

The Philemon Spirit

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Bible Text: Philemon
Preached on: Sunday, June 20, 2021

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Well, while you're being seated, let's take the word of God and let's go back to the book of Philemon in the New Testament. You say, "Pastor, you've preached through Philemon." Yes, but when I was preaching through it and ever since then I haven't been able to get over Philemon, the man. As a pastor, when I contemplate the things Paul says about this man and I know that Paul didn't just throw compliments around everywhere, I'm taken back, I'm somewhat enthralled with him. You say, "Well, pastor, I think he's probably a great man of God but I don't know about being enthralled." Well, you're not a pastor. The Apostle Paul was and the things he says about this man are, are powerful, they're stirring, they're encouraging and I want to build off of that and bring a somewhat very different kind of sermon to you this morning for a different kind of reason this morning.

We are initiating a new ministry at Grace Life Church and it'll be centered in our Anchored in Truth missions ministry and, um, while I wouldn't call it a new beam, I told you the Pastor's Training Institute was the final major beam in the house of Grace Life Church and Anchored in Truth missions, but it is an important room that complements the other foundational ministries that we have and not one that should take a whole lot of time or energy except for the, uh, brother or two that will maybe help lead it or be leading it, but, um, we're gonna draw most of it from the commendations that the Apostle Paul gives of this layman in the church, Philemon.

A few good men. I understand there's been a movie, there's a Broadway play entitled "A Few Good Men." It's also been a recruiting slogan for the Marines for many years. I did some research on the phrase and I found that the earliest known usage was by Captain William Jones, the captain of a 28 gun frigate, when he advertised in the Providence, RI Gazette in March of 1779, that he needed a few good men to join him on a short cruise, and that's been around ever since and it's been used by the Marine Corps in one way or another ever since.

Our Lord Jesus in like manner, had amassed a great following as he began his earthly ministry teaching, performing miracles. Hundreds, even thousands and thousands followed him and in the broad sense of the word, they were disciples, they were following after, they were learning. A lot of them were not converted, were not true Christians yet but they were interested and they were following. And then on one

occasion, Jesus pulls himself apart from the crowd and he prays all night, the Bible tells us, consult the Father, and the next morning the gospel of Mark says he appointed 12 men that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach. You might say that Jesus knew that he would have a great host of children in his church, followers of him, but he needed a few good men.

Now we do know based on what the Bible tells us about Jesus' 12 disciples or 12 apostles, that they were not exceptional men out of their own inherent goodness or virtue, but it was his choice of them and his grace working through his discipling of them that would make them to be exceptional men. For example, when Jesus was crucified, the Apostle Paul denied the Lord three times. Right after that over in Acts 5, or, or rather Peter, did I say Paul? I meant Peter if I did. Peter denies him three times and right after that in Acts 5, Peter is threatened by the religious authorities that he must cease to teach and preach the things of Christ and he without even hesitating said, "Yes, but I must obey God rather than men." He went from being paralyzed by the fear of man the night Jesus was crucified, denying the Lord three times, to boldly not regarding the fear of men at all. That's what Jesus can do, he can change a coward into a bold man of God.

I believe if we were alive in the last few weeks or months of the Apostle Paul's life, remember we've been thinking about that as we've been preaching through 2 Timothy and talking about the fact that he writes 2 Timothy from the prison cell and he knows his execution is just ahead. I think if we were around the Apostle Paul in those days, it's likely we could hear him say, "Well, most have forsaken me. Lord, if You'd just give me a few good men." And God did give him a few good men. The Apostle Paul had lots of associates during his earthly ministry. He won a lot of people to Christ. He's planted churches all over the world, but in those more difficult days we find him looking for just a few good men and, in fact, he found them. They were unusual men, men of unusually deep conviction and of unusually sound character, men like Timothy and Onesiphorus, and woman like Lydia, and yes, a man named Philemon. Now while we can't verify from the biblical record that Lydia was indeed faithful in the end of Paul's ministry, I believe that she was, but yet we're going to look at her example too as we think about Philemon and then also think about Onesiphorus. We're going to think about Lydia also and look at the conviction and the character of these people.

So we see the Apostle Paul in his ministry coming to that point where he would say, "Lord, just give me a few good men," and maybe one good woman, Lydia. So I want us to look today at these two men and this good woman and draw some conclusions to lead to how we're gonna establish this new ministry. Now so much is known of Philemon that we don't know about Onesiphorus and that we don't know about Lydia, so we'll center on Philemon and his example and we will complement that with the example of the other two. So here's how we're gonna do it. You are a Philemon when, number 1, I., you love and support your pastor. Now we've been talking about this a lot because there's a lot said about that in 2 Timothy so I want you to know in Grace Life Church that I'm not preaching this because I think there needs to be some big correction in this area. You do love and support your pastor. I, I experience it all the time and I'm humbled by it and I am grateful for it. So this is not because you need this correction. Even though it's always

true, you need the truth of the word of God no matter what it is. You'll never arrive to where we don't need it. I need it as a pastor, you need it as a church member.

