

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

A Priceless Pair Philippians 2:19-30 Part 3

So many professing Christians have a very superficial view of the church. They are not opposed to the church, but neither are they personally supportive of the church. They believe that as long as they go to church once in a while that they are OK. They believe if they can get their family to church once in a while that this is really not a very big deal. This attitude on the part of so many Christians is extremely short sighted and fails to reflect what we find in the scriptures both in terms of what it teaches and what it exemplifies. I believe that we will see this brought home to us very powerfully in the Scripture that we will be considering this weekend.

We are presently studying Philippians 2:19-30. In this passage Paul introduces two men who hopefully will serve as positive spiritual examples for our lives.

The first example that we considered was Timothy, in Philippians 2:19-24. Let us read this section of Scripture, **“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. (2) 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. (23) Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; And I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly.** As we looked at the example of Timothy we considered 5 different features. He was similar to Paul. He was sympathetic. He was single minded. He was seasoned. And he was submissive.

We are now going on to consider another man who serves as a powerful example for our lives, Epaphroditus. Let us read **Philippians 2:25-30, “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. (26) 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, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. (28) Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. (29) Therefore receive him 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.”**

The Apostle Paul had concerns for the Philippian Church. He wanted to reach out to them. He could not personally do this because he was still imprisoned in Rome. He could send Timothy but he felt it best to send him later for reasons stated in **Philippians 2:23**. So rather than going himself or sending Timothy he decided to send Epaphroditus along with this letter that we are now studying. The details of this decision are recorded for us in **Philippians 2:25-30**.

In exploring this passage I would hope that once again we will have the opportunity to see an example of an individual who will be personally challenging to us.

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I would hope that the model he presents to us would challenge us to become more involved in the life of Valley Bible Church and in the lives of the people who fellowship here..... What do we learn about Epaphroditus from **Philippians 2:25-30**?

We learn about who Epaphroditus was to others (Philippians 2:25). Let us read **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.”** In this verse, Paul focuses in on who Epaphroditus was to two specific entities.

We first of all learn who Epaphroditus was to Paul (Philippians 2:25). Epaphroditus was many things to Paul but Paul takes time to isolate three of those things.

Paul calls him “my brother” (Matthew 12:46-50). Look at **Verse 25 “But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother”** In what sense was he a brother to Paul? He certainly was not referring to him as a brother in the flesh. Paul was a Jew. Epaphroditus was a gentile. But though they were not brothers in the flesh they were brothers in Christ.

When we are saved we are baptized or immersed into Christ by the Spirit of God. Being joined to God the Son in this way makes us all children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. Certainly Paul had this in mind when he spoke of Epaphroditus as his brother, but I believe that he had more than this in mind.

Let me read for you **Matthew 12:46-50, “While He (Christ) was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. (47) And someone said to Him, “Behold Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.” (48) But He answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My Brothers?” (49) And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, Behold, My mother and My brothers! (50) For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”** Paul called Epaphroditus “my brother” not only because Epaphroditus was his brother in Christ but because Epaphroditus was acting like his brother in Christ. Epaphroditus was living his life in such a way that it confirmed for Paul that they were both a part of God’s spiritual family.

It would be a wonderful thing if we would live our lives in this same dynamic way and as a result feel this wonderful closeness that Paul felt toward Epaphroditus.

What specific behaviors might create these familial feelings of closeness? What is the next title that he gives to Epaphroditus?

Paul calls him “my fellow worker” (Philippians 4:2-3). Look again at **verse 25 “But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker**” Paul uses this expression 12 of the 13 times it occurs in the New Testament. Paul loved this expression. Though it does not specifically identify the work that they shared in common it is not difficult to discern what Paul specifically had in mind. He is thinking about the work of advancing the Gospel.

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We see this association in **Philippians 4:2-3** which says, **“I urge Euodia and I urge Synteche to live in harmony in the Lord. (3) Indeed true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”** Paul mentions two women and a man by name and another group of people who are unnamed but he identifies all of them as his **“fellow workers.”** His fellow workers in what? **Verse 3** tells us, it is in **“the cause of the gospel.”**

The closeness that Paul felt toward Epaphroditus was first of all being generated by Paul’s personal sense that Epaphroditus was doing everything that he was doing because he wanted the cause of the gospel to be advanced. He was a fellow worker.

It would be a wonderful thing that we could view each other’s efforts in the very same way. Hopefully the reason why you are choosing to do what you are doing is not because you want to advance your goals for personal comfort or financial success. Hopefully the reason why you are choosing to do what you are doing is not because you want to be a nice guy or gal or simply to be well thought of. Hopefully the choices you are making in terms of where you will expend your energy is somehow rooted in the advancement of the gospel.

Paul called Epaphroditus “my brother”, he believed and felt that he was spiritually bond to Epaphroditus in Christ..... I believe one of the reasons he felt spiritually bound to him was that he saw him as a fellow worker in the cause of Christ. But this is not the only reason Paul felt spiritually bond to Epaphroditus..... What is the next title?

Paul calls him “my fellow soldier.” Let us read **verse 25 “But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier.”** “The word translated my fellow soldier (SUSTRATIOTES) was originally a military term used to describe those who fight side by side. Epaphroditus was fighting alongside of Paul against the opponents of the gospel.

It is one thing to work alongside of someone in the cause of Christ it is quite another to fight alongside of someone in the cause of Christ. I have been privileged at Valley not only to be surrounded with many fellow workers but also many fellow soldiers.

