

Timothy and Epaphraditus, Part 2

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[0 : 00] The Bible, we are going to continue through the book of Philippians this morning. Philippians chapter 2, we're going to finish up chapter 2 this morning. We're going to start with verse 19, go through the end of the chapter.

So as a way of introduction this morning, we're going to look at two leaders or servants, both leaders I would call them, in the church during this time of the early church. Last week we looked at Paul. Paul was a leader, one of the big leaders of the early church. And we looked at his service last week. Today we're going to look at two more people, people that served Paul in the ministry, and specifically a guy named Timothy, and then another guy who's even less well-known, whose name was Epaphroditus.

All three of these men are examples of what Paul was talking about when he said, hey, we as Christians, we believers, we need to have the mind of Christ.

We need to live our lives with the same attitude, with the same humility of heart, with the same heart of service that Jesus had when he humbled himself, became a man, and then suffered for our sins on the cross.

[1 : 41] He doesn't necessarily offer himself as an example, though we can look at the things that he says and use him as an example. But he does offer these two men as an example, and we're going to look at their life and ministry this morning.

So we'll start, we're just going to read through this passage, and then we'll go through verse by verse. Again, Philippians 2.19. But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.

For I have no one like-minded who will sincerely care for your state, for all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father, he served with me in the gospel.

Therefore, I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my needs, since he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

[2 : 53] For indeed he was sick, almost unto death. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only, not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again, you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem, because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

You know, as we read this passage, we might kind of rush by it, because it seems like it's somewhat formalities, talking about some logistics that Paul wants to get accomplished here with the church in Philippi.

Big picture is Paul's in prison. He's looking to continue to try to build up this church. He wants to check in on them, but he's stuck. He's not allowed to leave.

He's in a Roman prison, or an under house arrest anyway. But he wants to send some people to go check up on the Philippians, see how they're doing, and have an opportunity to build them up.

[4 : 04] And so he's going to send two different men. Now, he says, I'm not quite ready to send one of them, but I'm actually going to send this other guy.

This was Epaphroditus, who's actually from Philippi, it seems anyway. And so as we read through this, you know, like I said, it may seem like formalities and just logistics, but we can learn so many

things from these two men who are held up to the church at Philippi, and really to us as well, as examples of faithfulness and of service.

So let's start in here. We're going to first look at the life of Timothy. Now, first, before we jump back into verse 19, who was this guy Timothy anyway? We know much more about Timothy than we do about Epaphroditus.

In fact, there are two books of the Bible that are named after Timothy because they were letters written to him. Paul came across Timothy as he was traveling around, preaching the gospel across Asia.

And he came to, I believe it was the city of Lystra. And while he was there, he came across this young man who was actually somebody that was offered up as quite an extraordinary young man of the faith.

[5 : 22] And he ended up finding him so useful and being so impressed with him that he asked him to travel around with him and be somewhat of an assistant or a fellow worker with him in his missionary endeavors.

We know that Timothy was raised by a Jewish mother, but a Gentile father. So a father who was not a believer.

His Jewish mother raised him up, not just in the Jewish faith, but also raised him as a Christian. So at some point, she came to follow Jesus Christ herself from out of Judaism.

And it also mentions that one of the things that Paul writes to Timothy is that he learned the scriptures not only from his mother, but also from his grandmother. Notice, by the way, here that there are men missing from this picture.

You know, really, the primary person in a young man or woman's life to teach them the scriptures should be who? It should be their father. Their father is the one who should at least, not necessarily be the one to do it day in and day out.

[6 : 21] Both mom and dad can contribute to that. But dad is the one that is responsible for making sure that that happens. But we see somebody, Timothy, in whose life he didn't have a father who, it appears, was not a believer.

He was a Greek and not a Christian. And by the way, this should be somewhat of an encouragement. You know, sometimes we have, whether it's broken homes or homes in which there is a lack of faith in either the mom or the dad.

And we can think, man, this is going to be a really much more of a challenge for my children to grow up in the faith, especially when the unbeliever is the father, right? It's much more challenging. But we have an example here, and I don't want to take away from that challenge.

It truly is a challenge. But we have an example here of a young man who was just a tremendous example of faithfulness in both the scriptures and understanding the scriptures and teaching them and helping build up the church, who grew up in a home where he did not have a Christian father but only a Christian mother.

