



An artist's depiction of Paul giving the letter to Philemon to Onesimus, who carried it to Philemon.

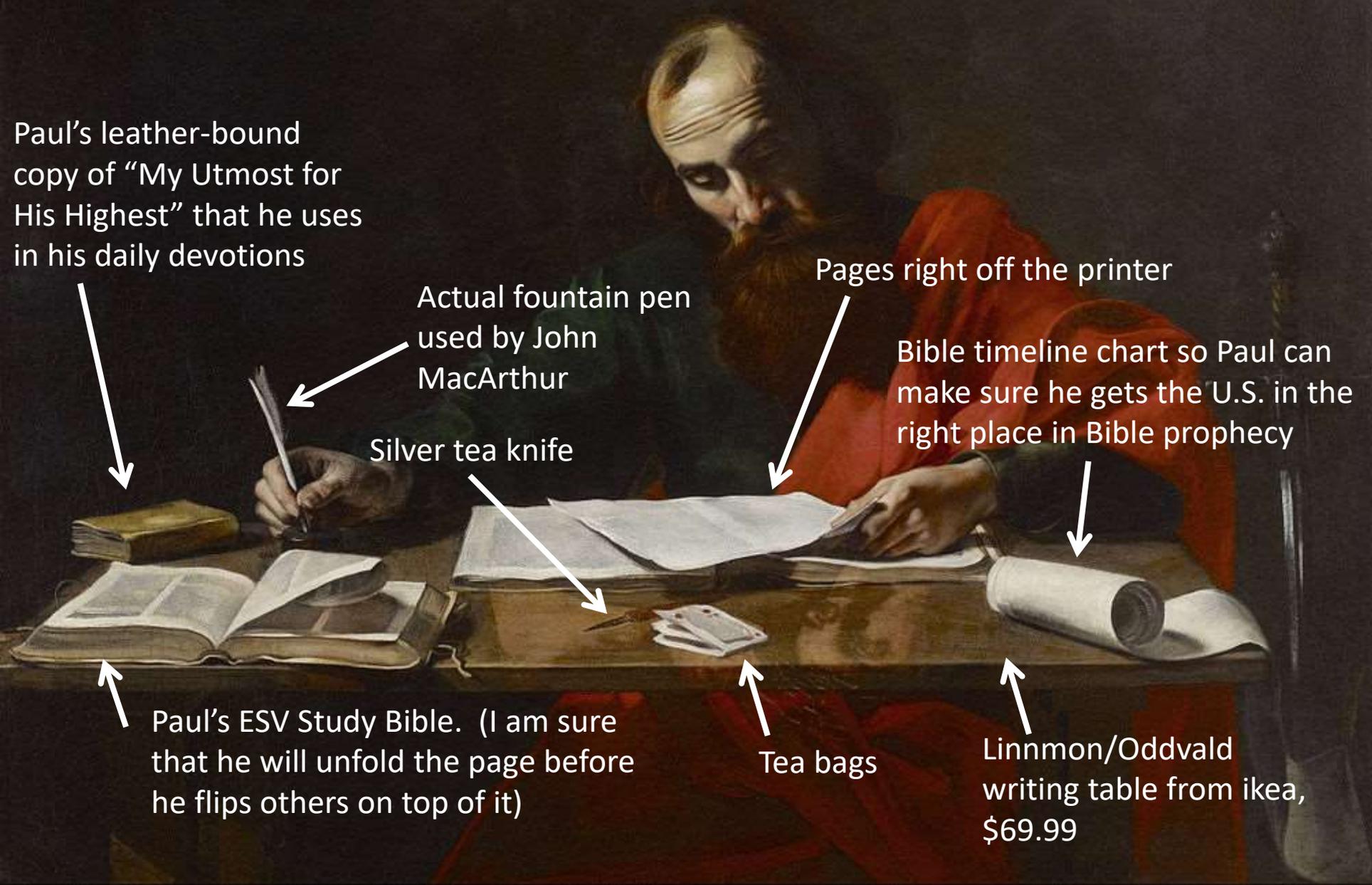
A fragment of Paul's letter to Philemon (v. 13-15) from a papyrus copy dating to 250 AD.



