A Study of the Book of Philippians

Role Models for the Christian Life (Philippians 2:19-30)

David Murrow in his book, Why Men Hate Going to Church said, “You cannot have a thriving church without a core of men who are true followers of Christ. If men are dead, the church is dead.”

I. Overview

Role models influence our lives, provide direction for life, and serve as an inspiration. Understanding the importance of such individuals, Paul lays out two role models for the believers at Philippi. In so doing, Timothy and Epaphroditus serve to illustrate the manner of life which is worthy of the gospel of Christ (see 1:27).

II. Biblical Role Models (2:19-30)

A. First Role Model: Timothy (vv. 19-24)

v. 19 - “hope in the Lord” - This phrase conveys Paul’s understanding that all human expectations and hopes are dependent upon the Sovereign Lord (see Rom 14:14; 1 Cor 7:39; 16:7; Phlm 22).

Timothy - First mentioned in Acts 16:1, Timothy served as a vital associate and companion of Paul’s. Timothy was blessed to grow up in a godly home in Lystra (see 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:5); and joined Paul during the apostle’s second missionary journey. Numerous times in Paul’s ministry, Timothy was assigned a special task (e.g., sent to Thessalonica to strengthen the believers in 1 Thess 3:1-3; delivered the first letter to the church at Corinth in 1 Cor 4:17; and oversaw the church at Ephesus). Similar to his “father” in the faith, Timothy was imprisoned and suffered for the cause of Christ (see Heb 13:23).

vv. 20-22 - Paul identifies the following reasons why he is sending Timothy.

• No one knows the mind of Paul better than Timothy. Paul recognizes the like-mindedness with his companion, Timothy. The intimacy between these two will be highlighted again in verse 22.

• Timothy cares deeply for the Philippian believers. Although Acts does not mention Timothy’s presence at Philippi, he would have been serving with Timothy at that time. The term “deep concern” expresses a weight of anxiety from concern for an individual’s well being (see 1 Cor 12:25).

• Timothy is not consumed with his own needs. Rather, Timothy is concerned with exalting Christ. This phrase appears a bit uncharitable to others who are standing with Paul (e.g., Epaphroditus, Luke). However, the remark appears to stem from a general evaluation of the world around him, rather than a comment about his fellow Christians (see 2:4). Timothy serves as an exception to this general rule (see Hawthorne, Philippians, 110).
• **Timothy demonstrates proven character in his ministry.** Appearing seven times in Paul’s writings, the term “proven” conveys both the process and the results of testing (see 2 Cor 8:2; Rom 5:4). Paul highlights the close relationship he and Timothy have (see 1 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 1:2). The father-son imagery originates in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Kings 2:12). Later rabbinic writings declare, “When a man teaches the son of another the Torah, the Scripture treats him as if he had begotten him” (*b. Sanh.* 99b).

vv. 23-24 - Exactly why there is a delay in sending Timothy is not given. It could be due to the fact that Timothy was immersed in Paul’s legal process, or Timothy was involved with a present ministry issue. Either way, “a visit from Timothy is not intended to be a substitute for Paul’s personal presence” (O’Brien, *Philippians*, 327).

**B. Second Role Model: Epaphroditus (vv. 25-30)**

v. 25 - “Epaphroditus” - This common first-century name means “lovely” or “charming”. This theophoric Gentile name was formed from the name of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, and may indicate that Epaphroditus came from a family devoted to her cult (see R. S. Ascough, *Paul’s Macedonian Associations*, 124).

Paul uses the following five terms to describe Epaphroditus:

- *brother*
- *co-worker*
- *fellow soldier*
- *their messenger*
- *their minister to Paul*

The first descriptors describe Epaphroditus’ relationship with Paul; the second two titles are addressed from the Philippians’ perspective.

v. 26 - “distressed” - The term denotes a deep longing or anguish. The word is used of Jesus’ distress in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Mark 14:33).

v. 27 - Paul does not disclose the details of Epaphroditus’ illness nor how he recovered. Rather, the apostle Paul focuses on the mercy of God.

*Why should Paul ascribe mercy to Epaphroditus’ restoration when earlier Paul preferred death to life (see Phil 1:21-24)?*

v. 28 - The two-fold reason for sending Epaphroditus is so that the church can rejoice when he returns and so that Paul can be relieved that they are united with their leader.
vv. 29-30 - The church is not only to welcome Epaphroditus wholeheartedly, they are also to recognize his great worth and honor him. This honor is not so much what he did, but why he did it. He risked everything in order to serve. Epaphroditus made no demands, he sought no recognition. Rather, he fulfilled his task with self-sacrifice and faithfulness.

“risked his life” - This term is used in gambling to refer to risking everything on the role of a dice. Ironically, Aphrodite, which served as the basis for Epaphroditus’s name, was the goddess of gamblers. Rather than throwing his life to chance, Epaphroditus was willing to give his life because of his trust in a sovereign and all-powerful Lord. His allegiance was not to a god of chance but to the God of certainty!

The reason Epaphroditus was willing to die was in order to do what the Philippians were unable to do—go and serve Paul in Rome.

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III. Intersect

A. Christian commitment to doctrine cannot be separated from a passion for the Lord and for others.

   Jeremiah 15:16 -

B. Christian commitment is a pattern for life, not simply when all is well, but especially in the midst of hardships.

   Acts 11:23 -

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C. Christian commitment is synonymous with serving others for God’s glory.

1 Peter 4:8-10 -

“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . “ ~ Phil 1:27

For further thought . . .

Based upon our study this morning, you may want to spend some additional time this week interacting with the following:

Earlier in Philippians, the apostle Paul identified how a believer should live his/her life for Christ (see 2:2-4). Take some time to compare this behavior with the description of Timothy and Epaphroditus in 2:19-30.

How could you apply one of Timothy’s or Epaphroditus’ attitudes or traits in the way you engage other believers?

“Contrast the priority of convictional intelligence with the models of leadership that are often found and even admired in some Christian circles. Charisma is a great gift, but it cannot substitute for conviction. The same is true of personality skills, gifts of communication, media presence, and organizational ability. None of these things can qualify a Christian leader when conviction is absent or weak.” ~ Al Mohler