And that speaks volumes to his mom and his grandmother. So he began to serve Paul and travel with him in the ministry.

[7 : 36] He's seen everywhere. We see him in the book of Acts, which describes Paul's missionary journeys. He's mentioned in six of Paul's epistles when Paul, usually he will start off with a greeting.

Hey, greeting from me and all my compatriots here. And six of those letters he mentions, Timothy is with him. Two of the letters that he wrote was actually to Timothy. Sometimes he would send Timothy out maybe ahead of him or he would leave Timothy behind while he moved on to continue to establish things in the church.

And he had opportunity to write two different letters to Timothy while he was traveling and away from him that helps us today get some instruction for how we ought to serve the Lord, just like Timothy did.

And the other kind of final little detail that we know about Timothy is it seems that he was a young man, a young man. There's one passage in one of the letters written to Timothy in which Paul encourages him, don't let anyone despise your youth.

He was sending him as a leader to lead the church, to provide structure and instruction. And you can imagine when you're young, and we don't know how old he was, whether he was 18 or 20 or 25 or maybe even 30, but probably more on the younger end, but was a faithful leader and somebody worthy of that leadership and that honor and that position that he held.

[9 : 12] But he was a young man. As we get into the first verse here, it says in verse 19, here's what Paul's saying. He says, I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.

Paul is wanting to send somebody to the Philippians, to the Philippian church, because he wants to know how they're doing. You know, today we have instant communication across the whole globe, right?

If we want to find out how our friend is doing while they're traveling in Germany or El Salvador or China, we can send them a quick message and hear back from them immediately, right?

But obviously back then, they didn't have instant messenger or these different communication methods where we can send communication over the speed of light across the world.

And so Paul, in order to hear about how the church was doing, he had to get a letter basically delivered from some kind of messenger. I don't even think they had a mail delivery system.

[10 : 17] You couldn't just put a stamp on a letter and an address and have it delivered in just a few days. You had to actually send someone. So he really wants to send someone to see how they're doing, to see what their state is.

Are they remaining faithful? Are they being, or maybe they're being drawn away from the Lord in some kind of way by the lusts of the world or maybe by some false doctrine or teaching.

Now, from what we read in the beginning of Philippians, he was pretty proud of the Philippians and how well they had done for such a young church who were new in the faith. He had really nothing but good things to say about them.

But he had this experience with other churches. The two that come to mind are the church at Corinth and the church in Galatia that he really had trouble with. And when he found out their state, he was fairly upset and had to write letters to make adjustments and send people their way to make those adjustments as a leader.

But he wants to see how they're doing. Verse 20, So he's going to send, he's not able to come yet, but he's got this young man, Timothy, who he has a great amount of trust in.

[11 : 35] And Paul will trust that when Timothy goes to this church, that he will bring back an assessment to Paul that, excuse me, he will bring back, Timothy will bring back an assessment to Paul that Paul can trust.

Careful judgment. But also that Timothy, while he is there, can make any adjustments that are necessary. Maybe see some false teaching that is cropping in or see some areas of sinfulness that needs to be addressed.

Timothy is trustworthy in that way. You know what? The church in every age, whether it was 2,000 years ago or even today, needs men like that who will give attention to the people in their circle of influence.

Whether it's in a local church like this or maybe it's just in your family, whether it's your immediate family as a father or a mother. How are my children doing walking in the faith?

Do they have sinful habits that are creeping in? Do they have strange ideas that they're kind of importing into the Bible that they need to be more careful about? Or maybe it's my extended family as a grandfather or a grandmother.

[12 : 46] I see my children or grandchildren being led astray by maybe some false teacher that's popular these days. And I need to be that leader who steps in and says, hey, let's take a look at this.

This is not the kind of direction you ought to be going. There's not that many people who will do such a thing. Not many people who have the wisdom to do such a thing.

And then beyond that, maybe some people have the wisdom, but they just don't have the courage to step into those situations and say something about it. But a man like Timothy is like, a man like Timothy is like that.

Verse 21, he says this about Timothy. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. You know, and really I think Paul is speaking primarily of believers, Christian people.

And he's saying this, everyone else basically just seeks what's good for them. But I know of Timothy, he is unique and that he will seek the things which are of Jesus Christ.