One man I want to specifically highlight for you this weekend is Bill Tagliaferro. Bill Tagliaferro was an elder at Valley Bible Church over a decade ago when we were going through a great deal of turmoil. During that time he not only labored but he also fought alongside of me for the cause of Christ. He was God’s special gift to me and to this church fellowship..... I came to know Bill as “My brother,” “My fellow worker,” “My fellow soldier.”

We have the same opportunity to enjoy this close brothers and sisters in Christ. Certainly the work of the gospel is still in front of us and we can be assured that as we remain faithful to this task that opposition will again occur. It would be a wonderful thing for us to think of each other in the same way that Paul thought of Epaphroditus. But we not only learn who Epaphroditus was to Paul

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We also learn who Epaphroditus was to the Philippians (Philippians 2:25). Epaphroditus I am sure was many things to the Philippians church but two things are highlighted by Paul.

Paul called Epaphroditus “your messenger” (Philippians 4:18). Epaphroditus did not go to Paul on a personal whim he in fact was sent to Paul by the church at Philippi. The church at Philippi had become aware of Paul’s difficult circumstances at Rome. The church at Philippi was aware of the fact that Paul was being held under arrest in rented quarters in Rome and they wanted to help with this financial burden. So it is clear from **Philippians 4:18** that they wanted to help him financially. Listen to this verse, **“But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”**

Obviously this says something about Epaphroditus. It says that he was trustworthy. I am not sure of the amount of money that was given but I am sure that the sum would have been a very large sum in the Epaphroditus. But they had no problem entrusting that money to him. But it appears that the Philippian church saw him as more than just a trusted courier.

Paul called Epaphroditus “your minister.” It was not just the money that was meant to minister to Paul but Epaphroditus himself was sent for that very purpose. This term “minister” (LEITOURGOS) denoted among the Greeks one who discharged a public office at his own expense. How successful was he at discharging his office as a minister or servant to Paul on behalf of the Philippian church? Apparently very successful since Paul was moved to identify him as “my brother, my fellow worker, my fellow soldier.”

Epaphroditus was obviously more than just a trusted courier who could deliver a large sum of money. The Philippian church had come to personally view Epaphroditus as a trusted servant who would be very able to minister to Paul on their behalf even as he had ministered to them. They sent to Paul I believe most likely their most trusted, most loved, most important man in their fellowship. I believe the reason why I would say this will become clear as we proceed with this passage.

What do we learn about Epaphroditus from this scripture? We learn who he was to others specifically to Paul and to the Philippians. What else do we learn about Epaphroditus from this passage?

We learn why Epaphroditus was sent back to Philippi by Paul (Philippians 2:26,27). Some people who had left their family and church behind might have gotten homesick. Perhaps that is the reason why Paul wants Epaphroditus to return. Perhaps the ministry to Paul in Rome was more than he could effectively handle and he was simply burned out. What was the reason why Paul sent Timothy back? Let us read **Philippians 2:26-27**, **“because he was longing for you** Paul was sending him back because he was longing for the Philippians. Some might think, “there it is he is homesick.” But if we continue to read you will see that this was not it. Look again at the verse **“he was longing for you and was distressed.....”** Again some might think, “there it is the ministry to Paul in Rome was wearing him out. But if we continue to read you will see that this was not it.

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Look again at the verse **“Because he was longing for you and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.”** Paul sent Epaphroditus back because of Epaphroditus’s concern for the Philippian church.

Obviously the Philippian church was extremely upset about reports coming out of Rome about the health of Epaphroditus. What were those reports? Let us read **Verse 27, “For indeed he was sick to the point of death**” The Philippians had very likely heard that Epaphroditus was dying and their response to this news was very upsetting. I believe that they felt as if their heart was being ripped out. The kind of feeling we might have when we think that our wife, husband or child may be dying. This is how close they were to Epaphroditus. I don’t believe that we can downplay the impact of this news on the Philippians. And their deep concern for him became a concern for Epaphroditus. He needed to go in order to comfort them and Paul felt that he needed to go.

What a wonderful relationship existed between the Philippian church and Epaphroditus. It was a relationship characterized by deep affection. Some people view the church and the relationships that we might enjoy with people in the church as being secondary to the deep feelings of affection that we might experience toward our own earthly family. This view is absolutely not correct. In fact the attachment we enjoy with our church family should be similar if not greater than the attachment we enjoy with our human family(Matthew 12:46-50). What did Jesus do about his disciples even as his mother and brothers were standing at the door. **“Behold, My mother and My brothers! (50) For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”**

We see this same depth of feeling on the part of the Apostle Paul toward Epaphroditus during his illness. Let us continue to read the verse, **“For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not only him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.”** Paul saw the healing of Epaphroditus as an act of mercy on the part of God directed not only toward Epaphroditus but toward himself as well. If God had not chosen to act in this merciful way Paul says that he would have had sorrow upon sorrow.

We do not know exactly what he is referring to in his initial reference to sorrow but it most likely has to do with the suffering associated with his present imprisonment. Paul is simply saying Paul was not only merciful to Epaphroditus when he chose to let him live but also to himself that he would not have to suffer the pain of his death on top of what he was already suffering in the cause of Christ.

The love that the Philippian church, Epaphroditus, and Paul had for one another was a powerful witness to the world that they were the disciples of Christ (John 13:34,35). What does Jesus was speaking to his disciples and said, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have love you, that you also love one another. (35) By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.”**

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CONCLUSION

There are many professing Christians who have failed to see the importance of the church. Based on the teachings of God's word and the example set before us this weekend I would hope that we would consider how important we have made the church family in our lives and in the lives of our human family.

The church which is the body of Christ needs to play a very central role in our lives anything else will be detrimental to our lives, the life of our families and the cause of Christ.