So on the one hand for most of you men here today, and this really ties in well because it's Father's Day, I didn't plan it that way, it just kinda all the dominoes fell for this to be preached today. But because it's Father's Day and because you men are responsible for more than ladies are responsible, and primarily the exhortation is to those men who have greater responsibility. They are men who own businesses, men who have more wealth, men who are responsible for more things. The Bible clearly teaches men you have more accountability, you have more responsibility, and that's where Philemon was. He was that kind of a man. So it's not because you need a correction but it is to say let's stay the course and, secondly, don't miss this, let's organize ourselves so that we might take what we're learning and growing as men of God in the local church, and reproduce it in our other Anchored in Truth church plants and partner churches. And that's been our conviction all along, has it not? We want to live it here, at least to a good degree, before we reproduce it other places. So in one sense I'm challenging every man in this church join with me in a new ministry that's bigger than us. Have a vision outside of us.

So let's look at this from Philemon's life. We're talking about you're a Philemon or you have the spirit of a Philemon when you love and support your pastor, and we see this so powerfully as Paul writes this letter to Philemon and, of course, the purpose of the letter is to persuade the, uh, man Philemon to take back his runaway slave Onesimus and not just take him back but take him back no longer as a slave but now as a brother in Christ. And Paul says some quite amazing things about Philemon, so while I, I, I know I'm not emphasizing the major theme of the letter, we preached that thoroughly, I do want to bring out some secondary truths particularly looking at the conviction and character Philemon, it's very important for us to look at and think about and apply to our own lives.

Look at verse 1, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon," now notice it says, "our beloved brother and fellow worker." Paul knew this was a brother who loved him. "You're my beloved brother, Philemon," implying among other things, "I know you love me and you support me."

Now jump down to verse 4. He says, "I thank my God always." Now why would the Apostle Paul thank God always? And by the way, this is the Apostle Paul who experienced great rejection and persecution by the culture at large, and significant difficulties in even the churches he started. He would have uprisings and people who would oppose his leadership, so when he says to Philemon, "I thank God for you," here's what he means, he means, "I know you love me, Philemon, and I know you support me. That's why I'm thankful for you, Philemon." But not just that he loved and supported Paul, Paul knew why he did it. He did it because he first loved Christ. Those two always go together once you gain any maturity in Christ. You will love God's man if you love God. You'll love Christ's ambassador if you love Christ and that's what Paul is bringing out here.

Uh, look at verse 7, if you will. He says, "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." This phrase "comfort in your love" is a powerful phrase. It means Paul, when Paul woke up in the morning, he might be first reminded of all of those who were forsaking him but when he thought of Philemon, he thought, "Praise God. That man will stay with me." He knew Philemon loved and supported him, that he had comfort in his love.

And then down in verse 8, if you will, "Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper." Context: he said, "I know I could order you to take Onesimus back and I could order you to no longer view him as a slave but as a brother," he said, "but I'm not gonna do that." He said, "I have such confidence in you. Among other things that's got to include that I know that you love me as your spiritual leader, and you support me."

And then, uh, we get down to, um, verse, um, 14 of Philemon and he says, he said, "but without your consent I didn't want to do anything," I'm not gonna force something on you, Philemon, "so that your goodness," goodness, "would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will." So here Paul is pointing out, "This man is a man who loves me and supports me." There's more there than that but that is definitely there and when you're a pastor, and let's just say a pastor, staff member, church leader who is really trying to build a spiritually biblically healthy church, it's worth everything to have some Philemons around because there are plenty who are against you. You guys got to understand, if you've been here very long, you think what we have is normal. It's not. The kind of unity and love and support that I experience is just, it's just almost radically rare, especially in Baptist and Evangelical circles.

Now in, in, in balance of that or, or in, in continuation of that, I should say, let's look at the example of Onesiphorus. Look at 2 Timothy, well, it'll be on your screen, 2 Timothy, uh, chapter, um, 1, verses 16 and 17. Paul's writing from prison and he says, "The Lord grant to the house of Onesiphorus, for he," grant mercy rather, "for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me." What Paul is saying here, "When everybody else fell away, there was one guy I knew loved me and supported me, Onesiphorus. He went to great lengths. He, he exhausted himself and, and, and literally put himself in danger by associating with me but he would not be deterred."

