

Two More Examples

Philippians 2:19-30

In Philippians 1:27-2:18, Paul tells the Christians in Philippi how to “conduct [themselves] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27a, *NIV*). Paul emphasizes *unity* (being like-minded, having the same love, and working together with one mind and purpose). Such unity requires *humility*, and Paul points to the supreme example of humility – Jesus Christ (2:5-11).

After Paul tells the Philippians “how to conduct themselves,” he begins sharing travel plans for two coworkers (and himself). What can we get from this? We can get more encouragement on how to live, because Paul’s coworkers (Timothy and Epaphroditus) are great examples.

Timothy

Timothy was one of Paul’s companions on parts of his missionary journeys.¹ Timothy was with Paul when the church in Philippi was started (*Acts 16*), and he is with Paul as he writes this letter (1:1). It is reasonable to assume that the Philippian Christians know and love Timothy.

1. Read Philippians 2:19-24. What do learn about Timothy from these verses?

2. What kind of relationship does Paul have with Timothy? In what ways can we have similar relationships today?



3. Paul says, “For everyone² [excluding Timothy] looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (2:21). How are “the interests of Jesus Christ” different from “their own interests?” How can we know?³

While Paul plans to send Timothy to Philippi, he is not ready to send him immediately. Paul wants to see how things go with him,⁴ and *then* he will send Timothy (2:23). In the meantime, Paul plans to send another co-worker to Philippi. This co-worker will deliver Paul’s letter.

¹ The first reference to Timothy is Acts 16:1-3, where he joins Paul on his second missionary journey. The letters named 1 and 2 Timothy would be written by Paul to Timothy after his release from imprisonment in Rome.

² Who is included in ‘everyone’ (*pantes* – ‘all’)? Of course, Timothy would not be included since he is contrasted with ‘everyone.’ Considering Paul’s commendation of Epaphroditus (2:25-30), he would be not be included. But apparently no one else currently available to Paul could compare with Timothy’s attitude of service.

³ In general, we can know about ‘the interests of Christ’ through his life and teachings, and his apostles’ teachings, recorded in the New Testament. However, we don’t need to leave this letter to see the difference. Christ’s interests are evident in 2:6-11, which are sharply contrasted with the selfish interests of 2:3-4. Those who ‘look out for’ (seek) the interests of Christ are those who share Christ’s values, humble servant attitude, love, and purpose.

⁴ Paul may be referring to his upcoming trial, to see if he will be released from prison. Paul feels confident that he will be released, and eventually go to Philippi (2:24), but that apparently wouldn’t happen until Timothy takes his trip to Philippi and returns with news about the Philippian Christians (2:19).

Epaphroditus

Epaphroditus is mentioned only in this letter (*Philippians 2:25; 4:18*). The Philippian church had sent Epaphroditus to bring gifts to Paul (*4:18*) and “take care of [Paul’s] needs” (*2:25, NIV*).

4. Read Philippians 2:25-30. What happened to Epaphroditus? (*2:26-27, 30*)⁵

Epaphroditus’ illness affected many. The Christians in Philippi had heard about it,⁶ and were probably very concerned. Epaphroditus was distressed because of this (*2:26*). Paul had been very concerned about it (*2:27*). “But God had mercy...” (*2:27*) and Epaphroditus was ready to travel.

5. In what way should the Philippian Christians welcome Epaphroditus, and why? (*2:26, 28-30*)

📖 “So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him” (*2:29*).

6. What three terms does Paul use to describe his relationship with Epaphroditus? (*see 2:25*) What do these terms say about the Christian life, and how does this apply to us?⁷

Reflection & Application

- What do you think about Timothy and Epaphroditus? Do you think they are good examples? Many would agree they are good examples of loving and serving others. But what about the *basis* of their attitudes and behavior, which is Jesus Christ? What do you think about Jesus Christ? Do you need to trust in him, and follow him? Do you need to talk about this?
- Brothers and sisters, how would you answer this question: Do you “look out for your own interests” or “those of Jesus Christ?” Think about it. Do you need a change of heart? Go back and read Philippians 1-2. As you read, ask God to change your heart, and be willing to respond to what God shows you. Share your feelings with other brothers or sisters.

⁵ Epaphroditus became very ill (sick) and almost died (*2:26-27*). Paul says he ‘almost died for the work of Christ’ and ‘risked his life’ to carry out his ministry to Paul (*2:30*). Perhaps Epaphroditus became sick on his journey from Philippi to Rome, and instead of turning back or stopping, he kept going until he reached Rome.

⁶ We don’t know how the Philippian Christians heard about Epaphroditus’ illness. Perhaps some of his traveling companions returned to Philippi after he got sick and reported what had happened.

⁷ ‘my brother’ – All true Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have been adopted into God’s family through faith in Christ (*John 1:12-13*). Paul probably uses this term to express a close brotherly relationship with Epaphroditus. As Christians, we should be working on our ‘family’ relationships. ‘my co-worker’ – Christians should be working ‘together as one’ in the work of Christ (*Philippians 1:27*). The unity and humility that Paul emphasizes in this letter is very important in working together. ‘my fellow soldier’ – This is similar to ‘co-worker’ but the military metaphor reminds us that Christians are engaged in spiritual battle. As we face opposition and suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel, we need to ‘stand firm in the one Spirit, striving (fighting) together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose [us]’ (*1:27b-28a, NIV*). Paul later wrote to Timothy, ‘Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus’ (*2 Timothy 2:3*).