

The Book of Philippians

Notes: Doug Hamilton

Being A Godly Example to Others (Philippians 2:19-30)

At the beginning of chapter two, Paul described the sacrificial love that the Philippians were to have in the church family. The supreme example He brought up was the Lord and His obedience to God while going to the cross. He "emptied" Himself as a drink offering on the cross. Jesus was our example, but not ours only, but for all whom are in the body of Christ. Paul will say in *Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.* Following the chain of command means that every soldier needs good examples of leadership to follow.

- Jesus, while washing the disciples' feet, said in *John 13:15 "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.*
- Peter reiterated that Jesus was our example of suffering to follow (1 Peter 2:21).
- James said that Job was an example of patience for the Christians (James 5:10).
- Paul said of the Thessalonians in *1Thes 1:6-7 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.*
- He told Titus to be a good example for those in Crete (Titus 2:7).

In this lesson we will look at two other examples in the chain of command that carried out Jesus' example in their lives. They are the foot-soldiers named Timothy and Epaphroditus. Of the first one Paul wrote in *1 Timothy 4:12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.* What kind of example of a Christian did Timothy display for us?

Timothy

Philippians 2:19-22 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. ²⁰ For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.

- Paul was very close to Timothy, having taken him into the mission field on the Second Missionary Journey before they brought the gospel into Europe (Acts 16). Not only was he with Paul in Philippi, but also in Thessalonica, Berea (Acts 17:1-14), Corinth, Ephesus (Acts 18 and 19) and even in the prison at Rome (Colossians 1:1; Philippians 1:1). He was with Paul through the thick and thin of the mission field. He was with Paul in the writing of at least six of his epistles (1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Philippians and Romans). He was a great comrade to Paul in the efforts of the gospel.

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- His greatest contribution to Paul was the fact he was a "go to man". If Paul needed to deliver a message of encouragement or rebuke and was unable to go himself, then he would more than likely send Timothy to make the delivery. He brought correction to Corinth, advice to the Thessalonians and encouragement to the Philippians. Timothy would take the marching orders from Paul and carry it out just as ordered. According to Hebrews 13:23, it even landed him in prison for awhile. *Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.*
- He was not concerned about his own interest first, but the interests of others. He was not taking the easy track, but the right track. In every sense of the phrase, they shared a father/son relationship when it came to Christianity, with Paul referring to Timothy in 1 Cor 4:17 as *"my beloved and faith child in the Lord.* He was not in competition with Paul, but always willing to serve him to the best of his ability. This is the quality of following the chain of command, for Jesus set the primary example, Paul followed in his steps and Timothy carried the example forward to his generation.

Philippians 2:23-24 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.

- To encourage his comrades of Philippi, he said that he would be sending Timothy to them immediately when he finds out any good news about the situation. When they see his face, they can have all assurance that Paul would be following soon after. There was a practice in the ancient military service that had high ranking officers sending a subordinate to announce the coming visit. They were sent to tip them off to prepare for a proper reception. It appears that this is what Paul is doing here in sending Timothy in advance to signal the great news that he would be arriving soon.

Summary on the example of Timothy:

- He was a great example to us that we must be supportive of our leaders in the church. They are under tremendous pressure to lead the flock and can really go much further if there is genuine support from the enlisted. Be willing to go up to your leaders in the church and lend a hand in carrying out the precious work of the Lord.

Epaphroditus

Philippians 2:25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need;

- The second person that Paul names as a soldier of Christ was Epaphroditus. His name meant *"lovely"* and he lived up to the name in Paul's eyes. When the Philippian church family heard that Paul was in

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prison, they immediately moved to action for his aid. Since there was a great distance between the cities, they loaded up the supplies and sent a volunteer to come to the aid of apostle. It was Epaphroditus that went to minister to Paul in his need.

- Prisons in the first century were very dismal. Often the prisoners would be covered in filth, being unable to attend to themselves while chained to a guard or in stocks. They were often hungry and thirsty, being given only the bread and water of affliction. If not for outside assistance, many of the prisoners might not make it the two full years until trial.
- For an attendant of a prisoner potentially on death row, there tended to be guilt by association. The assistant would have been treated with coarseness, "knowing" that he was likely in on it as well. Combined with the dangers of travel, Epaphroditus literally risked his life for the sake of Paul. He was living the example of a good soldier in God's army. As J.B Lightfoot stated in his commentary concerning this "Epaphroditus was one with Paul in sympathy, one with him in work, one with him in danger. He, in truth, had stood in the firing line."
- It is interesting to note the word that Paul uses for *minister* is *leitourgos*. This was a word that commonly referred to wealthy men of ancient Greece who would undergo the expense in funding an important project, like fitting a warship or paying a naval crew for their service in the military. In a sense, this is what Epaphroditus did when he brought much needed supplies, merciful assistance and great encouragement to his "commanding officer", the apostle Paul.

Philippians 2:26-27 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.²⁷ For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.

- While in Rome ministering to Paul, Epaphroditus became ill. Many speculate that he contracted Roman fever, something that was known to sweep the area similar to a plague. Many people would die from this, particularly visitors that were not familiar with the surroundings.
- News of this illness worked its way back from the front line to the church in Philippi, causing many broken hearts, including Paul. He knew that he would need to say something to the church to encourage them, *lest I have sorrow upon sorrow*. Apparently God had mercy on Epaphroditus by pulling him out the illness.

Philippians 2:28-30 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.²⁹ Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard;³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

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- Even though he was supposed to stay with Paul for the duration of the imprisonment, he was sent back to bring the letter and great joy of his presence. Nothing seems to encourage like a homecoming. The smile on Paul's face while meditating on Epaphroditus' arrival should bring joy to not only the Philippians, but to the present day readers as well.
- Like any good soldier returning victoriously from the front lines of war, the Philippians should celebrate their hero that came to the aid of Paul. That is the language which is being used here, the celebration of a hero in his victory.

Summary on the example of Epaphroditus:

- Epaphroditus was a true hero in every sense of the word. He was willing to brave the hundreds of miles, face deadly illness and even scorn from the guards to come to the aid of another godly hero name Paul. He thought nothing about putting his life in danger for another. Once again, we must be willing to lay down our lives for the brethren whenever the calling comes. *1 John 3:16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* Follow this man's example and be a hero to your fellow saints.

We would do well to surround ourselves with as many of godly examples as possible. Remember Jesus; remember Paul and the other apostles; remember Timothy and Epaphroditus; remember your elders; remember your fellow saints in the kingdom. They are all the for our example to continue in the faith.