And then he goes on to talk more about that but then notice the, the, Lydia as another example and we're looking at this in Acts 16, if you will, uh, verses 13 through 15 and verse 40. Paul is preaching in Philippi. He resides to the riverside where a lot of people resided and, and rested on that day and it says, "And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled there." All right, next, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics." Let me stop there. To sell purple fabrics almost automatically meant you had wealth because it was a very very rare dye that was in the region of Thyatira where, uh, Lydia's house. She's a long way from Thyatira right now. She's in Philippi. She's doing business in

another town, is what she's doing, and she's a seller of purple fabrics and purple was the color of royalty and nobility because it was so rare and so expensive, and so she's a woman of some means. Matter of fact, she's at least got two homes, she has a home in Thyatira and she has a home or a place of business here in Philippi also.

And she's a worshiper of God. She's one who's come to embrace the God of the Jews. She was listening and notice, "and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Notice how God points out over and over again it is the sovereign God who initiates conversion. The Lord opened her heart, then she responded. Notice this, "And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us." What's the point? Her point is, "I want to take care of you, Paul, and your associates. I want to support you. You can be housed in my houses or in my, my buildings here. We will feed you food." And, and no doubt she gave them money to continue their work. I can guarantee you Paul left Philippi saying, "I know there's one godly business lady in Philippi and she loves me and supports me."

So we see that pattern and there are other patterns but powerfully seen in Philemon's life, powerfully seen in the life of Onesiphorus, and powerfully seen in this godly lady Lydia who's converted on the riverside there in the regions of Philippi. If you have the Philemon spirit, God's done enough work in you to where you see it as pleasing to God and honoring God to love and support your pastor.

II. You are a Philemon when your pastor can trust you and depend on your support. This is just the other side of the coin but I think it needs to be emphasized because not only is Philemon commended for what he is, Paul's basically all the way through his letter to Philemon says, "And what you do for me by letting me know I can depend on you, Philemon, letting me know you'll be there to support me is worth everything."

Now there's one key point I want to bring out here because, as you know, the main context of the letter Paul's writing to Philemon saying, "Philemon, I found your runaway slave. He bumped into me and he's been converted and he's been a wonderful help and servant to me. I'm sending him back to you, Philemon. I'm not gonna command you. I could command you but I'm not going to, but I want you to consider, Philemon, now he's no longer a slave, he's now your brother in Christ." Powerful. See what we forget, we read that and we just gloss over it.

We're all well aware of the dark, deep, evil stain of slavery in the history of our country but what we sometimes forget is that for 6,000 years at least leading up to the middle part of the 19th century, slavery was generally practiced throughout the world. It's just irrefutable. Throughout the world. Now the Islamic world in history was perhaps one of the greatest participants in the slave trade. The Arab nations enslaved many white Europeans and many Africans to be their slaves, and by the way, when I was in India a few years ago, we had a man who was in our pastor's class who was a slave to an Islamic family in India. It's still practiced in Islam and people forget about that. In 1000 AD, slavery was common in England. Matter of fact, so many of the Germanic peoples were

slaves, the word for their name, Slav, of the Slavic nations, really came to be a word used for slave because it was just common, so many of them were slaves in their past. Significant portion of people in the, on the European continent. Matter of fact, moving on up in history, did you know that the Indians, the Cherokee Indians in particular but the Indians in general, when they were forced to move West, they took their African slaves with them and their African slaves built the Indian nation out West.

So here's what I'm saying to you: slavery has been dominant in world history but if you come to this time when Paul's writing to Philemon, there's probably no time in world history where slavery was more woven into the fabric of civilization than the Roman-Greco empire. The Romans practiced slavery. The Greeks practiced slavery. But none more than the Rome or than Rome during the Roman empire. Some biblical scholars say it's possible that 50% of the citizens of Rome were slaves of one degree or another. So in this context when all the businesses and all the businessmen and everybody used, utilized slavery, the Apostle Paul – listen to me – has such trust in Philemon that he believes with one letter he can write to Philemon and change that in Philemon's life. Know what that means? Paul trusted in this man. Trusted in him and knew he could depend on him.

I'm not gonna, my time's constrained here because you don't listen much past 11:45, so I have to move on but the way Paul, he says, "I could command you but I'm not going to. I could force you but I'm gonna just let the goodness of your heart because I know what you're gonna do, Philemon. Christ has changed you and, boom, the light's gonna go on and you're gonna realize as a Christian, I cannot participate in slavery any longer." Now that's a powerful truth. You see, Paul didn't appeal to the power of the state. That's too slow. Paul didn't appeal to the arm of the flesh, "I'll force you to do it." You see, listen, Christianity reverses slavery from the heart out. History records that the nations who were quickest and most thorough to remove this scourge from their lands are Christian, are nations that had strong Christian principles and influence in them.

