

READ: PHILIPPIANS 2: 16-30



He commended Timothy for being “like _____,” having the same attitude of heart or mindset as Paul had. In this chapter Paul has described that mindset and told the Philippians to emulate it. It is a mindset that puts others ahead of oneself. It is a mindset of humble service. It is the mindset Jesus demonstrated by going to the cross. *Phi 2 vs 5-8*

Secondly Paul commended Timothy as one with “**proven character.**” He has proven to be a man of integrity and reliability. As we look at Paul’s words about Timothy, we learned some characteristics of God-approved ministers. Faithful, servant heart, doing the will of God and not man.

Now we turn our attention to Epaphroditus. He was probably an elder at Philippi. The fact that they entrusted him with their financial gift for Paul would imply that.

Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippian church to bring him a financial gift and to minister to him. At the end of this letter Paul thanks them for the gift. *Philippians 4:18: “I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.”* We understand the importance of this gift better when we look at Paul’s cultural setting. In that culture prisoners were not provided for or cared for by the state like they are in our culture. The prisoner’s necessities, especially food, had to be supplied by friends and relatives. Paul was under house arrest and the state did not provide for his basic necessities.

Epaphroditus got sick, probably during his journey to Rome. In those days an individual traveling alone with a large sum of money could be a target for robbers. For safety against that, there were probably others with Epaphroditus, although he was the leader. When he got sick, one of those companions must have returned back to Philippi and reported on their progress and Epaphroditus’s illness. It is clear in the text that the Philippian believers knew about his sickness but did not know about his recovery.

Paul says in *verse 30* that Epaphroditus almost died. Although Epaphroditus was serving God, he was not above the laws of nature. When he got sick, he needed to rest and recover. Instead he pressed on to get the job done. The NIV says he risked his own life to minister to Paul’s need.

In 2:27, Paul praised God for His mercy in that: “*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.*” Paul was suffering under the Roman persecution, but for Epaphroditus to die would have added “sorrow upon sorrow” for him. Notice, even though Paul was a man of faith, he still had human feelings. He would have grieved his friend’s death - not as the world grieves, but as a Christian grieves over the temporal loss of the companionship.

One reason Paul was sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi at this time was so they could rejoice in his healing. He would carry this letter with him. But it would encourage the church at Philippi to see for themselves the healing God had done. Additionally, Epaphroditus was concerned for them, that they would know that he was okay. In *verse 26* Paul said, “. . . *he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.*” Epaphroditus was distressed because the Philippians knew he had been sick but did not know he had recovered. No doubt, Paul could have used additional help and encouragement from Epaphroditus. But he saw this need as more important than his own need.

Lessons that can be learned In *verse 25*, Paul makes five commendations about Epaphroditus that are good guidelines for evaluating ministries.

DEVOTIONAL MESSAGE

The battles are real. God is looking for people who can keep rank when the going gets rough. *1 Chronicles 12* numbers soldiers from the various tribes who aligned themselves with David. Then *verse 38* says, “*All these men of war, who could keep ranks, came to Hebron with a loyal heart, to make David king over all Israel.*” Double-minded people break rank when the going gets tough. People who are not committed will walk away whenever the journey gets rough. I want to be loyal to my King, even when it’s hard to do. Amen?

- Paul characterized Epaphroditus as “your messenger” in his letter to the Philippians. Epaphroditus was trusted with an important assignment. They sent him to bring the gift and minister to Paul. He submitted to that assignment. He was faithful to do what he was sent to do, even risking his own life to do it. The journey from Philippi to Rome was approx 800 miles. Epaphroditus went this distance no Airplane, trains, automobiles. no mode of transportation existed like this.
- Finally Paul says he is “**the one who ministered to my need.**” Here is the servanthood that Paul has been calling the Philippians to live in. Remember how Paul referred to himself and Timothy as servants (doulos) slaves of Jesus Christ. He talked about Jesus “*taking on the form of a bondservant*” in *2:7*. This is a concept Paul wants the Christians at Philippi to understand. It is a concept God wants you and me to grasp and live in. In *Matthew 20*, Jesus talked about the way the Gentiles exercise authority by dominating and lording it over people. Then he said, “*Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (*Matt. 20:26-28*) Epaphroditus had a mindset, an attitude of heart, that willingly fulfilled what was asked if him.
- In *1 Thessalonians 2* Paul describes his own ministry, and we see these same characteristics. We do not have time to expound on the passage. But I want to read *verses 1-13* from the New Living Translation as a final glimpse of what ministry should look like.
- “*You yourselves know, dear brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2 You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. [Paul is referring to what happened to them when he founded the church at Philippi (Acts 16:22-23)]. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition. 3 So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery. 4 For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. 5 Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! 6 As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else. 7 As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were like children among you. Or we were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children. 8 We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God’s Good News but our own lives, too. 9 Don’t you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God’s Good News to you. 10 You yourselves are our witnesses—and so is God—that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers. 11 And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. 12 We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory. 13 Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn’t think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe.*”

Conclusion:

- Paul, Jesus, Timothy, and Epaphroditus are presented in this epistle as examples of what biblical ministry looks like. In *verse 29* Paul tells the Philippians concerning Epaphroditus: “*Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem.*” NLT says, “. . . be sure to honor people like him.” The leader’s mindset should be one of a humble servant. The congregation’s mindset should be to honor them appropriately. *Hebrews 13:17* commands believers, “*Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*”
- Especially for new believers or young believers. Paul has provided a lot of information about the kind of spiritual leaders we should follow. Use that information to make wise decisions about who you listen to and who you follow. Be discerning. Don’t just follow the crowd. Don’t just follow the excitement. Look for character rather than superficial attraction. May God give us wisdom in these decisions.