[13 : 54] And that to me is somewhat of a depressing statement. But it seems somewhat true, doesn't it? That even among, in the Christian world, most people just throughout their lives just kind of focus on themselves and making sure that they're taken care of, that they're doing well.

Maybe you do good taking care of your family and your small circle of influence and your children. And that's good and something we ought to do. But we always ought to be looking outward, looking for how we can serve others.

Be a leader, not just seek our own comfort or our own success, but what is good for the body of Christ, for others around us, and really eternal things, right?

Because he says here, the things which are of Jesus Christ, the things which are of Christ Jesus. Like I said, this is somewhat common and we ought to look to be exceptions to that general rule. Verse 22 says this, but you know, again, speaking of Timothy, but you know his proven character that as a son with his father, he served with me in the gospel.

[15:18] So Paul speaks to Timothy as having character that is proven. Proven. What is proven character? How does someone get to a place where their character is proved?

Well, it takes this. It takes consistency over time. And it takes time to prove character. Character, proven character anyway, is not something that you can discern from somebody by meeting them one time, by just spending an afternoon with them, by just spending even a weekend with them, or the week with them, at a conference, or whatever it might be.

It's not something that you can prove by watching somebody on social media and know that their character is proven. Having someone with proven character requires knowing them day in and day out over a long period of time and seeing that they are going to do the right thing over and over and over and over again, regardless of what happens.

The other thing that he mentions here, he says, but you know his proven character that as a son with his father he served me in the gospel. And so he's pointing to Timothy's great service to him. And he calls him a son. And you know, I think it's pretty clear to most of us that Timothy was not a biological son. As we read through, we know that Timothy, or excuse me, Paul did not have any, or it seems he did not have any biological children and Timothy was definitely not his son.

[16:59] But he was a son in the faith. And that kind of family language is used frequently, right, for Christians. The other big one is we call each other usually brothers and sisters in the Lord, right?

We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are a family. In this church, this local church, we are a family. And when you have age dynamics, right, those who are older and those who are younger, you might think of somebody not necessarily as a brother, even though we are all very literally brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of our age.

But especially if there's a mentoring type relationship and someone really invests in your life, an older person, then it's appropriate to think of that person as a father or a mother in the faith.

And it may not even be somebody who led you to the Lord. Maybe you might call the person who led you to faith, led you to the Lord as a father or a mother in the faith.

And that could be true as well. But you have somebody who just invests in you and that person can be as a father. Just like a father is the primary person to invest in the life of their son or daughter.

[18:12] So a spiritual father or mother can be the primary person or a large person who invests in them spiritually. Verse 23, Therefore, I hope to send him at once as soon as I see how it goes with me.

But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly. You know, in reading this, Paul is somewhat reluctant to send Timothy, right? We're going to find out here in a second that he's going to send Epaphroditus first.

But he said, Hey, I'm going to check in on how things are going here with me. And then if things are going okay, and I think in between the lines I'm reading, if I figure that I don't really critically need him here with me right now, then I'll send him to you.

So he's reluctant to send Timothy because he really values so much his help. But he's willing to send him regardless. For the sake of the church.

In the next verse, we're going to get into the second person here, Epaphroditus. And it says here in verse 25, Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need.

[19:34] Epaphroditus, we'll just talk about him briefly in an overview fashion. Timothy, you can find dozens of verses that mention Timothy. When it comes to Epaphroditus, this passage and another one in chapter 4 of Philippians are the only ones that mention his name.

So this is all we know about him. His name is Greek, so evidently he was not a Jew, though he could have been, but probably not.

but his name is thoroughly Greek and his name is quite common. So you'll see the name Epaphroditus in other places outside of the Bible or early church history, people who are named Epaphroditus.

What does that name Epaphroditus mean? You know, a lot of the names back then, just like they do today, have some kind of meaning. Well, in the name Epaphroditus is the name of a pagan Greek god, Aphrodite, Aphrodite.

And that prefix, Epaphro or Epi, I think is the prefix, is a name that means being favored by or belonging to Aphrodite.

[20 : 45] And so this is a man whose name indicated that he belonged to or was favored by or loved by this pagan Greek goddess.

And what was she the goddess of? Was she the goddess of wisdom or the goddess of light or something like that? No, she was the goddess of sexuality, of fertility, of beauty, and really of sexual erotic love.

And so imagine being named by that, you know, after a Greek goddess of sexuality and then becoming a Christian, right?