So here we see a powerful statement of Paul who is functioning as the pastor of this local church that meets in Philemon's house, having this deep confidence that this man can be trusted and depended upon. Now in addition to that, again in verse 1, he calls Philemon his fellow worker. "I know I can depend on him. He's a fellow worker." Again he says, "You're a comfort to me," in verse 7. "Your, your faithful support comforts me. I can't depend on some churches and some individuals but, Philemon, I know I've always been able to depend on you."

And then, uh, go to verse 20, if you will. We're in Philemon. "Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord and refresh my heart in Christ." Now he's asking for that to happen but you can tell Paul knows he can trust Philemon to do the right thing here.

Verse 21, "Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know," that's I can trust you, Philemon, "I know you will do even more than what I say." Philemon had the kind of spirit where his pastor knew he could trust him and he could depend on him to do the right thing.

And there's something interesting here if we go on to verse, um, 22, "At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you." Now Philemon was most likely the wealthiest man in the church. He had the kind of house where he could have a, a guest quarters, if you will, and, and it's interesting, Paul does not sheepishly say, "Uh, Philemon, I, I just, I hate to even bring this up and I don't want to impose on you and I, I'm embarrassed to ask this but would it, you think, Philemon, that it might be okay if I stayed at your house a few days when I'm there?" No. There's such a trust in this man. There's such a, a knowledge that, "He'll rejoice to help me. I can depend on him." He just says, "Get my room ready, I'm coming." That's what he does.

I, there's, there's many many families in this church I feel that way about. I haven't asked for a room, as far as I know, from any of you but if there was a need I had, I, I could pick up the phone and I know in just a moment and I would feel confident that you would want to, "Pastor, I'll do that for you." Now you've gotta understand something. I don't have needs. I'm not asking for that. All I'm asking for is you to have that heart attitude, a Philemon heart attitude. I'm well taken care of. I'm not preaching this for me but a lot of our churches we partner with and a lot of the churches we plant aren't there yet. Their men need to learn the Philemon spirit and that's where I'm going with this. You gotta help me help them get there.

Then, of course, again the example of Onesiphorus. I'll not go there for time, how he was diligent to seek Paul out, find Paul in Roman prisons, minister to them. The example of Lydia and the Bible says Lydia didn't just suggest to stay at my house, the Bible says she prevailed on Paul. "Paul, you've got to stay here and let me take care of things." So Paul would say, "I know I can trust and depend on the support of Onesiphorus. I know I can trust and depend on the support of this godly lady Lydia." And certainly he knew he could trust and depend on the support of godly layman Philemon.

3. You are a Philemon when you strongly support your local church. Now this ties into the earlier points, I understand that, but it is a separate thing. Supporting God's pastor is supporting the local church but it's more than that too, and we see this in the, in the book of Philemon and it jumps out so powerfully. Again, if you're a pastor this means more to you because you are fellowshiping with pastors and in my case mentoring and encouraging and trying to train pastors who are not experiencing this kind of, of, of blessing that a Philemon brings to the church.

Verse 2 again, uh, "and Apphia our sister, Archippus our fellow soldier," notice, "and the church in your house." Philemon said, "We don't have a place to meet. Church can meet at my house." He was a churchman. He was strongly committed to the local church.

In verse 5 Paul writes, "I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus," and this always follows, "and toward all the saints." Paul says, "You love Christ and that's always seen in that you love the church, you love the saints." That's gotta mean primarily, "those who are meeting in the church in your house." A Philemon is one who is strongly committed to the local church.

Paul writes in verse 7, um, again, um, no, it's not verse 7. Let's go to verse 17 maybe, "If then," he's writing to Philemon, "you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me." Now what's, now here's the Apostle Paul and he says, "Philemon, you're my partner." Partner in what? Do they have a pit, tentmaking business on the side? I don't think so. Paul did that but I don't think that's what he's talking about. We're not partners in a business. What he's saying is this, "In my solitary vision of preaching the gospel, and seeing folks converted and establishing local New Testament churches, Philemon, you've been a faithful partner to me in that." That's what he's saying. "You're strongly committed to the mission I'm about starting local churches throughout the world." And here this successful businessman, relatively speaking, wealthy man in this local church shows a clear and strong commitment to the local church.

Um, Onesiphorus, now when we look back at 2 Timothy again, we think about this godly man Onesiphorus who was so diligent to seek out Paul, I think it's probable that Onesimus probably had a church in his house. We know Paul talks about Onesimus and his whole household being blessed, receiving God's mercy. I can't prove that. I don't know but I think it's possible, maybe probable, but certainly Onesimus knew that, "When I support this man, Paul, I'm supporting what Paul's about, preaching the gospel, planting local New Testament churches." And that's, that's something that's gotta happen inside of a layman where he says, "I'm beginning to see that God is pleased and glorified primarily and principally when His gospel is preached and His churches are planted and built up throughout the world." That's where Onesimus was, Onesiphorus was, and that's where Philemon was.

