

The Selfless Mind in Action

Text: Philippians 2:17-30

Introduction:

1. Having exhorted the Philippian believers to pursue the humble, selfless, others centred mind of Christ, he now enters a very personal discussion with them concerning his personal concern for them. In so doing, he outlines 3 living examples of the very principles he has just taught.
2. Concerning this section, Robert Gromacki writes, “The apostle thus cited as examples three men who manifested the mind of Christ and who manifested the mind of Christ and who were working out without complaint what God was working in.”
3. In this section we will study three godly men who exemplified the selfless, Christlike mindset – Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

I. THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL (VS. 17-18)

Paul discusses the possibility of martyrdom in these verses and his willingness to so suffer for the sake of the brethren if that would be God’s will for him.

A. His Preparedness for Martyrdom (Vs. 17a)

1. ‘offered’ = means to “pour out as a drink offering, libation”. Paul was ready and willing for his life to be poured out as an offering for God if that was his will. Paul would use the same word at the end of his life – “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.” (2 Tim. 4:6).
2. “upon the sacrifice and service of **your** faith” = Paul’s focus was upon the Philippians. Paul lived out the truth of verse 4. Paul was willing to suffer and die for the cause of Christ.

B. His Perspective on Martyrdom (Vs. 17b-18)

1. Paul rejoiced (Vs. 17b). The theme of the Epistle comes up again. Paul was joyful in the Lord even in the face of possible death. Paul was a joy filled Christian because he was a sacrificial and selfless Christian. Great joy is available if we submit to God’s supreme will and allow Him to work out His Divine purposes in our lives.
2. Philippi rejoiced (Vs. 18)

II. THE EXAMPLE OF TIMOTHY (VS. 19-24)

A. Paul’s Desire to Send Timothy (Vs. 19)

1. The Faith for the Visit (Vs. 19a) – “But I trust in the Lord”. Paul acknowledges the Lord in his plans. He understands that principle of the supreme will of God in all matters including travel plans (See James 4:15).
2. The Focus of the Visit (Vs. 19b) – “that I also may be of good comfort”. Paul’s desire was to get a first-hand report from Timothy concerning the well being of the church at Philippi. This reveals the heavy weight that was constantly upon the Apostles heart concerning the welfare of the Philippian church. A good report from

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Timothy would bring relieve to his burdened mind. Paul spoke of “the care of all the churches” in 2 Cor. 11:28.

B. Paul’s Description of Timothy (Vs. 20-22)

Paul now lists several supporting reasons as to why he wanted to dispatch Timothy to come and see them. In so doing, he lists the spiritual credentials of Timothy. Timothy was:

1. A Trustworthy Servant – ‘likeminded’ (Vs. 20a). Timothy was a living example of the truth of vs. 2. The word ‘likeminded’ means “of equal soul”. This goes deeper than just mental oneness. This is a oneness of heart in the work of God.
2. A Tenderhearted Servant – ‘care’ (Vs. 20b-21).
 - a. “will care” = the word ‘care’ is sometimes used of destructive worry (e.g., 4:6; Matt. 6:25). Some Christians are so consumed with fleshly worry and are so consumed with themselves that they have little room left to exercise any care and concern for others. Not so with Timothy. He was others focused.
 - b. “your state” = the things concerning you.
 - c. Paul knew Timothy genuinely cared for the saints unlike so many others who were self-serving and self-motivated. Selfless servants are exceedingly rare! Many are more concerned about what they can get out of the ministry rather than what they can put into the ministry. There is a very real sense in which all of us either live in Phil. 1:21 or Phil. 2:21.
3. A Tested Servant – ‘proof’ (Vs. 22). Timothy was a proven man with a track record behind him. He was known to the Philippian church as he had assisted Paul in the original evangelization of the city.
 - a. The word ‘proof’ comes from a word that was used of the testing of metals to ensure they were genuine. Time had proven Timothy’s genuineness as a reliable servant of the Lord. He had a track record of faithfully serving alongside the Apostle Paul.
 - b. “son with the father” = Timothy was Paul’s son in the faith. 2 Timothy 1:2 “To Timothy, *my dearly beloved son:*”
 - c. This is a vital principle for those who believe they are called to the ministry. A season of proving and preparation are essential before one enters the high office of a preacher of the Gospel (1 Tim. 3:6) or the office of deacon (1 Tim. 3:10).
 - d. Note: If you want to be used in ministry, you must follow the Timothy pattern and go through a period of faithful followership and learning with a godly mentor. Before Elisha took Elijah’s place as prophet, he first was a servant to the man of God. He “poured water on the hands of Elijah” (2 Kings. 3:11).
 - e. Note: There is a sense where for any form of Christian ministry, there needs to be a measure of proving before one takes that responsibility.
 - f. Wiersbe cites the following illustration in his commentary: “A popular local nightclub performer visited a pastor and announced that he had been saved and wanted to serve the Lord. “What should I do next?” he asked. “Well, I’d suggest you unite with a good church and start growing,” the pastor replied. “Is your wife a Christian?” “No, she isn’t,” the musician replied. “I

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hope to win her. But, do I have to wait? I mean, I'd like to do something for God right now." "No, you don't have to wait to witness for the Lord," explained the pastor. "Get busy in a church, and use your talents for Christ." "But you don't know who I am! the man protested. "I'm a big performer – everybody knows me. I want to start my own organization, make records, and appear before big crowds!" "If you go too far too fast," warned the pastor, "you may hurt yourself and your testimony. And the place to start winning people is right at home. God will open up places of service for you as He sees you are ready. Meanwhile, study the Bible and give yourself a chance to grow." The man did not take the pastor's counsel. Instead, he set up a big organization and started out on his own. His "success" lasted less than a year. Not only did he lose his testimony because he was not strong enough to carry the heavy burdens, but his constant traveling alienated him from his wife and family. He drifted into a "fringe group" and disappeared from public ministry a broken and bankrupt man.