And by the way, that's not a name I would recommend that Christians give to their children. I wouldn't recommend that you would name your children after Greek goddesses. But it's what he was born with and what he grew up with.

And yet, one of the things I notice here is that he didn't change his name, did he? He kept this name that had some fairly negative connotations.

[21 : 58] It's a name that identified him with a somewhat really perverted pagan and lustful pagan goddess. But you know what?

His new identity was not really in his name. Names mean things and I don't want to indicate that names are meaningless and it really doesn't matter what we're named.

We actually see God changing people's names in the Bible. There are different examples. Jacob and Abraham and even Paul himself.

But, one of the things I think about here is that when we become Christians, many of us became Christians, we didn't grow up in a Christian family, but we became Christians from out of the world. Grew up in a secular environment maybe. and we have maybe some baggage, whether it's our name or other things, that identify us with things of the world.

[22 : 58] But is that how God sees us? Is that how God identifies us? By our name? You know, Epaphroditus, he had a new identity and that was an identity in Christ.

Based on what? Was it based on his name? No, it was based on his faith and trust in Jesus Christ. His present reality at that time was not being identified with a pagan goddess, but was being identified with Jesus Christ himself.

And so, what really matters when it comes to our Christian life is not some of these external things, like a name, as important as that is, but where our hearts are at.

Who owns our hearts? Where the faith in our hearts is at. That's what truly matters. You know, and we have situations like this today. Probably not as much in America, even though we do have names today in America that are named after figures of Greek mythology.

A lot of times we don't think about it anymore because that's from such a bygone era, but the name Diana, or I think of the name Jason, I have a brother whose name is Jason, and that was a name from Greek mythology.

[24 : 16] Jason and the Argonauts. But, you know, some people today are born, for example, I think in the Muslim world. And what is the number one most popular first name in the Islamic world?

Mohammed. Mohammed. I think nine out of ten people, it seems to me, are named Mohammed in that world. It's because that was the prophet who started the religion of Islam, and so many people want to be tied to that name.

But you can imagine someone becoming a Christian and realizing that Mohammed was a false prophet. And he was, by the way. And now they have a name that is tied to a false prophet.

But do they have to change their name? No, you know, the name does not define them. There are people in India whose name is Krishna. Again, lots of names in India, many that I don't even know, that are tied to many of these false deities that are worshipped in these pagan religions.

The other thing I think about is sometimes we come into the faith with things, like physical things on our bodies. Tattoos are one example.

[25 : 28] Maybe a tattoo that, or a mark on your body, even a scar that points to your old way of life. something that is dark or sinister in some kind of way.

And, you know, I've met people who are, as we call it, tatted up, you know, from the bottom of their toes to the top of their head. I've, in fact, I remember going to a, it was a pro-life event full of just the most amazing Christians just on fire for the Lord.

And there was this guy there and his whole face was covered with tattoos. Again, I wouldn't recommend that, by the way. There's a comedian that we've watched who has some face tattoos and he says the same thing.

He says, guys, don't do that. Don't do it. Don't be me. But, that can look a bit freaky and when you see somebody like that, right, you think, oh, what kind of person is this?

The first thing you probably think, and I know we don't want to be judgmental, right? But, the first thing you think is, is this some kind of gangster or, you know, some kind of dark person?

[26 : 40] But, you know, this is a man who had been changed, his heart had been changed by Jesus Christ. And, regardless of what was on his face and the marks that were all over his body, his heart belonged to the Lord.

And, that is what really matters. Let's continue on here reading about Epaphroditus. Verse 25, Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, my fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need.

As he describes Epaphroditus here, he mentions three roles that Epaphroditus has to him. Actually, there's a fourth one. And then, a role that Epaphroditus had towards the Philippian church.

And, we're going to look at these kind of in order. The first three roles are more permanent, general roles that not just Epaphroditus should fill, but that all of us as Christians should fill.

And, the next two are more temporary, just service positions that he filled, maybe for a short time or a long time, and not something that just anybody would fulfill. And, that's something that we should think about as Christians.

[28 : 04] What are the roles that we should fill throughout our Christian life? And, maybe there are roles that we'll fill that are unique to us or just for a temporary season. The first one that he calls Epaphroditus, he calls him my brother.

And, we just talked about how, as Christians, we belong to a family. It's not a biological family, not by, by human blood, if you will, but we are actually connected by someone else's blood, right?