Now what about Lydia? There's a powerful thing here about the local church in the testimony or in the narrative concerning the conversion of Lydia. If you will, look again at Lydia. Now let me leave that for a moment. Let me leave that for a moment and, and let me, let me talk about this for just a moment. In Christian ministry, in New Testament teaching, Christian ministry is much more of a rifle shot than a shotgun blast. You know the difference, shotgun has many pellets and you shoot and they just go everywhere. Christianity is more of a rifle shot. It, for example, Paul wasn't called to plant churches and then Apollos, one of his associates, wasn't called to tent crusade meetings, and part of, Barnabas wasn't called to street ministry, and Titus wasn't called to businessmen's fellowships, and John Mark wasn't called to Chariots for Jesus. I can't say bikers because they didn't have motorcycles. And all these. Now I'm not saying these are bad and we support some things like that, but my point is when you look at the New Testament and all the associates of Paul, they're like a rifle shot, they all preached or supported that preaching and they all helped plant local New Testament churches, and then they all helped those local New Testament churches mature so they could cooperate and plant more local New Testament churches. Just a rifle shot. That's what you see in the New Testament and that's why we are not dogmatic about being centered on preaching and planting churches and revitalizing churches. We're not dogmatic about it, we're bulldogmatic about it. Others may do other things, I'm not gonna condemn them, but the New Testament is overwhelmingly full of this rifle shot. So that's, we want to be about what God is most often talking about in his word.

Now let's talk about Lydia. Acts 16 and we look at verse 13 again, "And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate," this is in Philippi. Lydia's come from Thyatira selling purple in the region of Philippi. The Apostle Paul happens to be there. He sees her by this riverside. Paul says in verse 13, middle of the verse, "we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. And a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Now notice verse 15, "And she, and when she and her household had been baptized." Does that say anything to you? I mean, the woman is just converted and already Paul is planting a church in her house. Boom, that quick. You don't baptize people just out on the street or in the community or in the swimming pool. Baptism is an ordinance which places you in the membership of the local church. It shows you the powerful priority and centrality of the local church and the Apostle Paul's ministry and in the heart of Lydia. She said, "Let's do it." So she starts this church in her home. That's what that means. We see it in the example of Lydia. She prevails that the Apostle Paul stay there with her.

Now look over at verse 40, skimming on down. Paul gets in trouble. His preaching has caused some businessmen to start losing money and you get, you mess with some businessmen's money, they'll hate you, they'll hate the preacher that messes up their money idol. But verse 40 says when, "They went out of the prison, they entered the house of Lydia." Now that's confidence. They trusted that, they knew they were welcome there. "And when they saw the brethren." What does that mean? That means the church. The brethren, the church is meeting there. "When they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed." You have the spirit of Philemon, you're a Philemon when you are strongly committed to the local church like Philemon was and like Onesiphorus was and like Lydia was.

Let me give you one more thought. I was sharing this with a brother and I'll talk about him in a moment but, um, let's think about marital status by way of illustration here, or parallel, I should say. When your marital status changes, it permeates and influences the totality of your life. In like manner, when your spiritual status changes, you receive Christ, you become a member of Christ's church, that new association and commitment and belonging, you understand you don't attend a church, you belong to a church. You can attend a church, you can attend a church meeting which is what you're doing right now but you, you belong to a church. It's your family. And once that happens, that too influences and permeates the totality of your life. Everywhere you go, that goes with you. For example, if, if a, if a couple gets married and after they're married the husband continues on like as if he was single, when he spends his finances and when he does his budget he is, did it just like he did when he was single. And when he was involved in his hobbies and his social things, he did the same things he did when he was single. And when he has his friends and buddies he hangs out with, it's the exact same guys as when he was single. You think, you say, "Wait a minute, you don't understand marriage." It, it flavors all of that. All of that starts changing. The same way, of course, for the ladies.

And so it is with the local church. It's to permeate the totality of your being. You're one of God's children and you have a belonging to this family that's eternal and it flavors everything you are. You guys who play ball, when you go out and play ball for the junior high or the high school, you're not just a ball player who attends church here, you're a ball player who belongs to Grace Life Church of the Shoals. And when you men go into the factory, you men go into your business that you own, you're not just going in there, you're going in there as a follower of Jesus Christ who belongs to Grace Life Church of the Shoals. It flavors everything you do. It's just that we have such a dumbed down understanding of the local church today. We just have such a woeful deficiency in our understanding of the local church. For example, the majority of pastors, I'm not exaggerating here and I'm not running these dear brothers down because so many of them have tried and they just get obliterated by their church members when they try to get things right, and I have a heart for these pastors. But most pastors willfully teach that membership is of no real consequence.

