

Please turn in your copies of God's Word to Philippians chapter 2. We will be completing this chapter today, building upon the teaching which has come before. As I mentioned last week Paul is making a shift into a very practical application of the doctrines he has expressed. Our passage this week continues this practical application of doctrine. So hear now the Word of our Lord from Philippians 2 beginning at verse 19.

Read Philippians 2:19-30

Prayer

Many of us here have had mentors or examples to which we can look throughout our lives. It could be a mentor in the workplace who aided you in being able to fulfill the obligations of your job well. It could be an older woman who you looked to for advice in marital and child-rearing matters. It could be a spiritual mentor, one who you looked to for guidance in spiritual matters and who helped instruct you in how to be more mature in the faith. Mentors are seen all throughout Scripture and are viewed as an important part in one's personal growth. Joshua had Moses; Mark had Peter; Timothy had Paul. An important part of this mentor relationship wasn't simply to provide counsel and instruction, but to be living examples which to follow. Here in our passage we are presented with two such living examples which we are to follow. Paul completes the pattern of teaching in chapter two by holding forth Timothy and Epaphroditus as examples to the saints at Philippi. He has urged the Philippians to be humble (vv. 1-4); he has expounded that pattern from the example of Christ himself (vv. 5-11), and drawn out its implications and the motivations which should encourage it (vv. 12-18). Now he is saying here are two men you know who illustrate the very qualities you are to imitate. Salvation has been worked out in their characters - look at them and you will know exactly what I mean. If we you really going to learn how best to implement the the truths which Paul has previously spoken of, you need to see what these truths do, not learn of them merely in the abstract, but in concrete examples of real people and real lives. The lives of these

men are laid before you as examples for you to emulate. So in looking at their example the charge is laid out to you this day, brothers and sisters. Be faithful fellow-laborers for the sake of Christ. We will consider this charge, looking at the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus, under three aspects of a faithful fellow: first, the selflessness of a faithful fellow; next, the service of a faithful fellow; and finally, the sacrifice of a faithful fellow.

First, let us look to the example of Timothy and see the selflessness of a faithful fellow. Look with me at verses 19-23, “But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.” Paul has an earnest desire to go be with the Philippians, but he knows for the time being he is unable to do so. Since Paul cannot make the journey himself, he hopes to send Timothy to the saints. He says this is because he trusts Timothy; he knows the purity of Timothy’s heart; he even says that he has no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. These words deliberately echo verses 3 and 4 in which Paul had urged the Philippians to look out not only for their own interests but for each other’s. It was in that context that he had introduced the ‘mind’ of Christ Jesus (v. 5). He, supremely, had been concerned for others’ interests, not for His own. He ‘thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.’ (vv. 6-7). That pattern Paul saw repeated in his spiritual son, Timothy.

Timothy exhibited the unity and humility which Paul had been focusing on so greatly throughout this letter. He says, “For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” What a great recommendation this is for Timothy, but what a sad statement it is

that is made against all others. Were there truly none who cared for others, who sought their own and not the things which are Jesus Christ's? Probably not. Paul is not lying here, but he does seem to be using hyperbole to emphasize the selfless nature of Timothy. He is using the selfishness which is, unfortunately, found in so many within the Church to commend Timothy who esteems others higher than himself. Matthew Henry comments, "Many prefer their own credit, ease, and safety, before truth, holiness, and duty, the things of their own pleasure and reputation before the things of Christ's kingdom and his honour and interest in the world: but Timothy was none of these." Paul wanted to put the minds of the Philippians at ease by ensuring them that their needs would be met by the work of one who cared more about them than himself. Timothy truly is an example unto the Philippians of the selflessness which those who are in Christ are to exhibit.

Can the same be said of you as well, brothers and sisters? Have you had your mind brought low even to the greatest depths of humility so that you esteem others as greater than yourselves? Do you put the needs of others before your own needs, even which it could potentially be a great cost to yourself? Henry says, "A selfish spirit is destructive of Christian love. We must be concerned not only for our own credit, and ease, and safety, but for those of others also; and rejoice in the prosperity of others as truly as in our own. We must love our neighbour as ourselves, and make his case our own." What is the state of your minds towards the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you found your own concerns swallowed up, as it were, in a concern for Him and His glory? Can you adopt, even in the most qualified sense, that expression of the Psalmist, "The zeal of thine house has even consumed me!" (Psalm 64:9) What is the state of your minds towards your brothers and sisters? Are your concerns more for their wellbeing than for your own? Are you willing to consider yourself the least among the brethren so that you can wholly tend to the needs of others? Friends, this is what is required of you if you profess Christ. If you are to be a faithful fellow-laborer for the sake of Christ you must put on the humility of

Christ. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Look to the example of Timothy and seek to exhibit the selflessness of a faithful fellow.

Paul then goes on and gives another as an example to emulate, that of Epaphroditus. What’s interesting is that Epaphroditus seems to be just an ordinary guy from the Church at Philippi. He may have been a deacon since we see that he is tasked with caring for the mercy needs of Paul, but likely he was just a man who was willing to serve the Church in any way he could. That leads us now to consider from the example of Epaphroditus the service of a faithful fellow. Look at verses 24 and 25, “But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly. Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.” Here we see a string of descriptors which Paul uses to speak of the service of this faithful fellow. He is said to be Paul’s brother; this is a recognition that in Christ we are all equal and are all part of the same household of faith. When you consider who Paul once was and who Epaphroditus once was, this statement speaks volumes to the unity which is found only in the Gospel. Paul, prior to his conversion, was a Jew of Jews, a pharisee of pharisees; he was consumed with zeal for the traditions of the Jewish people and despised all things not Jewish. Then you have Epaphroditus, whose name stems from the Greek goddess Aphrodite. This man was likely raised a pagan and was even dedicated by his parents for service to a false religion. And yet both men were radically transformed by the saving power of the Spirit of Christ renewing their hearts, and now they are able to say that they are no longer enemies but brothers. This is a beautiful example of Ephesians 2:13-15, “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments

contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.”