By the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ connects us as family, as brothers and sisters. And, when Paul calls Epaphroditus his brother, it speaks to something.

It speaks to a relationship, that Paul has a relationship that he gets to enjoy with Epaphroditus. And, you know what, as Christians, we have many, many, many brothers and sisters in Christ that we get to enjoy.

And, we should take full advantage of that, enjoying each other in the Lord. The second thing that he calls Epaphroditus, the role he makes mention of, is that Epaphroditus is his fellow worker.

[29 : 23] Paul is a hard worker. He's got a job to do, and so does Epaphroditus. And, they are working together. And, is this just something that apostles do that work for the Lord?

Just apostles and leaders back in the early church? Maybe just paid ministers, right? Or, elders in a church, those are the ones that have a job to do? Of course not.

All of us, as believers, we have jobs to do. We are workers for the Lord. And, our work may look different from one person to the next.

From one person to the next. But, we ought to be continually working. You know, from the very beginning, God created Adam and Eve and he put them in a garden and he had them do what? Sit around in their lawn chairs sipping margaritas? No. He put them to work and he said, here's a garden for you to tend. And, God has always designed us from the very beginning to be workers.

[30 : 22] And, in this age that we live in, we have so many opportunities to work for the Lord, reaching the lost, reaching others with the gospel and also building each other up in the Lord.

And, then the third thing that he mentions, which is a role that all of us should fulfill, he calls Epaphroditus his fellow soldier. Paul is a soldier and Epaphroditus his soldier and they are in the army of the Lord.

You know, the Bible uses lots of imagery about battle and armies when it comes to the Christian life and sometimes that freaks out the unbelievers.

They think of, they think sometimes that the Christians are talking about taking over the country or something like that. But, really, this is, we are to be soldiers because there is an actual war that we need to fight.

And, is it a war that involves guns and swords and things like that? No. Here's what it says, Paul says this when he writes to the Ephesians. He said, we wrestle not against flesh and blood.

[31 : 33] We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but we have a spiritual battle to fight. He said, we wrestle against principalities and powers and the spirits of darkness.

There's a spiritual battle that we all must be engaged in. We can't pretend that it's not happening. We need to be aware of the spiritual battle, of the temptations that will come our way without a doubt.

And, they will come. And, we need to be ready. That passage in Ephesians talks about the kind of armor that we put on, what we do battle with. We need to know the word of God so that we can fight, use it as a sword.

Our faith in Jesus Christ is a shield to protect us from the fiery darts of the enemy. We need to be equipped and prepared to fight when spiritual battles come.

And, they will come. And, then he speaks about some temporary roles that Epaphroditus played. He says, but to you he was your messenger, the one who ministered to my needs.

[32 : 41] So, he speaks to his service to the Philippians and then Epaphroditus' service to him. Evidently, what happened, and Paul briefly mentions this in Philippians 4, if you want to look at this, I'll read this, but since you're just one page away, you can look at Philippians 4, 18.

He says this, Indeed, I have all and abound. He's talking about his financial needs. He says, I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

And so, evidently, what had happened was the Philippians really wanted to serve Paul. They wanted to make sure he was taken care of. When you're in the ministry, somebody like Paul focused primarily on the ministry, and we know Paul was a tent maker, so he provided for his own needs.

But when you're in jail, it's kind of hard to make tents, right? And I don't know if he was allowed to do that while he was under house arrest or not, but there's always no end of need, right, when it comes to Christian ministry.

And so they wanted to send him a gift. So they found somebody who they knew would be reliable, they picked Epaphroditus, they said, all right, we're going to take up this collection, we're going to send it to Paul through the hands of Epaphroditus.

[33 : 59] And so he was their messenger to send a gift to Paul. And then when he got there, what we find is he was the one who ministered to his need, who served Paul wherever Paul had a need.

So he didn't just go and deliver a gift and then head back, he stayed because he wanted to try to meet the needs that Paul had. Then we find next, and we'll find out more about the commitment that Epaphroditus had to meeting the needs of Paul.

Verse 26, it says, since he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. So Paul's sending Epaphroditus one because he was longing for them, he wanted to go back and see his fellow countrymen.