Our former pastor, he was quite humorous. He, he used to say if you could teach a chimpanzee to walk down the aisle and fill out a card, most Baptist churches would vote him in. His point was it's a mess. It's a mess. Most pastors will basically tell you there is no evaluation or qualification to come in and join membership and if you join, there's certainly no accountability or discipline for your life after you join. That's radically wrong and unbiblical and I've been spending decades trying to correct that, and God bless you for hanging in there with me as we've been on this journey. But saying all that to say, my illustration is just as marital status touches and determines the totality of life, so does one's status as a Christian and a member belonging to one of God's local churches.

That was Philemon. As you look at, as you look at what Paul says about Philemon, it's everything's wrapped together. His, his household is there, the church meets in his household, his business more than likely in that day most all business functioned out of your household whether you're a blacksmith or whatever you did. You may have sold things in the marketplace but you made it in your home, in your household. And so it permeated everything. I mean, Philemon brings Christianity and even the church right into the center of his business life and his home life. Powerful stuff. It's a lesson for all of us.

Now by the way, time out. Hey, guys, listen to me. Now some of you are thinking, "Well, you know, pastor, it could be a little hard for business if I'm too upfront about Christ in my business." Do you know that antagonism and resistance to Christianity in this day? And Philemon just didn't say, "I'll be known as a Christian," he said, "Meet in my house." He put his business and everything on the line for the good of the church and the honor of Christ.

That brings me to our last point, IV. You're a Philemon when you view your business and wealth as belonging to God and gladly yield them for the greatest purpose. That's what Philemon did. "Everything I am now, everything belongs to me, it's all centered in Christ and centered in Christ's work and Christ's purposes and Christ's church." We don't know much about Onesiphorus on this point but definitely Lydia was like Philemon. When this

woman of purple fabrics probably making fantastic profits said, "I don't care." Because right after Lydia's baptized and the church is started in her home, Paul is persecuted by a businessman in the community and he gets locked in prison. But Lydia says, "It doesn't matter to me. My business is on the line, my home is on the line, my reputation, it's all Christ." Powerful stuff. Powerful stuff.

So we see the example of Philemon and in Lydia this lack of dividedness. It's all one in Christianity and my commitment to his local church permeates all of it. Actually Lydia and Philemon and Onesiphorus remind us of another man, actually several but one other I'll mention in the New Testament: Joseph of Arimathea. The Bible calls him a righteous and good man and he was one of the leaders in Israel which meant he had wealth and influence and when Jesus died, he boldly goes to Pilate and asks for Jesus' body and associates himself with the most scorned and hated and rejected man that they'd probably known in centuries, and didn't just say, "I'm gonna take His body and bury Him," he said, "I'm putting Him in my tomb. I, I'm putting it out there I'm one of His."

Do you remember James Cash Penney? Do you remember him? No, you remember J. C. Penney, the same guy. J. C. Penney at the early part of the 20th century built an empire of dry good stores. J. C. Penney, you may not know, was raised in a preacher's home. His dad was a Baptist preacher. Don't tell anybody but he was a Calvinist Baptist preacher. And his godly mom and his godly dad poured biblical truth into him. Matter of fact, at a young age he bought his first store and it was called the "Golden Rule Store." That was, they weren't called J. C. Penney's at the first. Golden Rule Stores. He had great vision, he had great discipline. He was super-successful. He builds this empire but his heart didn't yet belong to Christ. The Great Depression hits. His empire begins to crumble. His finances begin to dwindle but not primarily from the Depression but because he had made some foolish investments in banks and in real estate. J. C. Penney went into a despondency, a depression. He became suicidal.

One of his dear friends encouraged him to go to a sanatorium in Battle Creek, Michigan and he did and he checked himself into the sanatorium and J. C. Penney's own words is that, "One morning I woke up before breakfast and I was walking down the hallway and I heard some people in a room." And he walked into the room which was the chapel there and some doctors and nurses were sharing Scripture and praying before the day started and one of those doctors quoted from the words of Jesus, "Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." That's all it took. J. C. Penney's testimony is, "My heart was changed immediately. I became a different man." He said, "I almost lost my wife and my children and it was my own fault but God gave me all of that back." He went back to rebuild his stores and it got greater than ever before and became one of the greatest businesses in the world of his day, certainly in his line of work.