Fragment of a papyrus scroll containing Greek text in a cursive script. The text is arranged in seven lines, with some characters appearing to be in a different script or dialect. The fragment is irregularly shaped and shows signs of wear and tear.

Line 1: ΝΑ. ΠΡΕΥ
Line 2: ΤΟΙΣ ΔΕΟΜ
Line 3: ΧΩΡΙΣ ΔΕΤΗ
Line 4: ΚΑΕΝ ΗΘΕΛΙ
Line 5: ΜΗΥΟΚΑΤ
Line 6: ΟΝΤΟΥΝ ΗΔ
Line 7: ΔΙΑΤΟΥ

Paul laboring over his letters...



Paul's leather-bound copy of "My Utmost for His Highest" that he uses in his daily devotions

Actual fountain pen used by John MacArthur

Pages right off the printer

Bible timeline chart so Paul can make sure he gets the U.S. in the right place in Bible prophecy

Silver tea knife

Paul's ESV Study Bible. (I am sure that he will unfold the page before he flips others on top of it)

Tea bags

Linnmon/Oddvald writing table from Ikea, \$69.99

This is not the point, but this will help us get there...

What is assurance of salvation? How do you know?

1. The promises of God—Rom. 1:16, 10:13; John 3:16, 6:37; Acts 16:31.
2. The finished work of Christ—John 19:30; Is. 1:18; Eph. 1:3-14, 2:4-8.
3. The Holy Spirit—the Great Convincer — Rom. 8:16; 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5; 1 John 3:24, 4:13.

Do I believe? Do I affirm the record of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and that He is God in the flesh? Do I believe that God saves sinners only through the merits of Christ's obedient life and substitutionary death on the cross? And one more...

4. The evidence of a new life—Is my faith real?

How can I know? 1 John 5:13, and then these:

- Do I affirm the truths of Scripture and desire to obey them? ~ 1 John 1:6-7
- Do I agree with God about my sin? ~ 1:8-2:1
- Do I read Scripture to understand and obey it? ~ 2:3-4, 5:2-3
- Do I love God's people and desire to be with them? ~ 2:9-11; 3:10, 14-15; 5:2
- Do I hold to sound doctrine? ~ 2:20-23; 4:2, 6
- Do I follow after holiness (direction, not perfection)? ~ 2:29; 3:3-4, 6-9
- Do I give evidence that the Holy Spirit is in my life? ~ 4:13, 5:10-11; Gal. 5:22-23

Philemon, v. 4-7...

3 words are repeated twice in this passage...

- Love
- Faith
- Saints

What does the text say about love?

- It is Philemon's love
- It has an object (more on this shortly...)
- Paul has heard about Philemon's love from others
- Philemon's love has had an effect on Paul

What does the text say about faith?

- Again, it is Philemon's faith
- It is faith in Christ
- Paul has heard about it from others
- As it is exercised it has an effect

Philemon, v. 4-7...

3 words are repeated twice in this passage...

• Love • Faith • Saints

What does the text say about the saints?

- They are the object of Philemon's love.
- Paul has heard from others about the impact Philemon's love has had on them.
- "all the saints" have been recipients of his love (i.e., believers in Colossae, where Philemon lived).
- Philemon has refreshed "the hearts of the saints."
- Philemon has taken intentional and deliberate actions to encourage his fellow believers.
- Paul makes this the foundation of his appeal – v. 20

Here's our outline of Paul's short (but revolutionary) letter:

- Paul's introduction to his letter to Philemon, v. 1-3
- Paul's thanksgiving & prayer for Philemon, v. 4-7
- Paul's appeal to Philemon, v. 8-16
- Paul's confidence in Philemon, v. 17-22
- Paul's final greetings & prayer for Philemon, v. 23-25

And here's where we're going today in v. 4-7:

- Paul's thanksgiving for Philemon ~ v. 4
 - Why Paul gave thanks for Philemon ~ v. 5
- Paul's prayer for Philemon ~ v. 6
 - Why Paul prayed for Philemon ~ v. 7

We could also title these verses like this –

Philemon's love for the saints

Paul sees in Philemon a genuine love for the saints, one of the evidences of a genuine faith in Christ.