But also he was distressed, it said, because you had heard that he was sick. Isn't that wild? Have you ever known somebody like that? It doesn't say that he was distressed because he was sick. It says he was distressed because others were worried about him. He didn't just have a cold or a flu. He almost died. He was sick probably for some amount of time with some kind of tremendous ailment.

[35 : 18] And he knew that his church back home in Philippi had heard about his sickness and that he was close to death and he was worried about them.

Wow, what a tremendous heart attitude of love for others. And so really, Paul indicates that it wasn't just Paul himself that wanted Epaphroditus to go.

Epaphroditus was like, hey, I want to go see my people. My heart longs for them. Verse 27, for indeed he was sick.

And this talks a little bit more about exactly what happened. For indeed he was sick almost unto death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Again, as I just said, this wasn't just a cold or a flu or some temporary thing that was here and then gone in a week. It was something that happened to him in which he almost died.

[36 : 23] One of the things that comes up here is a question that people ask, what exactly happened? It says here that God had mercy on Epaphroditus.

He said, God had mercy on me too, Paul says. So does that indicate that Epaphroditus was supernaturally healed through some kind of miraculous healing?

Now we know that especially during this time, and especially through the hands of Paul, there were many miracles done, including many miracles of healing.

I can't tell from the words used here whether Epaphroditus was healed miraculously, or whether he just recovered through natural means.

I think I can probably discern that there wasn't some immediate miracle that as soon as Epaphroditus had something wrong with him, he was immediately healed through some supernatural gift.

[37 : 26] Because if that was the case, we wouldn't have this drama going on, right, of the Philippians hearing about how sick he was and that he was so close to death.

And now Epaphroditus needs to go and let them know that he actually pulled through. If he had been healed by some immediate miracle, that whole drama would not have unfolded.

And so this comes to a question. People ask as Christians today, should we expect miracles kind of on demand? And did that even happen back then?

we know that God gave Paul power to heal the sick. But what it seems here, as far as I can tell, is that Paul didn't have the power to heal Epaphroditus.

Not immediately anyway. I mean, I'm sure that he prayed for him, and he may have eventually recovered through some supernatural means.

[38 : 30] But during this time, Paul did at different times, we read about it in the book of Acts, it talks about when anybody came to Paul, he would touch them, or sometimes even people would just take cloths to give to Paul, they would take the cloth, Paul would touch the cloth, they would take that back to a sick person, they would be immediately healed.

That's incredible. But it doesn't seem that that was something that happened at all times in Paul's ministry, that that was a gift that he had at all times.

If Paul could have healed his friend and fellow co-worker and fellow soldier, Epaphroditus immediately, I think he certainly would have done it. And so I think even for, you know, back then God was doing some of these miraculous works, and I think the primary reason was to be a sign, a sign for people to realize that when Paul was delivering this new message about the grace of God and the death of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world, that wasn't something that was really understood by the Jewish people, and it was certainly new to the Greeks.

And so God wanted to bring an extra witness when there was this new message being preached, and along, and one of those witnesses was these miraculous powers, these miraculous signs and wonders, that were done by the hands of Paul.

You know, many times there are people who, even back then, I'm sure, were not healed, and succumbed to whatever sickness that they had, and that happens over and over and over again today, and the sufferings that we endure.

[40 : 23] The Bible says, have a reason and have a purpose, and even though it's sorrowful, as Paul says here, he speaks to that sorrow. He said, I would have sorrowed beyond sorrows if I would have lost Epaphroditus.

So many of us have lost loved ones to all kinds of different things, cancer, a big one among them, and we do sorrow. But we have this promise from the Lord, that one day, for those of us who are in Christ, all of those pains and sufferings and sorrows, and even death itself, will be destroyed.

We won't have to worry about any of that anymore. Verse 28, therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again, you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem, because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service towards me.

And just to weigh in just a little bit more on Epaphroditus' service, what we see here is that there was some kind of relationship between his sickness, or at least how long it was prolonged, and his service to Paul.

[41 : 50] He neglected his health. Now, it's not a good idea to neglect your health, right? We ought to take care of ourselves, but sometimes the needs out there are so great, and people do neglect their health so that they can serve others.

You know who I think about most? Think about moms. Moms who have little babies, and they're puking their guts out, but you know what? Baby needs fed. Baby needs taken care of.

And they spend so much time and attention taking care of little baby or their own children, and sometimes they neglect their own health. And hopefully dad comes in or somebody else to help mom.