Paul goes on to describe Epaphroditus as a “companion in labour, and fellowsoldier.” They both had the same mission, which was to see the glory of Christ be exalted and His Gospel spread forth to all people. Paul viewed him as a fellow-laborer, one who worked alongside him to see the Gospel proclaimed. But not only that, he was a fellowsoldier, one who fought the good fight, who warred a good warfare. Ask anyone who has been in the military is faithful service is required to be a good soldier. They will all tell you it is vitally important. Epaphroditus knew that he was at war against the evil of his present age and he fought alongside Paul as a fellowsoldier in that war. He understood what Paul meant when he wrote in Ephesians 6:12, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” This is a crucial aspect of service which is require for all who believe the Gospel. But that was not the only way in which Epaphroditus served. Paul also says that Epaphroditus ministered to his wants. He not only served Christ in fighting the spiritual war against the forces of darkness, but he served the Church in ministering to those in need. He was sent as a messenger by the Church at Philippi and when he got to Paul he ministered to his wants. What a beautiful example of selfless service we have in this faithful fellow.

Dear saints, this is the service which you are called to as well. The Lord Jesus Christ did not redeem you with His own blood in order for you to sit there and simply enjoy the benefits of it without serving Him with your lives. We are at war. The enemy is just as active now as he was during the first century. Countless people are being deceived by doctrines of devils, heretics are leading those within the Church astray, cults are operating even just down the street from us. As I said last week, this world is an incredibly dark place, and it’s dark because the prince of darkness is still at work

within it. Calvin writes, “Let those, then, who prepare themselves for edifying the Church, know that war is denounced against them, and prepared. This, indeed, is common to all Christians – to be soldiers in the camp of Christ, for Satan is the enemy of all.” But this is not the only way in which you are to serve Christ. Yes, you are to be a companion in labour and a fellowsoldier, but you are also to minister to the wants of others. When someone is sick pray for them and offer to bring them whatever is needed. When someone is in the hospital go visit them, encourage them, pray for them, provide for them. When someone is struggling and needs aid be there to assist them in whatever they need. We are to be the hands and feet of Christ; go and do so. Do not just expect someone else to take care of it; take the initiative and fulfill your Christian duty to serve one another. Heed the example of this great man and exhibit the service of a faithful fellow.

But it must be noted that this selflessness, this service, often comes with a price. That price is something which we all must consider, but it must be something which we must all be willing to pay. This leads us now to consider the sacrifice of a faithful fellow. Look with me at verses 26-30, “For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.” Epaphroditus took a great risk in making this journey to give communication to Paul and to minister to his wants, and ultimately this risk nearly cost him his life. He became sick even unto death. You may be thinking that sickness isn’t a sacrifice; it’s something that is natural which cannot always be avoided. It would be helpful to see that Paul viewed it as a sacrifice for Christ’s sake. “Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life,

to supply your lack of service toward me.” We see from the book of Job that sometimes illness and calamity is the work of Satan seeking to dishearten a servant and destroy his service. This is likely what was happening here. When a believer dedicates himself to the service of the Lord he opens himself to increased attacks by the evil one.

Perhaps you’re not convinced by the example of Epaphroditus; look to the example of Paul, “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” Or even more clearly the example of Christ who in His service to His people “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Those who truly love Christ, and are hearty in the interests of His kingdom, will think it very well worth their while to hazard their health and life to do Him service, and promote the edification of His Church.

Friends, you must be willing to sacrifice for the sake of Christ. Nothing in this world should be off limits should the Lord in His providence deem it necessary to take it away for the sake of the Gospel advancing. This is what you may experience when you take up the cross and follow Christ. It is not a popular view of the Christian life, for we are too often obsessed instead with what the Gospel will do for ourselves (give me peace, purpose, joy, friendships, good experiences). But Scripture’s vocabulary of Christian experience is rugged and stretching. Our tendency is to say ‘If it hurts it cannot be truly spiritual’. But Paul’s tendency is to remind us that if it is spiritual it may well hurt - someone, somewhere, sometime. Charles Simeon writes, “We dread the

thought of sacrificing our present comforts, and of encountering hardships of any kind. Instead of “counting all things but loss for Christ,” we pause long before we will part with any thing: and we desire, for the most part, to have as cheap a religion as we can.” Friends you must give up your own right if you would discharge your duty as one called by Christ. A regard to your own interests must not be put in preference to Christ’s glory, or even placed upon a level with it. You must willing to part with everything, to give up everything, to face any calamities or turmoil or sickness or persecution that may come your way, and you must face it with joy for it is part and parcel to what it means to be a Christian. Follow the noble example of those who came before you and be willing to make the sacrifice of a faithful fellow.

Brothers and sisters, the worst thing you can do in this life as a follower of Christ is believe that you can do this on your own. The Christian faith is a covenantal one, meaning we are all a family, and we are all in this together. When one of us is hurting or in need, you must be willing to lay your own wants and desires aside and tend to others esteeming them greater than yourself. When the war is raging or a brother or sister needs ministering to, you must take up arms and war a good warfare for the sake of Christ as well as go and minister to your fellow laborers in the Church. When the Lord calls on you to give up everything, to give up the comforts of this life, the things of this world, your family, your friends, your health, even your own life, you must be willing to sign that blank check saying I will sacrifice everything for the cause of Christ. Friends, look to the examples of the many dear saints who have gone before you, two of which are exhibited here in our passage, emulate their examples, and be faithful fellow-laborers for the sake of Christ.