

Men Not Males

Philippians

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Well, if you do have a Bible in your hands, it would be a good time to open it and just turn to the passage that we read because it's very much connected with the way in which Paul has already been writing. If you've got one of our church Bibles or your own, you'll see that verse 19 of Philippians 2 looks like the start of a new section. Paul has been writing about the Christians in Philippi being living examples of Christ, putting one another first, putting Christ first, holding out the word of life, putting the Gospel first, in that way finding their lives resonating with Paul's own life, and now he turns to talk about some plans that he's got for Timothy and for Epaphroditus, and if we were doing that, then we would probably just sort of switch gear mentally and we'd just sort of lay out the plans, but Paul doesn't do that. Paul talks about the two men and why he's sending them, and as he talks about the two men, Timothy and Epaphroditus, then he carries on in the same sort of mental frame that he's been writing everything with so far. All the points of reference for what it means to be a normal Christian, for normal Christianity, all the points of reference that we've seen from back in chapter 1 around verse 15, certainly from verse 27 following about normal Christianity, all land on Timothy and Epaphroditus.

So when Paul is talking about Timothy, he uses phrases that he's already used. Where did Timothy's interest lie? Well, Timothy's interests lie exactly where Paul has said all the Philippians Christians' interests should lie, that is, they should look to the interest of others and the interest of Christ. When he talks about Epaphroditus, he's going to talk about a man who risked his life to serve others, to put them first. Of course, that's exactly what he's been talking about in the example of Christ in verses 6 to 11. So in Timothy and in Epaphroditus, we see two living examples. This just comes out in the way Paul writes about them. This isn't some neat point that the minister is trying to make from an otherwise sort of slack bit of the letter, we see in Timothy and Epaphroditus, Paul presenting them to the church in Philippi as living examples of exactly what he's been talking about.

Now, let's just dwell on that for a moment. What that means is that what Paul's been talking about, normal Christianity, putting Christ first, proclaiming Christ, that being the most important thing because Christ being exalted is the most important thing in our lives, putting him first and therefore serving one another and being united with him and

not putting ourselves first individually, as Paul has been writing about these things, he then turns and talks about Timothy and Epaphroditus who are in all other ways two normal blokes. They are men but they are men, not simply males. Male is your gender. Man, men, is more a reference to your character and your conduct.

Well, these two men, they are just ordinary blokes. Epaphroditus is one of the Philippians. He'd come from them to see Paul to bring gifts and bring their kindness and their love back to Paul in practical ways, as Paul is in prison in Rome. Timothy. Timothy was just a bloke who had become a Christian, started following working with Paul on Paul's first missionary journey. Neither of them were in any other way significant people except that they did the normal Christian thing, that is, they put Christ first in their lives which meant that other people were second in their lives, and they put themselves last, and they did so at great cost.

So I want us to bear in mind that these are two ordinary folk. This really is normal Christianity. This godly men who are not supposed to be like one or two every generation. So if you're a bloke, this is for us. If you're a woman, this is what to pray for the men in Gilcomston. This is what to pray. This is the kind of thing to have in mind when you're praying for the men in Gilcomston, when you're praying for the men in your life, when you're praying for those four boys. These are the kind of things to have in mind. So it affects us all this morning.

Timothy then, first of all. Timothy was almost certainly converted on Paul's first missionary journey and even though that's when he began to become sort of a fellow worker in the Gospel, he was the son of Lois who was mixed marriage, Jewish/Gentile background, and Lois's mother was Eunice and Eunice and Lois were both followers of Jesus. Eunice and Lois, as followers of Jesus, had done something which the men in Timothy's life hadn't done. There is no reference really to any influence from Lois's husband or Eunice's husband. They had done something that the men in Timothy's life hadn't done, they had passed on the word of life. They had passed on the Scriptures to Timothy, and they had done that from his birth. Now, of course, the Scriptures for them were the Old Testament.

So by the time Paul came along with Barnabas preaching the Gospel, all the seed had been sown in Timothy's life and it all clicked into place and Timothy must have seen what Paul wrote about when he wrote to the church in Rome about Christ being the end-point, the goal of the law of the Old Testament. And Timothy saw that and responded not primarily to Paul as sort of a strong and godly male influence in his life, but to Christ who made sense of everything that he'd been taught from his mum and his grandma, his mother's mum, who is always more significant. That's why you must never throw it off a bus.