Paul's thanksgiving for Philemon – v. 4

“I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers...”

Ok—let's stop here for a second and ask ourselves a question: is this a regular practice of ours when we pray? Do we think of other saints and give thanks?

- Notice this: the very things that Paul gave thanks for are the same ones that he wanted to see Philemon act on again toward Onesimus.

Paul's thanksgiving for Philemon ~ v. 4

The very things that Paul gave thanks to God for could still be stretched in a way they had not before.

- We never *arrive* in godliness—never reach a place where we cannot grow and be stretched further.
- Philemon's love for "all the saints"—would he extend that to his slave? Would his faith in Christ allow him to welcome as a full brother one who was considered in Roman culture property? A kind of non-person?

"Even the most perfect, so long as they live in the world, never have so good ground for congratulation as not to need prayers, that God may grant to them, not only to persevere till the end, but likewise to make progress from day to day." ~ John Calvin

Why Paul gave thanks for Philemon – v. 5

Paul mentions two things—love and faith.

How did Paul know about Philemon's love and faith?

From others—“...because I hear of your love...”

- His life was consistent—people noticed, and over time he gained a reputation.
- Likely this was Pastor Epaphras of the Colossians, a “beloved fellow-servant” (Col. 1:7) of Paul's who planted the church at Colossae, was a “faithful minister of Christ on your behalf” (1:7), and who struggles “on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God (4:12).”

Why Paul gave thanks for Philemon – v. 5

Ok—the wording of this verse seems a little awkward

- The Gk and the better English translations render it as it is in the ESV: “your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints...” The NIV rearranges it more to our liking, wording it the way Paul does his thanksgiving for the Ephesians (Eph. 1:15) and the Colossians (Col. 1:3-4). Which is right?

Best answer: Assume that Paul’s wording is intentional, and that love is always in the context of faith in Christ, and faith in Christ is demonstrated in the context of love. (That’s the Reader’s Digest version of the answer)

Why Paul gave thanks for Philemon ~ v. 5

Let's look at Paul giving thanks for the saints...in each verse, notice the reasons for his thanksgiving ~

- Rom. 1:8
- Phil. 1:3-5
- 2 Thess. 1:3
- 1 Cor. 1:4-6
- Col. 1:3-5
- 2 Tim. 1:3-5
- Eph. 1:15
- 1 Thess. 1:2-3
- Philem. 4-5

What conclusion can we draw?

- None of the people he wrote to were perfect—they were redeemed sinners, as he was (1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 7:21-25). But he intentionally focused on those things that were evidence of the genuine work of grace in their hearts—he saw Christ in them and he gave thanks to God for that.

Paul's prayer for Philemon ~ v. 6

Ok—what does this mean? “...the sharing of your faith...” ~ what is that?

- Is he talking about evangelism?

Answer: No.

“sharing” here is the Gk *koinonía* ~

- Gk: *fellowship, communion, participation, sharing.*
- The Baptist meaning is *potluck.* :)
- Paul uses the word 13 times in his letters, along with other forms of the word.
- He uses it for the sharing of material things: i.e., the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem ~ Rom. 15:26, 2 Cor. 8:4.

Paul's prayer for Philemon ~ v. 6

“sharing” here is the Gk *koinonía* ~

- He uses it to refer to the way believers ought to think of each other ~ Phil. 2:1
- He uses it to refer to the unique fellowship shared between believers and Christ ~ 1 Cor. 1:9
- He speaks of his *koinonía* in the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:10), and the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13).
- And he talks of the partnership that he and the Philippians had in spreading the gospel ~ Phil. 1:5
- And we should have no *koinonía* with darkness ~ 2 Cor. 6:14

Paul's prayer for Philemon ~ v. 6

“sharing” here is the Gk *koinonía* ~

- And the same word is used in Philemon 6—“the sharing of your faith”

So the thought here is that Paul is praying that Philemon's participation in, or expression of, his faith in community with believers would result in something.

