

Harmon Philippians Session09

This is Dr. Matthew S. Harman in his series on Philippians, Rejoice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is session number nine, Examples of Christlike Mindset, part one, Paul's Coworkers, Philippians chapter two, verses 19 through 30. Welcome to session nine of our study in Philippians.

We are entitling this session Examples of Christlike Mindsets, part one, Paul's Coworkers. We'll be looking at Philippians chapter two, verses 19 through 30. So let's go ahead and read the text.

Actually, before we do that, before we read the text, let's remind ourselves of where we were in the previous passage in chapter two, verses 12 through 18. So in that passage, we saw Paul calling the Philippians to work out their own salvation of fear and trembling. And he stressed that that's not a solo project.

It's not a project that we do on our own effort or in our own strength, but that our responsibility is to use the means of grace that God has given us. But ultimately, God is the one who is at work in believers to both to give the desire and the power to obey. And then that section, the second part of that passage, Paul warns the Philippians about avoiding Israel's mistakes.

We saw several Old Testament allusions that draw a contrast between Israel's failure in the wilderness through their grumbling, complaining, and the fact that they were not obedient children. And Paul is calling the Philippians to be what Israel failed to be, and that they have the power to do that based on God's work in their lives. And when he concludes that section by using sacrificial imagery to depict his own life potentially as a drink offering that would be poured out on the offering of the Philippians faith.

So now that brings us to Philippians chapter two, verses 19 through 30. To follow along as I read the text, Paul writes, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know, Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me.

And I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. I have found it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need. For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

Indeed, he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon soul. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.

So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men. For he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. So as we look at this passage, what we are seeing is Paul is laying out examples of a Christ-like mindset.

And really, this is going to stretch from Philippians 2.19 all the way through 3.14. Here in 2.19-30, the focus is on Paul's co-workers. And so he's going to talk about Timothy, he's going to talk about Epaphroditus. And then he will turn his attention to his own example in Philippians 3 verses 1-14.

And all of these are intended as examples of a Christ-like mindset. Paul is indicating that yes, it's important and helpful to describe what a Christ-like mindset looks like. Yes, it's crucial to show how Christ is the exemplar, the fullest embodiment of this.

But at the end of the day, he also knows that when we have tangible, real-life examples in our lives that we can look at, that teaching takes on a whole new richness and texture. So he's going to point first to his co-workers, and that's the focus of Philippians 2.19-30. And he tells us about two particular co-workers. The first is Timothy, and that's the focus in verses 19-24.

He says several things about Timothy's character. He refers to his Christ-like concern for others. In fact, that's where he really leads with.

He says there's no one like him. Verse 20, who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. And we contrast that with others.

They, these others, all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. With the implication being, Timothy seeks the interests of Jesus Christ. And if you listen carefully, you hear the echoes of what Paul has said back in chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, when he talked about, let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

So Timothy is embodying the kind of self-sacrificial humility that he wants the to live out in their own lives. That's the first thing we see about Timothy's character. Second, Paul uses the expression proven worth there in verse 22.

That the Philippians know this, they know his proven worth. And the imagery of that language there is of metals that have been tested under fire. And so the word picture there is that Timothy, his proven worth has been demonstrated in the crucible of everyday life and ministry and service.

That he has demonstrated this. And we see that same word for proven worth shows up in Romans chapter 5, verse 4 as well. The third thing we see about Timothy's character is that he has a father-son relationship with Paul.

And that comes out in verse 22, when Paul writes, as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel. Now in the ancient world, it was very common that if your father had a profession, then the son would follow in that profession. And so if a father was a carpenter, the expectation was that the son would also be a carpenter and that the son would work alongside the father and learn the skills and techniques of that occupation and serve essentially as a sort of apprentice under the mentorship of his father.

And so the picture that Paul paints here for us is that Timothy was like his son working in his gospel ministry with him, learning alongside of Paul. And this is not the only place where Paul uses that language to refer to Timothy. He refers to Timothy with sonship language in the two letters that he writes to Timothy as well.

