glory to Christ – cp. **1 Corinthians 10:31.**
3. So often, we get stuck in thought patterns about how we have been wronged, how other people who have offended us deserve judgment, and how we deserve justice, so we justify our thoughts because of the clarity of the wrongs perpetrated against us.
4. However, when we elevate our “rights,” or the vindication of our wrongs, we fail to consider how God could be glorified by our responding to those who wrong us as He did – cp. **1 Peter 2:21-23.**

B. The Manifestation of Christ's Glory

1. This is what “*for Christ's sake*” means – to enable Him to take preeminence in our pursuits.
2. An unforgiving spirit does not glorify Christ Jesus – unforgiveness contradicts the Spirit of Christ who stands ready to forgive – cp. **1 John 1:9.**
3. Paul seems certain that given these realities, Philemon will forgive Onesimus.

VI. The Care of the Believer – v. 7

A. The Appreciation for Compassion

1. As believers observe other believers excelling in their pursuit of the glory of Christ through their lives, they rejoice in the glory of Christ

being displayed – *“For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love,”*

2. Paul appreciated this exemplary Christian because of his “love” for others – a love that was not merely asserted but proven by how he brought his resources to bear in alleviating the suffering of others.

B. The Alleviation through Compassion

1. Paul stated, *“because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.”*
2. The terms used here indicate there were some severe and heart-wrenching struggles that Philemon had helped *“saints”* to overcome.
3. *“hearts”* [σπλάγγνον] – refers to the intestines, the deepest inward part of the body, and describes the most intense of feelings.
4. Since Philemon had already been the source of blessing to so many of the church members who had faced so many heartaches, trials, and suffering, he is primed to help restore Onesimus.