So—what does the “sharing (*koinonía*) of your faith” mean for Philemon?

Well, Philemon doesn't know yet, because he hasn't read the rest of the letter by this point. But we've read the rest of the letter, so we get where he's going:

Paul's prayer for Philemon ~ v. 6

For Philemon, participating in, or expressing, genuine faith in the community of believers would be to now think of his slave property Onesimus “no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother” (v. 16).

- Paul, in v. 6, is simply laying the groundwork for his request in v. 16-17.
- A form of the same Gk word (*koinonos*) shows up again in v. 17—“So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.”

Well...what does it look like for *me* to show my faith in Christ through love within the community of believers? We know what it was for Philemon—how about me?

Paul's prayer for Philemon ~ v. 6

Ok—so we understand the first part of v. 6 now...
what in the world does the second part mean?

When Philemon responds in the forgiving, welcoming, transforming, redeeming love of Christ, it will have an effect, it will result in something—it will be *effective* (the Gk word is the root of our English word *energy*)—it will have a powerful result (same word is used in Matt. 14:2; Eph. 1:19-20; 2 Cor. 1:6; Gal. 2:8, James 5:16—among many others).

- Here's what it would be powerful for: “the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.” ~ Which means what?

Paul's prayer for Philemon ~ v. 6

When Philemon acts in forgiving and reconciling love toward his (former) slave Onesimus, something will happen inside of Philemon himself.

- A “full knowledge”—a deepening understanding, comprehension, and experience...
- ...of “every good thing that is in us...”

What are the good things that are in us? Eph. 1:3-14

What's the best way to learn something?

- When we first got a VW, I went to the library and read every book I could find on VW maintenance. That was a great start—but when I completely tore down and rebuilt an engine...well, now I know what every single part looks like and what it does.

Paul's prayer for Philemon ~ v. 6

Had Philemon been forgiven of his sins?

- Absolutely—and he knew it.
- But when he forgave his slave, charged what Onesimus owed to Paul's account, and fully accepted him without reservation as a beloved brother in Christ...well, then he would know forgiveness like he had never known it before.
- Philemon had to do what Paul wrote in the letter to Philemon's church: "...forgiving each other; *as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*" ~ See Col. 3:12-14
- Philemon would learn of forgiveness and adoption and redemption and grace in a much deeper way.

Why Paul prayed for Philemon ~ v. 7

Paul, even in his imprisonment, had “derived much joy and comfort” from the love that Philemon showed for his brethren in the church at Colossae.

He puts it this way: “because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.”

Refreshed...to rest, to cease from toil (like Matt. 11:28-29).

- Those in Philemon’s community of believers who were exhausted, struggling, weak, suffering, hurting...Philemon helped them to rest, he eased their burden, he brought rest and renewal.

Why Paul prayed for Philemon ~ v. 7

A quick look at refreshing hearts ~

- Jeremiah 31:10-14
- Jeremiah 31:23-25
(Why separate those two?)
- Prov. 11:25
- 1 Cor. 16:18
- 2 Cor. 7:13
- Rom. 15:32
- 2 Tim. 1:16

So...what do you suppose Philemon did? How can we be refreshers of hearts? What do we do?

One other thought to remember here: everyone needs a refreshed heart from time to time...but remember that refreshment is temporary. Watch and pray for the saints—there will be some who need more refreshment than others, but all need some.

Why Paul prayed for Philemon ~ v. 7

William Barclay with the last word:

“He (Philemon) was a man whose faith in Christ and whose love to the brethren all men knew, and the story of them had reached even Rome, where Paul was in prison. His house must have been like an oasis in a desert, for, as Paul had it, he had refreshed the hearts of God’s people. It is a lovely thing to go down to history as a man in whose house God’s people were rested and refreshed.”

So—pray to be a refresher of hearts. And pray for those who refresh hearts. And pray for those who hearts need to be refreshed in Christ.