And don't misunderstand, it wasn't merely just an occupational thing. It's not like it was a purely business kind of relationship. There's a warmth, there's an affection, there's a closeness, and that even probably picking up on the common Hebrew idiom idea of that a son is to resemble his father.

So if you would say like Paul does in Ephesians chapter two, when he talks about children of wrath, the idea there is that those children are so characterized by wrath that wrath must be their father. And so the idea here of that father-son relationship is that Timothy has taken on Paul's characteristics, serving alongside of him. And that's why he can say in verse 20, I have no one like him.

There's a uniqueness to that relationship that Paul has with Timothy. And the Philippians apparently know Timothy because he was on the team that helped plant that church. In fact, the story of Timothy joining Paul's ministry team comes right before the story of the church at Philippi being planted.

And so that would have been early in Timothy's ministry experience. By now, some 10 years later, they probably know with even more confidence that Timothy is Paul's beloved ministry colleague and has a father-son relationship with him. And lastly, in terms of character, we see the value of discipleship and mentoring in the church.

I think that this is an area where many churches struggle to see this effectively worked out. And when I talk about discipleship and mentorship, I'm not just talking about specific programs. You can put programs in place in a church that can help facilitate this.

But some of the most powerful discipleship and mentoring takes place in a more organic way. And this is where I think believers who are a little bit further down the path should be intentional about looking for younger believers, whether that's by age or even just spiritual experience and maturity, and be intentional about spending time with them, learning more about their spiritual life, trying to be an encouragement, offer wisdom where it's needed, and things like that. And one of the things that I'm most encouraged about the younger generations is there seems to be a greater hunger and desire for being discipled and mentored.

And oftentimes what the problem is in the churches is that there aren't enough older men and women stepping up to then help meet that need. And so Paul models this here and talks about it indirectly and that by this point, 10 plus years of mentoring and discipleship, that now he thinks of Timothy as his son in effect. So what is Timothy's role? First, Paul is sending him to Philippi so that he can learn what's going on there, and then be able to send news back to Paul.

That's how he introduces this, in fact, when he says I hope to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be cheered by news of you. Paul wants to hear a good report back from

what's going on in Philippi, and he's sending Timothy soon in order to find out more about what's actually happening there in Philippi. Second, he's there to prepare for Paul's return.

If you look again at verse 23, Paul writes, I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. So he's holding on, waiting until he finds out the resolution of his legal circumstances there in Rome. Will he be acquitted? Will he not? And then he intends to send Timothy to Philippi so that he can update them, and then eventually Paul can join him later.

So that's the first example of a Christ-like mindset, and Paul has intentionally described Timothy's actions using language from earlier in Philippians so that the careful reader picks up those connections and says, oh, so that's what it looks like to put the interests of others above my own interests. I see Timothy's demonstrating that. That's a tangible model for me to observe.

Sure. So that's Timothy. Then he moves on to Epaphroditus.

Now, Epaphroditus is in a slightly different situation. You see, Epaphroditus is the one that the Philippians sent to Paul. So although he knows Epaphroditus, he doesn't have as close of an intense relationship as he has with Timothy.

And yet, he is sending Epaphroditus back, and I want you to notice how he describes Epaphroditus. He has very encouraging things to say about Epaphroditus. He refers to him first as his brother.

In other words, a fellow believer, part of the family of God, and then a fellow worker, someone who has worked alongside of him. So he's putting Epaphroditus on the same level that he is. He's not speaking of him as if he's subordinate to Paul, but he's speaking of him as a fellow worker, someone working alongside with Paul in gospel ministry.

And then the imagery gets even more intense when he moves on to refer to Epaphroditus as a fellow soldier. And so I think he uses that language in particular because it brings up the idea that Epaphroditus is involved in the same struggle and conflict that Paul is involved in. So these are three very affirming descriptions that Paul gives to Epaphroditus.