He became a fellow worker with Paul so very soon after his conversion, I mean, he didn't have to wait until he was like in his mid-70s before he was qualified to become something in the church, immediately a young Christian and a young man was given responsibility, was given an involvement in the work of the Gospel with Paul. So

Timothy accompanied Paul on the second missionary journey that Paul made. Timothy was with Paul when they went to Philippi with the Gospel, Paul, Silas and Timothy. Timothy was with Paul and Silas when they went down from there to Thessalonica.

So Timothy went through the same persecutions that Paul had gone through, shared them with him. Timothy had to escape places where riots broke out. This young Christian, this young man was constantly having to risk his life for one reason: not that he was with Paul, but because he was with Christ. And that was never better demonstrated than by the fact that Paul could send Timothy off as kind of an outrider, so when Paul made his way down to Corinth, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to find out how they were doing so that, then, Timothy could come and join Paul, waited around in Athens, got them in Corinth, to tell him how the church in Thessalonica was getting on. Paul could send Timothy into situations where some correction of false doctrine, some rebuke for ungodly conduct was needed. A relatively young guy, a relatively young Christian, but he could send him because Christ was first in Timothy's life, not Paul.

And that's even more extraordinary because of Timothy's character. He's called Timothy because it sort of rhymes with timid, or maybe it's the other way around. Timid Timothy. Timothy who would back down in the face of strong male opposition. Timothy who was of a somewhat nervous disposition. Timothy who needed encouragement. Timothy who needed Paul to write to him two letters just to sort of reinforce him and keep him on track. Timothy who struggled with lusts like every bloke. Timothy who struggled to confront people and Paul had to urge him to go and confront people who were teaching false things in the church. Here is Timothy, deeply loyal, Timothy who by temperament and disposition is not brave and courageous and sort of go at them, Timothy who struggles with things that every bloke struggles with, Timothy who needed the word of God to keep him on track, but Timothy of whom Paul could say, "I have no one else like him." No one else like him.

Timothy who did the very thing that Paul had been talking about, "For everyone looks out for his own interest," verse 21, "not those of Jesus Christ." But Timothy looked out for the interest of Christ which meant that he looked out for the church in Philippi. Timothy who had been there that morning down by the river, the river Gangites when the Lord opened Lydia's heart to the message and opened Europe to the Gospel. Timothy who had seen the results of preaching the Gospel faithfully, that Christ opened blind eyes, but that hard hearts were hardened yet further. Timothy who had proved himself as a son with a father, with Paul. Timothy who had found in that godly man what he had missed in the older men in his own life. Timothy who did what Jesus did, who served. Timothy who learned from Paul to serve the work of the Gospel of Christ.

Timothy wasn't a macho man. Let me talk about men, not males. We're talking about godly men. We're talking about men who mirror the likeness of Christ. We're talking about males who do things for the Gospel. We're talking about males who venture out beyond their own comfort zone, beyond the sort of perimeters that their temperament or dispositions might normally set for them. We're talking about males who serve and serve Christ. We're talking about males who so work in this world that the difference they leave

when they move on to somewhere else, the difference they've made that they leave behind them when they shuffle off this mortal coil, has almost nothing whatsoever to do with this world's values, this world's priorities, this world's fame, this world's reputation, this world's opinion. Nothing to do with this world's opinion because Christ has been first in their life and their natural affinity has been with those who are serving Christ and working for the Gospel. Their resonance, the resonance that has, as it were, brought a tune out of their lives has been exactly what Paul wrote about about himself, that the most important thing in life is not your reputation with your colleagues, it's not how cool people think you are, it's not how much money you can make, it's not how well people think of you, the most important thing in your life is not getting on exceptionally well with members of the opposite sex, the most important thing in your life is Jesus Christ.

And that's the kind of man Timothy was. Not a macho bloke, actually quite fragile. By disposition, timid. Not a big confrontationalist. He is not somebody who would ever ever be picked for an action movie but he was a man, not a male. He was a man of God.

Epaphroditus. As well as having a name that's quite difficult to spell unless you've read it a good few times, Epaphroditus is quite different from Timothy. Epaphroditus comes from Philippi. He's one of the local blokes. He's just one of the men in the fellowship. He's not known for having any great position of leadership. He's not a sort of a famous man in the church in the Philippi area. He's just one of the men in the fellowship who was able to take stuff from the rest of the fellowship who couldn't all go and visit Paul in prison, even though they would have wanted to. But he could go so he went and that's what distinguishes Epaphroditus, in one sense, from the rest of the fellowship. He had the time, he had the wherewithal, so he went with a gift. Epaphroditus who was different from Timothy in that Epaphroditus was, in one sense, more of a sort of an action figure, and yet with such a tender heart.