"His branches went out father than his roots went deep," the pastor said. "When that happens you eventually topple."

C. Paul's Decision in relation to Timothy (Vs. 23-24)

1. Paul reiterates that it is his hope to send Timothy soon but there was a factor that would influence that decision, namely, what was going to happen to him in the near future.
2. Paul's desire was to also visit the church at Philippi. The phrase "I trust" denotes "a settled assurance and conviction of heart produced by the indwelling God." (Gromacki)

III. THE EXAMPLE OF EPAPHRODITUS (VS. 25-30)

Epaphroditus was apparently a member of the church at Philippi who had delivered the gift from the Philippian church (Phil. 4:18). He is not to be confused with Epaphras from the church at Colosse (Col. 1:7; 4:12). His name means "lovely" or "charming" and was probably based on Aphrodite the pagan goddess of love and beauty. Praise God the Gospel delivered him from paganism. He is only mentioned twice in the Bible – both times in Philippians (2:25 & 4:18).

A. His Description (Vs. 25)

Paul lists 5 positive characteristics concerning Epaphroditus:

1. A brother. He was a part of the family of God through regeneration. Believers share a deep and abiding connection to one another in the family of God. Serving alongside other believers is a tremendous joy and blessing. Salvation is a vital pre-requisite for service.
2. A companion in labour. Epaphroditus partnered with the Apostle in service for Christ. He was busy in the Lord's service. He was not a slothful Christian.
3. A fellow soldier. He was involved in the spiritual battle with the Apostle Paul for the defense of the Gospel.
4. A messenger. The word 'messenger' comes from the word 'apostle' which literally means "sent one". He was not an Apostle in a

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technical sense but in the sense of being sent by the church for a particular task. He was prepared to take the long and dangerous journey to Rome on behalf of his church to minister to Paul. Evidently, he was from the church at Philippi – note the word ‘your’. He was attached and accountable to his local church. Church membership is a Biblical thing! Some other examples of the Lord’s servants who were clearly attached to local churches:

- a. Onesimus & Epaphras (Col. 4:9, 12).
 - b. Phebe (Rom. 16:1).
 - c. Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17-18).
5. A giver – “he that ministered to my wants”. The word ‘ministered’ (leitourgon) was a word used of official and sacred service. Our English word ‘liturgy’ is based on this word. He not only brought the gift from the church but also made a personal contribution to the needs of the suffering Apostle. In fact, he came near death in his efforts to support the work of Christ by serving Paul.
 6. Epaphroditus was a balanced, well-rounded Christian. Some believers are strong on fellowship but weak on the furtherance of the Gospel. Dr. H. A. Ironside told a story about a group of believers who thought only of “fellowship” and had little concern for the lost or for the defense of the faith. They hung a sign out the front of their meeting place that said, “JESUS ONLY”. Over time, the wind blew away some of the letters, and the sign read – US ONLY. It was a perfect description of a group of people who were not balanced Christians. (Wiersbe)

B. His Compassion (Vs. 26)

There are two phrases that describe this dear brother’s earnest feelings towards his home church:

1. He longed after them. The word means “greatly desire after”. “The verbal construction emphasizes a prolonged duration of intense desire.” (Gromacki)
2. He was full of heaviness. This is a strong term that is also used of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Garden (Matt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33). It stresses mental, emotional and spiritual anguish. The reason for his heavy and burdened heart is given – “because that ye had heard that he had been sick.” Instead of feeling sorry for himself he felt sorry for the believers who were feeling sorry for him! He was concerned about their concern for him! What a selfless spirit!
3. Note: What love existed in the early church between the brethren. We tend to be so cold and clinical as believers in our affluent and individualistic society.

C. His Restoration (Vs. 27-28)

1. God healed him (Vs. 27)
 - a. God had mercy on Epaphroditus. The fact he was “nigh unto death” reveals something of the severity of his illness.
 - b. God had mercy on the Apostle. God healed Epaphroditus for the Apostle’s benefit as well. God would not suffer Paul to be overwhelmed with too many sorrows. God in His wisdom does not remove all sorrows from our lives but at times He reveals His mercy towards us by removing some of them.

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- c. Note: It is significant to note that even Paul, with his Apostolic gift, was not able to heal Epaphroditus in this instance. It is a reminder that even the Apostle's, with their sign gift of healing, were still subject to the overruling will and sovereignty of God.

2. Paul returned him (Vs. 28)

D. His Reputation (Vs. 29-30)

In relation to Epaphroditus, Paul instructs the Philippian church to:

1. Receive him (Vs. 29a).
2. Honor him (Vs. 29b-30)
 - a. "hold such in reputation" = means "in honor". It is also plural in number. They were to highly esteem Epaphroditus and all others who were like him. We are not to idolize spiritual men, nor are we to blindly follow them. But if they are spiritual, Christlike men who sacrifice to serve God's people, we should have an appreciative and honoring attitude towards them.
 - b. 1. Thess. 5:12-14 "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to **esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake**. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*."
 - c. Paul offers the reasons why they should extend this kind of honour to Epaphroditus:
 - i. He was a sacrificial servant – "nigh unto death" (Vs. 30a). He risked his life in the service of God. He was willing to lay down his life for Christ and Christ's service. Compare this with the cheap, 2-dollar shop Christianity today where little to no sacrifice tends to be the norm.
 - ii. He was a selfless servant – "not regarding his life" (Vs. 30b). He knew the gift from the Philippian church was not enough to meet the needs of the suffering Apostle so he laboured to make up the short fall.

Conclusion: What is dominating your life right now? The selfish mind or the Saviour's mind?