And it's noteworthy that he stresses these things because I think what he's making sure, as he's going to say later in this passage, that the Philippians welcome him back warmly. And that they hear Paul affirming and saying, Epaphroditus did what you asked him to do. And in one sense even went well beyond what you could have even hoped he would.

So those are a couple of descriptions that Paul gives him. But then he transitions to a couple more descriptions here in calling him your messenger and minister to my knees. So that's just affirming that he was sent by the Philippians to continue their ministry to Paul.

And so he highlights in doing this Epaphroditus' endurance. That's the theme that really comes through here as we unpack what he experienced. Epaphroditus persevered through distress and illness.

So if you look at verse 26, he was longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. That term distressed, the only other appearances of it in the New

Testament occur in Matthew and Mark to describe Jesus' distress in the garden. So that gives you a picture of the intensity.

That as Epaphroditus is sick, he is distressed because now he's concerned about the fact that the Philippians will be worried about him. That's what's causing him this distress. Oh no, the church in Philippi is going to be worried about me.

And I don't want to cause them any additional concern. In the midst of this illness, it goes on, verse 27, Paul says, yeah, you've heard he was ill. You may not have heard the extent of it.

He was ill near to death. Yeah. And that's an important point that Paul makes here.

He's going to actually come back to it later in the passage. But if you pause for a moment and think, why would Paul describe him that way? Well, one, because it's true. But think about back in chapter 2, verse 8, how did he describe Christ's obedience? That Christ was obedient to the point of death.

And so he's saying Epaphroditus, in following Christ, came near to the point of death in order to fulfill the mission that you sent him on. And yet he did not die. Paul says, God showed Epaphroditus and him mercy.

Verse 27, God had mercy on him and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I think what Paul is saying there is the grief would have been overwhelming if Epaphroditus had in fact died. And again, this helps set the contrast here that Paul's in prison.

His circumstances are not great. And even as he's wrestling with this, he's still hammering away ultimately at the theme of joy. And we'll see that come up again in verse 28.

So Epaphroditus apparently recovers. He manages to successfully bring the gift that the Philippian church had gathered for Paul. And now Paul is ready to send him back to the Philippian church.

So let's talk about Epaphroditus' return. It might seem strange to us in verse 28 when Paul says that he sends him back so that you may rejoice at seeing him again. And then he says again in verse 29, receive him in the Lord with all joy.

You think, well, wait a minute. Why would Paul put such emphasis on that? You would think they would naturally be joyful that he's returning. And yet I think part of what Paul is trying to address is he is trying to emphasize that Epaphroditus was successful in that mission and they should welcome him back as a successful messenger on their behalf and they should rejoice.

Mission accomplished would be the idea there. So they expect, Paul expects that they will welcome him joyfully and he expects that they will show him honor for his Christ-like service. He says in verse 28, receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men for he nearly died for the work of Christ.

There's that language again. He nearly died. Paul says it twice.

Nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. And so if you're wondering, what's Paul mean by what was lacking in your service to me? I think what he's saying is, is that by the Philippians giving the gift, by Epaphroditus delivering that gift that fulfills their intention of serving Paul and being a blessing to him in his particular need. Now Paul will eventually circle back at the end of the letter and actually say thank you for the gift, but here his focus is on Epaphroditus and I want us to linger a bit even on thinking about this idea of honoring such men.

That Paul says it's good not just to joyfully welcome him back, but to show him honor. And what's particularly noteworthy is we talked earlier about how humility was not a Greek or Roman virtue. That it was not something that was valued and yet Paul was trying to put forward an example of someone who shows great humility in doing the work of Christ.

So stepping back, what's the big picture here? I think the big idea from this particular section can be summarized as God's servants show their true colors by risking it all for Christ. God's servants show their true colors by risking it all for Christ. So let's break this down a little bit more.

In the first section dedicated to discussing Timothy, we can kind of summarize that as God's servants demonstrate their proven worth. And through Timothy's example we see a couple of ways that they can do that. By showing genuine concern for others and by seeking the interests of Christ rather than of self.

