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Week 7 Scripture Guide | Philippians 2:19-30

v.19 - Paul transitions from his command to the church to shine as lights in the darkness (v.15) and rejoice (v.18) to citing two men who exemplify Jesus: Timothy and Epaphroditus. It's Paul's hope that soon after the completion of this letter, both men will be sent to the church.¹ Note too the reason for sending these two out, it's not to straighten out a problem occurring in the church, or for Timothy and Epaphroditus to fill in any sort of leadership deficit in the church, it's so that Paul might rejoice knowing the church will be comforted by them.

vv.19-24 - We first see mention of Timothy in Acts 16, soon after in this same chapter we see the planting of the Philippian church. All that to say, the Philippians would have known Timothy fairly well from their early days as a church plant. In Acts 16:1-5 we see Timothy is from Lystra, with a Gentile father and a Jewish-Christian mother, and is looked upon favorably by other Christians in the area. And while we do not see Timothy's conversion in Acts, like we do other conversions in Acts, we do see mention of his conversion elsewhere - specifically in Paul's farewell letter in 2 Timothy 1:5.

While Timothy is not in prison like Paul, he does reside in Rome at this time thus he's able to assist Paul through dictating the letter (1:1). As we see in Acts and other Pauline letters, Timothy is a close confidant of Paul's helping him throughout his missionary journeys. In v.22 Paul calls him "like a son working with his father" thus revealing a level of friendship and trust tied into their ministry endeavors.

Timothy's character is in stark contrast to those who seek their own interests in v.21. That phrase "seek their own interests" connects us back to Paul's command in 2:4 ("do not seek your own interests") as the Greek is similar. But who are these people Paul is talking about that seek their own interests? Is he referring to the selfish teachers in 1:15? Or is he alluding to the "dogs" and "evildoers" in 3:2? Dr. Thomas Constable says of v.21:

Perhaps Paul was thinking of those local Roman Christians who were serving the Lord at least partially to advance their own reputations. He had referred to them previously (1:14-18). He probably meant that of all the people whom he might have sent to the Philippians, none put the interests of Christ above their own as Timothy did. Luke must have been away from Rome when Paul wrote this, and perhaps other helpers of Paul were also absent.²

vv.25-30 Next we move onto Epaphroditus. In v.25 Paul offers five descriptors of him: a brother (ἀδελφός), a coworker (συνεργός), a fellow soldier (συστρατιώτης), a messenger (ἀπόστολος), and a minister (λειτουργός)³ - each word evoking a high level of trust and faithfulness to Jesus. Suffice to say,

¹ "Thus, even though "hope" may be watered down at times (as in our idiom, "I hope so," when we have very little confidence about something), this qualifier, plus the change in v. 24 to "I am persuaded in the Lord" when referring to his own coming, suggests that "hope" moves much closer to certainty." Fee, Gordon. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians (The New International Commentary on the New Testament | NICNT)*

² NET Bible Commentary. <https://netbible.org/bible/Philippians+2>

³ In this verse, a couple observations can be made when looking at the Greek. For "messenger" Paul uses the same word elsewhere translated, most notably in Acts, as "apostle." In the New Testament, an apostle can refer specifically to the twelve founding apostles of The Church. In this case though, apostle carries a more general meaning, referring to someone who carries a message on behalf of Jesus. Also, the term "minister" is the same root

Paul has a high view of Epaphroditus and tangentially, Paul has a high view of the Philippian church for raising up someone like him.⁴

Even though this is the first mention of him in the letter, Epaphroditus is alluded to in Philippians 1:5 and 4:14-20. Epaphroditus was the trusted member of the Philippian church who traveled to Rome to deliver the large financial gift to Paul. Verses 26-27 reveal that at some point in this journey from Phillippi to Rome, Epaphroditus suffered illness - from what we don't know - but was slowly recovering and hoping to return back to Phillippi soon. Paul's hope in sending him back to the church is that Epaphroditus might be received with joy and treated with honor. To connect this to modern day, it's as though he's to be treated like a soldier returning back home after being deployed for too long.⁵

Connection and Application

With a passage more descriptive like this, we need to zoom out and understand Paul's mindset to see how we're to apply this. One big detail is to remember his current circumstances: he's imprisoned and relying on help from the outside in order for his basic needs to be met. Through trusted people in the faith like Timothy and Epaphroditus taking care of him, it would have undoubtedly made Paul's situation much easier to bear if they were to stay. And yet, Paul doesn't see these men as an opportunity to make his life more comfortable or for his personal ministry to be "more effective." These men are faithful followers of Jesus who have sacrificed much for the kingdom, and Paul in his sending them out acknowledges that. By sending them out, they can make much of Jesus elsewhere.

Similarly our Christian community, as perhaps as tight-knit and as wonderful as it might be, does not exist purely for itself, it's to make much of Jesus. This means our relationships should be about helping each other be mature disciples of Jesus in hopes that we would be sent out too - whether that means sent out into the workplace, or sent out to start new communities in the city, or sent out to plant new churches outside of our city. Just as Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and the rest of the early church were sent out to spread the kingdom, so too our Jesus-centered relationships ought to have that primary goal in mind as we follow after the pattern of Jesus who was sent out.

word we see in 2:17 translated as "service" (λειτουργία) - where we get our word "liturgy." Thus, a "minister" or a λειτουργός, is one who serves or more literally one who liturgizes.

⁴ Because we do not see him show up at the start of the Philippian church in Acts 16, we can infer that Epaphroditus became a Christian and was discipled through the faithful witnessing of the church.

⁵ In v.30 Paul makes a fun play on words in the Greek with Epaphroditus' name: "Aphrodite (Venus) was the goddess of gamblers. When a pagan Greek threw the dice he would cry out "*epaphroditos!*" meaning "favorite of Aphrodite." Epaphroditus' name may have connections with this custom. If so, Paul may have written that Epaphroditus "risked [gambled] his life" as a play on his friend's name." NET Bible Commentary. <https://netbible.org/bible/Philippians+2>