Look at how Paul writes of him. "I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus," and it's necessary for his sake, by the way, not for Paul's sake, not even for the church in Philippi, but it's necessary for Epaphroditus' sake. "I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother," that is, one in Christ, "fellow worker," he's a grafter, he does this stuff, "and fellow soldier," he will fight in battle; he won't back down; he will take on that which needs to be taken on; he is not a passive guy who just lets everything happen around him; he will put his head above the parapet, which is what soldiers do, isn't it? He won't stay in the trench even though that's quite obviously the safest place to be; he will get out there. So Epaphroditus, "my brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs."

Epaphroditus who is also a man after Paul's own heart because Epaphroditus is, as well as being a brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, as well as being a man who has tremendous sensitivity, he obviously has considerable amounts of emotional intelligence, as we might put it nowadays. He is not a man with the emotional resonance of a brick. He is a man who feels far more for the Philippians who are worried about him than he feels about himself and he's got good reason to be concerned about himself. The thing that distresses Epaphroditus is not the condition he's in but the fact that the folk back in

Philippi are worrying about him. So he's got a very tender heart. I mean, he feels stuff and he feels for people and it makes a difference to him. So he's not British.

You see, the thing that resonates with Paul and with Christ, the thing that resonates with what we've read already in Philippians is that Epaphroditus was an absolute full-time inveterate gambler. I don't mean gambling, I mean he risked everything and it's very interesting that Paul uses the word "risk" in verse 30. He doesn't say jeopardizing. He doesn't say sacrificing. He uses a word which describes an attitude in this man's heart that would make him think, "I don't know what the outcome is but I've got to take the action. I don't know how this will work out but I've got to do it." And that's what risk means, and that's what Epaphroditus did except Epaphroditus didn't risk some income for a few weeks or risk his job not being there when he got back to Philippi, Epaphroditus didn't risk his comfort, Epaphroditus didn't just risk his health, Epaphroditus didn't risk his prospects, Epaphroditus didn't risk his reputation, I mean, if it all went wrong, what will people say about him? Epaphroditus risked his life to take the stuff on behalf of his fellowship to Paul who was in prison.

"He almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you could not give me." Do you know what Epaphroditus would be thought of nowadays by many many Christian men? Many Christian men, many Christian males would think Epaphroditus was a fool. Paul didn't and neither does the word of God.

He risked everything. He almost died for the work of Christ and what was the work of Christ that he almost died for? What was the work that he risked his life for? Getting some financial help and clothes and warm stuff from Philippi to Rome where Paul is in prison. He wasn't even preaching. It was just to take some stuff given out of love from Philippi to Paul in prison in Rome. That's all. He could have posted it. Well, maybe.

That was the work of Christ that he almost died doing and Paul says, "You welcome a man like that with great joy and with great honor." Epaphroditus, magna cum laude. You welcome him with great honor. You make something of that. You recognize it. That's what you would want to be like.

So Epaphroditus, courageous, brave, physically committed, doing stuff, traveling, risking his life, a risk-taker for the sake of Christ's kingdom, for the sake of the work of Christ.

We come back to the point that we made at the beginning. Let's take it full circle. Both these men are simply doing, being, what is normal. That is the standard for being a Christian man. That is what Christ in us, the hope of glory, produces from us, turns us into. So, gentlemen, we have to hold that up to ourselves as a mirror and we have to ask ourselves what are we spending our lives for? What are we spending our lives to get? What are the years as they tick by, what are they saying about us? You see, these men were in the world but not of the world. They were of Christ. A man like Paul admired them, valued them. They were kindred spirits with that sort of person. They were kindred spirits with Christ.

What are you frightened of, men? What are you frightened of? Are you frightened of what other people will think of you? Are you frightened that you might not amass this world's goods or lose the ones you've got? Are you frightened of the future? Are you frightened of your own incompetence that is rising to the surface? Are you frightened of making a mistake? Are you frightened that you might do something that might not turn out right? Forget those things. Forget them. Look to Christ. Follow Christ. Put him first in your life. Stop being a male and be a man. Be God's man.

And women, you pray that the men that you know will quit a wasted life and pour themselves out for Christ, and you will love them more and you will respect them more, and don't pull them back. Don't pull them away from Christ because the irony is they'll love you more when they love Christ first, and they'll cherish you more when they cherish Christ most. They will be real Christian men when Christ is first in their lives every day.

Let's pray.