And then third, by working for the spread of the gospel. I think we've all probably had the experience of interacting with people who show interest in us and sometimes we wonder, is your interest in me genuine or is it somehow selfishly motivated? What's in it for you that you're showing interest in me? And yet when we're the recipients of someone showing genuine interest in us, genuine concern, not for any agenda they have, there's a deep sense of encouragement and love that comes from that. And Timothy provides us with a picture of that.

Second, God's servants risk their lives for the work of Christ. Now with Epaphroditus this was literal, right? He did this by sacrificially serving others and those who do this deserve joyful honor for their service to Christ. Now it's not the case that every believer is going to be called to risk their physical lives in the service of Christ.

That's not something that God calls every believer to. And yet there's a picture of it, right? When we lay down our own agendas and our own resources and our own time and sacrificially serve others, there is a sense in which we are risking our earthly lives for the benefit of others. I'm hoping that at some point in your life you've experienced the overwhelming blessing of someone laying down their time and energy and resources and just joyfully serving you in your moment of need.

There's nothing really quite like that. It can be overwhelming and sometimes it's so overwhelming that we don't even really know how to respond to it. That someone would show us such genuine concern and love and self-sacrificial action.

So let's think about some points of application here as we wind down. What does God want us to think or understand? Well one thing we could conclude here is that God uses his people to advance his interests depending on what kind of background you come from or even perhaps theological tradition or church background. Sometimes people who come from backgrounds that so emphasize the sovereignty of God can fall into this trap of almost just being like, well God's going to do what God's going to do and he's going to get done and it really doesn't matter what I do.

And that couldn't be further from the truth. God uses his people to advance his interests. And when you stop to think about it, God is powerful enough that he wouldn't have to do that.

He could choose to accomplish his will and his purposes without us if he wanted to. And yet he says I want to bless you by allowing you to participate with me in accomplishing my purposes. So we need to understand that.

Second, I need to believe that God can use me. That God can use you. And he has different ways of using individuals and sometimes we get a little too fixated on, well there's only certain people and certain ways that God can use them, right? We think, well, I don't have that set of gifts that this person has.

So you might think, well, goodness, he can obviously use the pastor. He's got all these gifts and he's really smart and he's got all this training and that sort of thing and I don't have any of that. I don't have any of those abilities.

So can God really use me? Yes. He can use your gifts, your abilities, your time, your energy to bless people in other ways. And sometimes we think that we have to have a certain background or certain set of skills for God to use us.

And God intends for all of his people to participate in what he's doing. Third, desire. We should desire to live a life as a Christ-like servant.

One of the things that I see in our contemporary day is this tendency to think of our lives as Christians, as part of our lives. And so you see this approach that kind of divides life up into these different categories of, well, there's my career and then there's my family and then there's my hobbies. And then, oh, and I'm a Christian too.

And those are all sort of in the mix and I kind of have to balance them and make sure that I'm paying attention to all of them at some level. And that's not the way that we are intended to live our lives as Christians. Our identity as followers of Christ should shape every other aspect of our lives.

And so when we have that mindset, it helps us to see that we should desire to live the entirety of our lives as a Christ-like servant. Lastly, do. I would encourage you to think about identifying someone who is a faithful servant of Christ and find a tangible way of showing them honor.

This could take a variety of different forms. One of the simplest could be send that person a note, a text, an email, or be intentional about, when you see them the next time, telling

them a specific way that God has blessed you through them. And this can feel awkward sometimes, but this is an important aspect of showing honor.

And it can be done in a way that doesn't puff that person up. It can be done in a way that points attention to, I'm so grateful for God's work in and through you and I've been blessed by it. And so I want to say thank you and I want to express my appreciation for how God has used you in my life.

It can be as simple as that. So that's the initial section of Paul giving us examples of a Christ-like mindset with his two co-workers, Timothy and Epaphronetus. In our next session, we'll see how Paul talks about himself as an example of a Christ-like mindset.

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