But that's a wonderful thing that I've seen in moms over and over again. There are a couple of takeaways to wrap this up that I want us to take as thoughts to take away.

And I want to focus on this phrase. Paul says this about Epaphroditus, and I think also Timothy. He says, hold such men in esteem.

[43 : 00] Hold them in esteem. Honor them. honor these kinds of men. And I want to look today and have us apply that to our own lives.

Who are the kind of people that we should esteem today? You know, in the world, those who are unbelievers, you see the kinds of people who are esteemed most.

I think about Hollywood actors, actresses, people with power or fame, those who have athletic prowess sometimes, great musicians, politicians, or entrepreneurs are pretty popular and held in esteem today.

They are considered successful. And you know what? There's nothing wrong with any of those things in and of themselves. It's not wrong to be a famous musician. It's not wrong to have political power.

It's actually, you can do a lot of good with those things. It's not good to be an entrepreneur. It's not bad, excuse me, to be an entrepreneur, a successful one who builds a multi-million dollar or even a billion dollar business.

[44 : 05] But those things are not a good basis to esteem others. It's just not. Because people that are good can do those things and people that are as evil as the day is long can also do any of those things.

But even Christians can fall into this worldly trap. of esteeming men for the wrong reasons. We look to people sometimes, you know, even in the church arena or maybe the conservative space where we esteem people because of things that don't really relate to character.

I think of people who are just great speakers and they can really spin a sermon, you know, something that is sometimes very positive. Somebody who has great charisma and personality or a commanding presence and they make you sit up and pay attention.

Or maybe it's somebody who has great marketing prowess and they have 10 million followers on Instagram. They know how to get people's attention. Or a popular conference speaker who, again, may be a great speaker who can pull in the crowds.

But are those things alone, again, those things by themselves aren't bad, but are those things alone a sufficient basis to esteem someone, to look up to them as someone that you want to exemplify?

[45 : 34] I don't think so at all. Paul warns, actually, in his last letter to Timothy, he warns about what could happen to the church. And he talks about how there's a time coming when people will have itching ears.

And they will give their time, focus, and attention to people that have things to say that aren't necessarily true, but they sound really good.

I think about those today who promise miracles to anyone who puts enough money into the offering. Or riches and wealth to anybody who gives an offering of seed faith or something like that.

Who promise material prosperity. But even those who are just bold in what they speak. You know, today there is lots of crazy nonsense going on with people not knowing what a woman is or a man is, the transgenderism stuff, with the sexual immorality and perversion.

And it's actually quite easy to just slam those things. And we have this resurgence in our country anyway of people who are identifying all of this nonsense in clear terms and eloquent ways and doing it boldly and brashly.

[47 : 00] And many of us stand up and cheer, right? I'm glad somebody with a platform and a voice is finally saying something, finally calling out that the emperor is naked, right? And we're happy about that and I'm happy about that.

But you know what I've noticed is that many of these people calling out and a lot of these things are so simple. Duh! Boys and girls are different. It's not like this is some great wisdom or something that we're talking about here.

But many of these people, they are bold and sometimes we call them based, you know, you're really based. They have this kind of tough guy demeanor.

And they're willing to say things that other people won't. But you know what? When you find out about their personal lives, you find out their personal lives are a mess. They don't have any character.

They actually live hypocritically. They lack the kind of character that God would have them to have and they're not really, even though they might be somebody you might look up to in one way, when it comes to the fundamentals, just being a person of good character, they don't have those kinds of things.

[48 : 12] And so we ought to be careful. You know, I think about Paul himself. And he lacked so many of these things that so many of us like look to. Was Paul a great speaker?

He says no. He says, he told the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 2.1, he says, when I came to you, I didn't come in excellency of speech. I wasn't a great orator. In fact, he quotes, and I don't think it's a direct quote, but he says, this is what the Corinthians say about me.

He says, the Corinthians say that his presence is weak and his speech is contemptible. That's what they said about Paul. The people that, you know, he brought to faith.

He's not a great orator. You know, he's kind of boring to listen to. In his presence, you know, he doesn't command a great presence. He's kind of weak. There's actually another example of a person who it seems is more of an eloquent speaker.

His name was Apollos. And some of the believers actually brought him to faith. He was a Jewish guy who was preaching the baptism of John, and they helped bring him along and tell him what Jesus did so that he could know about the gospel of grace.

