

Timothy and Epaphroditus
Models of Serving Others
Philippians 2:19-30

Introduction

Previously, Paul had exhorted the Philippians to be of one mind and to consider others above self. Jesus was given as the model for such a mindset. Paul then gave specifics as to what that life looked like in their faith community life. Here Paul turned to two of his co-workers as models of a Christ-like mindset. These two models were disciples who the Philippians had personally experienced living this selfless life. Underlying all Paul says about Timothy and Epaphroditus is another demonstration of the life he was calling the Philippians to model. Paul wanted the Philippians to exhibit the same characteristics within their community of faith and within the larger community of Philippi.

Timothy (Seeks The Interests Of Others): 2:19-24

The phrase “in the Lord” or “in Christ” is used 16 times in Philippians (1:1, 1:14; 2:1,5, 24, 29; 3:1,3,9,14; 4:2,4,7,10,19,21). Such an obvious focus tells us this was vital to Paul’s understanding of the life of a disciple. Paul’s life boiled down to life that is found only in relation to Jesus. “For me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Paul’s confidence, hope, trust, rejoicing, mindset, and the ability to stand firm was all found in relation to Jesus. The life of a disciple is found only in relation to Jesus.

This section is to some degree a letter of commendation. Timothy was being sent with the authority of the apostle Paul. Timothy would not be the carrier of the letter but would eventually visit the Philippians after they had received the letter. One purpose of the visit was to cheer up Paul. This goes back to the comments about “boast” in 2:16. The thing that concerned Paul was the behavior of the disciples in Philippi and how it affected the faith community and how it affected the influence of the gospel in Philippi. The thing that would cheer Paul up would be to hear that the faith community in Philippi was living life as a community that was worthy of the gospel (1:27).

Paul’s description of Timothy in verse 20 is virtually a repeat of what Paul wrote in 2:4 and a repeat of what was lived out in the life of Jesus (2:6-8). Timothy was another model for the kind of behavior that Paul was calling the Philippians to embrace. The Philippians experienced both Paul and Timothy living out the mind of Christ from the first time the two arrived in Philippi. The phrase translated “your welfare” is the same Greek phrase spoken of in the comments of 1:27. It is best understood as “your affairs,” your affairs in terms of life within the community of faith. Paul again stressed that he wanted to know how the faith community was doing in relation to the gospel. Were they living a life worthy of the gospel or not?

In 2:4-5, Paul exhorted the Philippians to look out for the interest of others rather than their own interests and used Jesus as the ultimate model for such a mindset. Now,

Timothy is described as one who was genuinely concerned and unlike those who sought self-interest (1:15-17). The Philippians had probably never seen Jesus in the flesh but they had seen the mind of Christ lived out in the lives of Paul and Timothy. Jesus was the ultimate model but Paul and Timothy were models as well. Our English translations (“no one like him”) do not do justice to Paul’s thought concerning Timothy. Timothy was literally “like-souled.” The word here contains the word that is translated “soul” (“psucho”). Timothy was a “soul mate” to Paul. The word “soul” is also found in the earlier word “cheered.” Timothy, the one who was a “soul-mate” of Paul’s was going to Philippi so Paul would be “good souled.” Paul’s concerns and interests were Timothy’s concerns and interests. They had a father/son relationship that existed only in the context of the gospel.

It is not clear who the “all” is in 2:21. The idea behind the word is not literally “all” but rather carries the idea of “whole lot of them.” This very likely refers to those who preached Christ out of selfish ambition (1:15-17) and/or those who were promoting conflict in Philippi.

Timothy’s “worth” or “proven character” is to be understood in the context of someone who has been put to the test or undergone a severe ordeal. Just as Jesus underwent a severe ordeal living out a life that considered others first, Timothy had done the same thing. 2 Corinthians 8:2,9; 9:13 show this understanding of this Greek word. Timothy’s serving was not serving in general. Paul was not talking about Timothy’s character in general. This serving, as it was with Paul, had everything to do with the gospel.

Epaphroditus (Fellow Soldier): 2:25-30

It is not known when Epaphroditus had been in Philippi, but he had been at some point (“rejoice at seeing him again” - 2:28). He would be the bearer of the letter prior to Timothy’s arrival. This section is another letter of commendation. While it might be thought that Epaphroditus did not need such, the current situation in Philippi made it important. Epaphroditus was not just someone coming for a visit to renew old acquaintances. He was coming with an instructional letter from the apostle Paul that addressed the affairs of the Philippian faith community. Paul wanted the Philippians to know of Paul’s relationship with Epaphroditus. It was not a casual relationship. As with Timothy, it revolved around the gospel. Epaphroditus was a “brother,” “co-worker,” “fellow soldier” (Epaphroditus was much like a wounded soldier returning for rest), and “minister to Paul’s need.” The word “minister” should be understood from a liturgical point perspective. It is the same word translated “offering” in 2:17. Epaphroditus had performed a priestly duty to God when doing something the Philippians were unable to do, minister to Paul’s needs. The only source for the necessities of life for prisoners was family and friends. Epaphroditus’ relationship with Philippi was that of a “messenger.”

Epaphroditus’ concern was not for his illness, but rather the stress news of his illness had upon the Philippians. Epaphroditus’ illness came as a result of his efforts for the “work of Christ.” Here again, we see someone who modeled the life of Christ. Epaphroditus risked his life for the gospel. He considered others more important than self. Epaphroditus’ survival was attributed to the merciful act of God. Maybe we should

see in this something like what Paul said of his own predicament. Paul believed he would survive prison because God wanted him to continue his ministry. It seems God was not through with Epaphroditus either.

Paul had some of that same concern for the Philippians. Paul expected Epaphroditus' arrival to bring joy to the Philippians even in the midst of their suffering. With all the apparent conflict they were dealing with, Epaphroditus would be an encouragement. The Philippian's welcoming of Epaphroditus was to be "in the Lord." Earlier this phrase was addressed. Everything that a disciple does is to be within the realm of their relationship with Jesus.

Conclusion

After putting forth Jesus as the template for the life of the disciple, Paul put forth two co-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Both had modeled the idea of considering others above themselves. Timothy's endured through trials while preaching the gospel and Epaphroditus' risked his life for the gospel. Not only had Epaphroditus risked his life, he had ministered to Paul in a way that the Philippians could not.

Paul was sending a letter with Epaphroditus that would address the affairs of the Philippian faith community. Later Timothy would be sent to see if the Philippians had heeded his message. As was true with all the communities where Paul took the gospel, Paul was concerned about the Philippian's faithfulness to the gospel. The thing that would cheer Paul up would be to hear that the Philippians' were getting their act together striving side-by-side for the gospel in the midst of a hostile environment.

Points To Be Made

1. Everything a disciple does grows out of and is influenced by their relationship with Jesus. It is to be approached "in the Lord."
2. Jesus is the template for a disciple's life but anyone can to some degree model the mind-set of considering others first.
3. The affairs of a Christian faith community are to be one of unity, considering others first, and living out the gospel in the community in which they live.