J. C. Penney then did, did something that you probably thought he had already done. He went to a local church and he was baptized and became a member. Well, of course he did. No, you don't understand. J. C. Penney was, had great bitterness and resistance to the organized church because when his, when he was a young boy, his father was preaching and teaching the church that they needed to start a Sunday school. You do understand

Sunday schools haven't always been around. The Sunday school movement was starting and it was designed initially to get the kids of unchurched people into the church and teach them the things of God, teach them the gospel. And he wanted to reach these children but the men of his church adamantly opposed him and fired him and ran him out of the church and they were lived in abject poverty for years. It was so difficult. Probably part of the reason why James Cash Penney gave himself to build such an empire and gain wealth. He knew what it was like to have nothing.

Well, he was resistant to the church but God had changed his heart and he realized, "The church is right and I'm to be baptized." And he joined the church and he gave his life to serving the Lord. J. C. Penney spent the latter days of his life leading his company to view his business now as a tool for God. In his latter years, he said, "I'm not here to be successful, I'm here for a different cause." He developed many ministries and Christian ministries and charities. One of the things that speaks to me most strongly is he, he bought 60 acres of land and filled it with homes and gave those homes to Christian missionaries and Christian ministers when they retired because in those days guys would retire, leave a pastorate and be in poverty, have nowhere to live. That was the heart of J. C. Penney. J. C. Penney was changed by the gospel and then he was changed so that he began to use his business and his wealth for the greatest purpose.

So I come to this new ministry that I'm initiating today. Brother Chad Epperson(ph) has agreed to direct this ministry. You know, Brother Chad was on our staff, I don't know if it was two separate times or one whole time, Chad, but he was director of small groups and children's director. But the whole time he was here, he always had a cellphone on his ear, and he kinda had that business mind. And Brother Chad, I remember the day you and I sat in the parking lot in front of the building and we were talking about, "I wonder if can get the money and buy this and start a business?" You couldn't have started any lower than Chad started. When you go to Jeff Noblit and ask him about where to get money to start a business, you're just down at the bottom of the barrel. Now I think more than that, he just wanted to honor his pastor but I remember sitting in the parking lot. And Chad's had a vision of structuring the whole business to have a witness for Christ and I know that's a heart of a lot of our men but Chad's just kind of that guy that has it all structured and organized and we've talked through the years and had a burden for that. It wasn't long ago that he and I were talking and I said, "Chad, we need to get this in the local church more and get it multiplying through our churches." And he said, "Count on me. I love that." So you asked for it, brother, so here we go. So I appreciate his willingness to head this up and take the decades of learning. I think last I heard, you're, you're, you have about 100 employees, right under that, I think? Okay, and so God's greatly blessed his business but it is a strong and faithful witness for Christ.

So we're calling and go ahead and put the title up there. We're calling this the Grace Life Church Philemon Fellowship. It's the Philemon Fellowship. The objective as you see there is to develop and encouraging mentoring fellowship of men to build great businesses that exist for the greatest purpose. That's the objective. Now some subpoints there. These will not be on the screen, but as Philemon was, we want these men to be loyal supporters and trusted friends of their local church pastor. You're already doing that

well. And the spirit of Philemon, we want these men to be, to develop their businesses to have a high priority of supporting God's church and missions through God's local churches. So many of you guys are doing that well. And thirdly, to see the Philemon Fellowship as an extension of our foundational ministries but not a replacement. This cannot become your church, it cannot become your small group. If it does, I'll dismiss you from it. If you're not faithful in those areas now, you can't be in the Philemon Fellowship. That'd be upside down, all right?

You say, "Is it only for businessmen?" Absolutely not. Some of you guys are young guys, maybe older guys, and you've dreamed about starting a business. We need you in there. Some of you guys are just gonna work and punch the clock and that's wonderful and that's honorable. We need you there because more than anything this is about being a witness in the workplace for the glory of God. It's not in any way going to be about legalism. It'll not be, "Well, if you don't do these things the way Chad did it or the way this brother does it, then..." No, we're not doing any of that. Matter of fact, Chad's been very humble to tell me several times, "Pastor, I need to learn from these brothers." But we can learn from each other and be more like a Philemon, more like a J. C. Penney in his latter days.

So that's basically the objective. The meetings, we're talking about meeting once every two months on a Sunday evening since we're not having services on Sunday evening at this time. And, uh, this, the first one will be August 22 at 6 o'clock and we'll provide dinner, all right? Open to all men. You might say, "Well, pastor, you've preached about Lydia, what about the ladies?" I, I don't know. I'm not against that but here's what I'm seeing happen. A number of our men already fellowship around these truths now and, Brother Chad, you'll agree with me, it just builds bonding and closeness and I just, I'm not comfortable with ladies being interspersed in that kind of intimacy and bonding and closeness. A church needs to be disciplined about those things so I don't know yet. I just don't know. Right now it's just for the men.

