

Philippians 2 pt. 3 v19-30 - Timothy and Epaphroditus - Faithful Workers

Paul comes to some administrative matters in his letter to the Philippians. More specifically he lays out his plan for sending a couple of men on their way to Philippi.

Ministry is more than just sermonizing. In fact, the bulk share of the ministerial work is more than just sermonizing. There are many things involved in keeping our service on the right track and doing the work that the Lord has called us to.

The Lord gifts His church, as He wills, with people who are best suited to carry out His work and He sends those people out for His own purposes. Sometimes we even get to be a part of that.

In this portion of Scripture we see just such men who embody the attitude of Christ-like service and who are committed to laboring in God's Kingdom. Their names are Timothy and Epaphroditus.

V.19 - Timothy

The first of these men is Timothy; for whom two of our NT books are named, both of which are letters written to him by Paul while Timothy was off serving the church in Ephesus.

We know much of Timothy from the NT writings. In fact, Timothy is mentioned 24 times in the NT corpus.

Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman (Eunice) who was married to a Greek man who remains unnamed in the text. His grandmother Lois, a believer like his mother, is also mentioned in 2 Tim 1:5.

He accompanied Paul on many of his journeys; this is recorded for us in Acts, and when Paul was unable to travel to certain places he would often send Timothy in his place even to deal with the most incendiary of matters. (1 Cor 4:17)

Paul first took Timothy under his wing in Acts 16.

[Act 16:1-3 NKJV] 1 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, [the] son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father [was] Greek.
2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and

Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took [him] and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

During their time travelling and serving together they grew quite close. 10 to 12 years had passed since Paul and Timothy first met and the writing of this letter. Over time Timothy had proved himself able, faithful and trustworthy.

Here in v.19 Paul plans to send this dedicated worker to the Philippians so that he might discover how everything is going. Paul wants to put eyes on the situation, have a body in the room.

There's no better way to get to know somebody than spending time with them and Paul is sending Timothy to do just that since he himself is currently imprisoned.

V.20 - Paul trusts Timothy to not only observe faithfully the state of the church at Philippi but to care for them in the same way that he would care for them - sincerely, genuinely, affectionately.

He describes Timothy as being like-minded in a unique way - a way that nobody else in Paul's ministry circle really fit into except Timothy.

They had a unity of mind with one another - something that Paul has been encouraging the Philippians to adopt.

[Phi 2:2 NKJV] 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind.

It was important for Paul to choose the RIGHT person for this task.

This required a special touch - a unity of mind and a unity of heart as demonstrated by the care that Paul knew Timothy would give to the Body at Philippi. After all, Paul wouldn't be able to coach Timothy over the shoulder. Timothy would be flying solo!

Similarly, our work in the kingdom should be marked by a unity of mind and sincere care; not simply the administrative task of caring for people like a production manager making widgets on an assembly line but a deep, earnest, concerned care for the lives of God's people.

That is important for any church, anywhere! Unfortunately there are those within the church who only see ministry as a job and their lackluster commitment and care for the church reflects that view.

There are some who approach ministry from an adversarial or competitive position which really betrays their own selfish motives or desire to “be somebody.”

Rather than sharing a unity of mind and genuine affection for God’s people they would rather obscure, confuse, or block everybody else's efforts in a grab for power that isn’t ours in the first place!

Perhaps that seems too extreme. Paul confirms this in quite strong language in v.21.

V.21- Paul has addressed the idea previously that men enter the ministry with mixed motives.

“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish

ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains;”
(Phil 1:15-16)

Sadly, Paul’s language here in v.21 seems to indicate that those who are known to him IN MINISTRY aren’t cut from the same cloth as he and Timothy. While this can be taken in a general sense, we have reason to suspect that he probably had certain, particular men in mind as he declared “all seek their own, not the things of Christ.”¹

This is a sentiment we know all too well. Having surveyed the landscape of modern christendom it is easy to conjure up a list of crooks who are purposefully taking advantage of God’s people -- as it was in Paul’s own day!

In direct contradiction to Paul’s exhortation to adopt the humility, mind, and ministry of Christ; rather than “esteeming others better than themselves,” these men sought their own gratification.

We know that at the end of Paul’s ministry many of his one time companions left him - having a stronger affection for the world

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 268.

than for Paul, the church, the saints and more importantly the Lord Jesus himself.

Specifically a man named Demas, once listed alongside other fellow laborers like Luke and Mark, bailed completely on ministry. (Col 4:14, Phm 1:24)

[2Ti 4:10 NKJV] 10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica...

[2Ti 4:16 NKJV] 16 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

We know too that “false brethren,” were named among the multitude of perils that Paul experienced in ministry (2 Cor 11:26, Gal 2:4)

It's no wonder then that Paul saw the value in faithful, like-minded, sincere co-laborers - these men and women are far and few between.

“Few come to the help of the Lord’s cause, where ease, fame, and gain have to be sacrificed. Most help only when Christ’s gain is compatible with their own...”²

This is a call to serious self-reflection.

V.22 Contrary to this Timothy enjoys much commendation from Paul.

Notice that Paul didn’t withhold this praise just so Timothy wouldn’t get a big-head! Also note that this isn’t flattery but an honest assessment of Timothy's faithfulness that has been tried and tested over time and been found pure.

The relationship these men shared was that of a son to a father.

Paul had spent much time training, instructing, and encouraging Timothy. Pouring into Timothy, along with the grace of Christ, produced the fruit of faithfulness and care that is so necessary among pastors.

² Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 365.

Paul understood the responsibility to raise up a spiritual generation to follow - sons of faith to advance the kingdom after his departure.

As a matter of fact, Paul explicitly instructs his own spiritual son to raise up the next generation of disciples in his very last letter before his death.

[2Ti 2:1-2 NKJV] 1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Our faith is a disciple-making faith and a faith that finds its realization in the expansion of the family of God. All of us, adopted into Christ's family, are commissioned by the Lord Jesus himself to make other disciples and to care for people the way an ideal family does. (Matt 28:19)

It's important to highlight the term "ideal" family because many people bear the deepest scars from their own earthly families. Those families turned out to be less than ideal. That is true for the

church as well. Many people bear deep wounds from a less than ideal church family as well.

BUT, when we adopt the mind of Christ, lay aside our selfish ambitions, esteem others as better than ourselves and care for one another as Christ cares for us then we can be about the business of raising up sons and daughters of the faith.

Yes, there will be bumps, arguments, some selfishness, and growing pains along the way. There will be hurts. But, in Christ's family, His grace is the foundation of our eternal family and that is what allows us to bear with one another, bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:1-2, Col 3:13)

Paul raised up a spiritual son who proved his mettle and whom Paul had every confidence in.

The terminology employed by Paul here, "...is used of gold or silver which has been tested and found genuine."³ Timothy was the real deal!

³ I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 80.

V.23-24 Paul reiterates his desire to send Timothy to minister to the saints at Philippi after he discovered more of how his situation would play out in Rome. AND, Paul expresses confidence that the Lord would make allowance for him to visit as well.

Paul was eventually released from this first imprisonment for a few years before being arrested a second time and finally killed at the hands of Caesar Nero c. 66 AD.

V.25-27 Epaphroditus

We are introduced to a man by the name of Epaphroditus.

This man was actually part of the Philippian church. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus earlier to deliver their care package to him. The Philippians were great material supporters of Paul's ministry. (Phil 4:14)

Paul commends Epaphroditus as a brother, a worker, a soldier, a messenger, and a servant.

That is quite comprehensive! This is a man you want on your team -- one who shares in that familial understanding of ministry -

that we are more than just coworkers but we are family in Christ; a man that understands that ministry is work, it requires effort; a man that understands that part of our calling is to stand as soldiers in the armor which God provides in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation; and one who willingly accepts the task as messenger and servant to those in need - namely Paul.

Remember that the Philippian church loved Paul and it appears that they sent their very best to care for him in his time of need.

Now, even though Epaphroditus appears to be a rockstar of the faith - he became sick, so sick that he nearly died.

We are now confronted with the reality that good people get sick. Christians get sick. The people we lean on and look to become ill.

God has not promised to keep us all from every illness. We are part of a fallen creation subject to its maladies until the Father makes all things new once and for all.

Paul felt the weight of this illness too, he felt deep sorrow watching somebody he cared about come close to death. He

wasn't a robot with no emotions or who reduced all of human suffering to "God's will," in the dismissive sense that we find in calloused believers.

Yes, we take hope in the resurrection and God's perfect will, but that doesn't mute our feeling of sorrow in the moment - even as demonstrated by Paul's own deep sorrow.

"Here only occurs anything of a sorrowful tone in this Epistle, which generally is most joyous."⁴

Mercifully, God was good to Epaphroditus. We can be sure that much prayer was had for him as he lay sick, at the precipice of death. Remarkably none of that is recorded for us here - only the fact that God intervened on his behalf.

V.28 As God brings Epaphroditus back to full health Paul sends him on his way back to his home church so that they might rejoice in the miracle of God's goodness and also the dedication of their brother, Epaphroditus. This was good medicine for Paul's heart too!

⁴ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 365.

We really get the sense that Paul truly cared about the men and women that he shepherded, and that he experienced deep emotions for them.

V.29-30 As Epaphroditus returns to his sending church Paul instructs the Philippians to specifically hold Epaphroditus in high esteem as an example of sacrificial service in the name of Christ.

It's important to point out here that men worthy of this type of esteem are not going to demand it for themselves! Paul takes it upon himself to make sure that they do what is right and fitting.

This is not to be done in a weird, idolatrous way as some have adopted, putting the pastor and other servants on a pedestal where they don't belong. As we lovingly esteem those faithful servants who give so much of themselves for Christ we know that all fame, celebrity, and glory belong to God alone!

Paul writes to the Thessalonians, [1Th 5:12-13 NKJV] 12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

Later he writes to Timothy similarly, [1Ti 5:17 NKJV] 17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

As the Body recognizes the marks of Christ born by these humble servants they are to honor them in turn by love, affection, respect and care.

We know a tree by the fruit that it bears (Matt 7:17). Even so, Christ's servants are known by how they resemble Him, how they humble themselves, how they don't count their own lives too high a cost for the cause of Christ.

The church was full of these types of people - willing to risk their own lives for what they saw as more important. And truly that is the mark of Christ. Giving all for the sake of others. (Rom 16:3-4)

[Jhn 15:12-13 NKJV] 12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

This sentiment, this commandment, this example first carried out by Christ, lies at the heart of the work that Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul embraced.

It is good and right for us to consider these examples of faithfulness who have walked before us.

It is good and right for us to consider the call to servanthood and the cost of service that we may each be called to bear.

It is good and right for us to consider and esteem those of our own number who faithfully labor for the Lord's sake placing the interests of others above their own for the glory and honor of God, for His kingdom, and for His people. Amen.