

## A Half-hour with Philemon

Franklin Church of Christ  
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PM Worship

### Introduction:

When is the last time you studied **Philemon**? How many sermons have you ever heard about **Philemon**? How many Bible classes have you been in that discussed **Philemon**? Be honest. **Philemon** is 25 verses of scripture, stuck back in the middle of the New Testament where all those books are real close together and easily overlooked. I want to encourage us to remember **Philemon**, the book and the man. Philemon is perhaps one of the greatest examples of Christian character in our Bibles. Just imagine if we could sit down with Philemon for half an hour, what would he say to us?

### Discussion:

- I. "Live in such a way that others can be thankful for you."
  - A. After Paul's initial greetings to Philemon, Apphia (possibly Philemon's wife), Archippus (perhaps a family member) and the church in Philemon's house, he expresses his thanks for Philemon (**Philemon 4**). When Paul said his prayers and he wanted to thank God for the blessings he had experienced from God, one of those blessings was Philemon.
  - B. If we were Philemon, living as we live now, would Paul have been thankful for us? Wouldn't that be great to hear from Paul? "I appreciate you." "I thank God for you." "I'm so glad you came into my life, that when I say my prayers of thanksgiving, I mention your name." Would Paul be thankful for you?
  - C. Granted Paul is not here today. So, we might ask about those who lead us in this congregation, our elders. If they were writing this kind of letter, could they say they are thankful for us? **Hebrews 13:17**, we should let those who lead us do so with joy, not with grief. That would be unprofitable for us.
- II. "Don't wait to be commanded to do what was proper."
  - A. In **vs. 8-9**, Paul said he could command Philemon to fulfill his request. However, because fulfilling the request would be the proper thing to do, he didn't have to command Philemon. He simply had to appeal to Philemon. Philemon was the type of man who would do what was right, fitting and proper. The KJV uses the term "convenient" here. Recognizing how this same word is used in **Ephesians 5:4** and **Colossians 3:18**, we understand that convenience here is not a matter of what is quicker or easier. Rather, it refers to what is best and fitting.
  - B. Are we this kind of people? Are we the type of people who do what is proper just because it is proper, without being commanded? Are we the kind of people that say, "Nobody has commanded this, but it is the fitting thing to do, so I will do it"? Further, do we live in such a way that others can see that in us?
  - C. Or are we the type of people that say, "Show me the command. Otherwise, I am not doing it"? Are we the type of people that say, "Show me where it says I can't. Otherwise, I am going to do it"? Are we the type that say, "Find me every single line of technicality. If I am not crossing those lines, leave me alone"?
- III. "Live in such a way that others can be confident in you."
  - A. In **vs. 21**, Paul claimed he was confident Philemon would do right. Paul trusted Philemon, to not only want to do right but actually do it. He knew he wouldn't have to send another letter to Philemon to remind him. He knew he wouldn't have to argue with him about whether or not he would do it. Philemon was going to do it. He knew the only thing necessary on his part, was to let Philemon know what needed to be done. If somebody said Philemon was beating Onesimus for running away, Paul wouldn't believe it. He would know better, because he knew and was confident that Philemon would do right.
  - B. Are we reliable and trustworthy? Do people know we simply have to be shown what is right and we will do it? Do others know that we can be trusted to do the right thing without having to be constantly reminded of what is right or what we have committed to?
  - C. Or, are we the kind that have to be constantly called and reminded of what is right? Are we the kind that have to be constantly watched to make sure we are doing what is right? What kind of people are we?

#### IV. How can we live this way?

##### A. "Pursue love."

1. Paul could be thankfully confident that Philemon would do what was right because he knew of Philemon's love (**Philemon 5**). We have been in enough classes and heard enough sermons to know that the term translated love here, "agape," means unconditional love.
2. We know what this love is from **I Corinthians 13:4-7**. Philemon was this kind of man. He was patient, kind, not jealous. He was humble. He would only behave becomingly, doing what was fitting and proper. He would not seek his own and was not provoked. He would not take into account a wrong suffered. He would not rejoice in unrighteousness but rather rejoice with the truth. He would bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things. Consider how much of this played into Paul's knowing that Philemon would do right.
3. Do you want people to be thankfully confident that you will do the fitting and proper thing? Then love. Study these characteristics and apply them to your everyday life. But if you will not love, do not expect people to give thanks for you, neither now nor in eternity.

##### B. "Hold on to faith."

1. Paul could be thankfully confident in Philemon because he knew of Philemon's faith (**Philemon 5**). Paul knew Philemon's Christianity was not the fly by night variety, neither rooted nor grounded but tossed about by every wind of doctrine that came along.
2. Philemon was convicted. He knew what he believed and why he believed. His conviction gave Paul confidence because true conviction brings a change. The one convicted that Jesus died for us and will come again to keep us from enduring the wrath behaves a certain way, as Peter demonstrated in **II Peter 3:11**. Paul knew of Philemon's faith and conviction and therefore knew that Philemon would have holy conduct and godliness.
3. Do you want people to be thankfully confident that you will do the right thing? Have faith. Allow that conviction to affect your life, demonstrating it to others. If your faith does not come out in your life, do not expect people to give thanks for you, neither now nor in eternity.

##### C. "Work hard."

1. Paul could be thankfully confident that Philemon would do what was right because he knew Philemon was a worker. Philemon's love was not in word only. Philemon's faith was not just mental assent. These characteristics were meted out in his daily life and work. In fact, Paul's first description of Philemon was "fellow worker" (**Philemon 1**).
2. The church met in this man's house, demonstrating his commitment to the work. In **vs. 7**, Paul talks about Philemon's refreshing or comforting the saints. Philemon served brethren.
3. Do you want people to be thankfully confident you will do the right thing? Work. If you do not work, do not expect people to be thankfully confident in you, neither now nor in eternity.

##### D. "Go the extra mile."

1. According to **vs 21**, we learn that Philemon would go beyond what was asked of him. When pressed to walk one mile, Philemon would go two (**Matthew 5:40-41**).
2. Philemon was not a man who was striving only to do just what was technically required of him. He knew what was right and he would do it to the fullest extent (**Ecclesiastes 9:10**). "But wait a minute," we might say, "if I do just what is required, that's all that God asks." In a sense, yes. But when our attitude is that of just doing the minimum, we will never truly understand what is required of us. When our attitude is one of show me the line and I won't cross it, but don't say anything when I get really close, we will typically not set the line in God's place. The "minimum service and just what is required" mindset is detrimental to serving God and man, because it is still focused on us and what we want. When the minimum requirement equals your maximum output, you have stumbled on the formula for failure. This formula doesn't work anywhere, especially not in service to Christ.
3. Do you want people to be thankfully confident that you will do the fitting and proper thing? Then go the extra mile. Do the extra work. Don't live at people's expectations, live beyond them. Don't search for the smallest thing you can do, grow. If you won't go the extra mile, do not expect people to be thankfully confident in you, neither now nor in eternity.

#### Conclusion:

What character Philemon had! I am so thankful we have had this time to learn from Philemon. May we never forget this often overlooked character but rather strive to be like him.