Our topics when we have these meetings every two months will be like, the first one we cannot divide our lives, secondly, you don't own it, thirdly, God's standards are not the world's standards, fourthly, your business is an extension of your ministry. Another session, what, what do or what are must-do roles for Christian CEO's and etc. etc. Now there'll be a lot of time spent explaining how you can be open in your witness for Christ like Philemon was in his business, like Lydia was surrounding her business without getting into a lawsuit. There's a big concern today and there's a real strong clear law about this and how you can follow these things and avoid some of the pitfalls that could come upon you.

Lastly, the vision for this ministry is to see God or God's work rather of planting and revitalizing sound local churches, flourish to the ends of the earth for the glory of God. I can guarantee if you sat down Philemon or if you sat down Lydia and said, "Now, now what are you about now?" They'd say, "We want to have a great business but we want you to know we're supporting Paul in this work of planting churches and getting this to the ends of the earth."

Now that's the broad vision, more specifically for us, the Grace Life Church Philemon Fellowship will be a fellowship of godly men in Grace Life Church whom God might use to mentor other men and other churches to build great businesses that exist for the greatest purpose. That fires me up. I'm not after your money. Can I tell you something? I don't need your money. I don't need your money but I want God to have your heart and Christian ministry does require money just like, no doubt, Philemon generously supported Paul financially and about Lydia generously supported Paul financially. That's always there but I'm free from that temptation. Well, let me say that, I don't walk in that temptation. But God wants your heart. Don't think there's anything wrong with you working hard and building a great business and living comfortably and with nice stuff. I'm not against that because I can't tell you in the Bible, but I am against you making an idol out of that business and an idol out of that stuff and not seeing it as a tool for the glory of God.

Are you listening to me? By the way, that's true whether you make \$20,000 a year or \$20 million a year. It's the heart. That's why, brothers, I'm saying all of us can benefit because this is going to be a fellowship of men who get together without legalism, without saying you've got to do it like me, but to say are we committed to these broad biblical principles and it be iron sharpening iron and one man sharpening another. Now let me say this to you. There are some of you guys, you've had work and business for years and you might say, "Well, I, I don't think I've been very good at that." And maybe you're even saying, "I don't know, I may have failed." Look, first of all, the past is the past, but secondly, you've done a lot of good things too. Some of you who don't think you have, you've done a lot of solid, God-centered, good stuff and you can help some brothers. And I'm especially jealous for our young men because some of you guys are starting out, you're investing, you're building businesses and I want you to be wildly successful but I don't want you to end up with \$20 million, I want you to end up with \$200 million because God could bless you more because you put him first.

Yesterday I was running some errands with my wife. You know, as you get older you do that on Saturday. Do you notice that? David Young goes to Sam's on Saturday because that's, that's what old people do. I was in Sam's Saturday. We were driving through the Regency Square Mall parking lot and we came across that great big vacant building that used to be J. C. Penney's. Gone. Empty. Abandoned. Matter of fact, I read where J. C. Penney is just in recent days has closed over 150 stores. They've just come out of bankruptcy. They're having some hard times and who knows, they may go completely out of business but if every single J. C. Penney store closes and his financial empire is over, what Mr. Penney did with his vast wealth for Christ and his church will last for eternity. I'm still being blessed by it and the man's been in heaven for a good while.

What's going to be your legacy? I mean, everything's changed. You go to the internet now instead of J. C. Penney's. But what's done for Christ will last. Nothing wrong that Mr. Penney and his descendants had a wonderful comfortable life and retirement and everything, but he made an investment. I read somewhere where he was giving 90% of his wealth every year to Christian causes by the time he died.

Let's have the spirit of a Philemon, a Lydia, an Onesiphorus, and let's pray and ask God, "God, would You let this come from our hearts? Would You let us be real about it and let us walk in it so we can take it to our sister churches and plants and help them?" I'm telling you guys, just listen to me. So few pastors have what I have. They don't have the kind of love and support you give me. I don't deserve it but God wants you to give it. You get that? It's not about me, it's about you loving God enough to love his pastor, that's all it is. Warts and all. But some of our churches would be so helped if we could take this out of our church and meet with some of their men and get them thinking this way, a huge help for some of these pastors and churches.

Well, that's the vision, that's the ministry. It won't require much time at all but pray for us as we go forward for the glory of God. Now I told you it was a different kind of sermon with a different kind of purpose, but I hope many many many of you guys will get in on it. Don't think now, "Well, that really don't apply to me." If you're a breathing man and you're in the world, it applies to you.