[49 : 19] And he actually worked with Paul, and Paul was very excited to have him on board. You know, when you have somebody who's a good speaker that more people will listen to, hey, that's a great thing. So he's called an eloquent man.

And in fact, there were divisions happening even in the early church, right, about some people said, hey, I'm of Paul, and I'm of Peter. And some people said, I'm of Apollos, and you can imagine why. Hey, this guy's cool. He can really spin a tale.

He can really, you know, make a great speech, something that's exciting to listen to. And that kind of thing will gather followers. But is that the basis for which believers in Philippi or anywhere in the church should exemplify somebody, should hold someone in esteem?

And the answer is no. And so there are pitfalls to popularity. You know, there are many people today who will vie for our attention, even in kind of Christian, conservative circles.

Back, you know, in the past, a generation ago, you had broadcast and cable television, and somebody would get a spot, and you might call it whether it's a televangelist or something else, they would get a spot on TV and gain a lot of followers.

[50 : 25] And they may have been good or maybe not, right? But you had people on the radio. You had publishing houses where people would publish books. And so they would gain a lot of followers, popularity.

But again, maybe the book was good, maybe not. Today we have more of an influencer culture, we call it. People on Instagram and YouTube, they have marketing prowess, X and TikTok, rising stars, many, some of them with very good things to say.

We hope that people pay attention so they can figure out what a woman is. But you know, most Christians lack discernment, and they can't tell the difference between somebody of character and somebody who's just popular.

But we need to be the kind of Christians who have that discernment. Not giving our attention to things that matter little, like how many followers somebody has, or how based they are, and owning the libs.

And we need to give more attention to things like character and Christian service and humility and godliness. That we would esteem people like that.

[51 : 34] And you know what? Most of those people aren't on Instagram. They're not on YouTube. Many of them are sitting right next to you. They're people who love the Lord and just do it, not in the limelight, but just in humility in their church.

Those are the kinds of people that we should esteem. Instead of waiting for that YouTube person or that Instagram influencer to tell us their latest wisdom and thought, which may be great, maybe we can go to that person in our church and say, hey, I'm struggling with something.

I need some counsel. Could you help me? I've noticed that you have a lot of attributes that I want to have in my life. And I think you'd be a good person to speak into my life. We would do that instead.

The attributes, just to reiterate what was described here, these are the kinds of attributes.

Somebody who cares for others, cares for their state.

Somebody who puts the things of God before their own needs or desires or interests. People who have proven character, who have proven over time that they are a person who will do the right thing for the right reasons over and over and over again.

[52 : 49] And people who you see who lay down their lives for others. They could be doing something else. They're spending time helping people, giving up of their own time, labor, sometimes even their health to serve others.

And so those are the kinds of men and women, by the way, that we ought to esteem. But not just esteem, right? But also we want to emulate. Because we want to be the kind of person that others esteem, that others emulate.

So as we look to those people, of course we look primarily to Jesus Christ. We look to Paul. We look to all these people in the Bible, Timothy and Epaphroditus. We look around at the people that are serving alongside us in the church.

And we esteem those people as well. And we work to become like them. And you know what?

When you esteem the right people, you tend to become more like them.

When you esteem the wrong people, you tend to become more like them. So really I think there's a key there. Who do we esteem? Who do we give our attention to?

[53 : 59] And if we do that, we will, over time, it doesn't happen overnight, us having our character transformed, us becoming more like Christ, us having hearts of service towards others.

You know, it takes time. Christian growth does. But if we will esteem others who have those things that we want and what God wants in our lives, over time, we'll be transformed to be like them and ultimately to be like our Savior.

Amen? All right. Let's close in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to work in us in that way. Father, we thank you for your word and these examples of these two men, Timothy and Epaphroditus, who are examples to us.

I don't know that they really knew or understood that they would be examples to millions and billions of people thousands of years into the future from when they lived. But they are. And we're so grateful for their faithfulness to be examples to us.

We pray, Father, that we might also be examples. We would look to them, look to others around us who are good examples of character. Character that has been proven over time. And that we would be transformed to be the same way.

[55 : 05] We need you, Father, to work in us. We can't do it on our own. We need you to work in us each and every day to be more like you. We thank you for your work in us, that you have promised that you will continue to complete a work in us as we look to you.

In Jesus' name, amen.