

“Looking Out for Number One”

Today Paul arranges things a little different than he normally does in most letters.

Usually he saves his thoughts about what people he will be sending to the church for their edification in the faith until the very end of his letter. But today he drops those names right in the middle.

Why?

Because the two people that Paul wants to send to this church, Timothy and Epaphroditus, serve as wonderful examples of what he has been encouraging in this epistle all along. Philippians is primarily an exhortation from Paul to the church to live lives of humility, that put the needs of others above their own, and put Jesus Christ and his will for the church above all else in their lives.

Paul has already given them this counsel in chapters one and two when he told the church to be of “one mind” in Christ and “united in the cause of the gospel.” Paul then told them to do nothing out of “selfish ambition,” but in “humility” to consider the needs of others as more important than their own.

After giving this powerful exhortation Paul then points the church to the very source of their salvation, Jesus Christ, as the supreme example of the one who did all of this.

In Philippians 2:5-11, that beautiful poetic text of scripture that is commonly referred to as the Christ hymn, we learn that though Jesus was eternally God (*along with the Father and the Spirit*) he humbled himself and became human so that he might come down to us to be with us.

Jesus was so united with the Father and the Spirit in their shared will to redeem fallen humanity from sin that not only was he willing to come down to us but he was even willing to die the lowliest of all deaths- death on a cross- so that we might be saved. Jesus clearly placed our interests above his own, even though we are sinners.

This is what Paul has been hammering away at to the Philippians. Be united in faith and purpose, just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united; and be humble enough to put the needs of your brothers and sisters above your own, just Jesus put your needs above his own when he died on the cross for your sins. And now Paul buttresses this overarching point by giving two examples of men who have exhibited these kinds of characteristics in their own lives- Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Timothy- The One Who Made Great Personal Sacrifice for the Cause of Christ

First, Paul speaks of Timothy.

I love Timothy because he was a young man who was raised in the Christian faith by his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. The Bible tells us that young Timothy has “known the scriptures from infancy.”

I would like to diverge for a moment from my exposition of this text and ask ourselves a question. How well are **you** doing in raising your children or grandchildren in the knowledge of the scriptures? Do you think that it is the primary responsibility of the church? Some people do. Many folks say “I take my kids to church so they can get a religious education, or learn moral values.” This is the wrong motive to have and it is also shirking off one of the primary duties that we have as Christian parents.

First, the primary purpose of church is not for making good citizens who “don’t lie, cheat or steal,” (*according to Jesus there are plenty of people who “don’t lie, cheat, or steal” who are in hell*) but rather it is about the cross and how God has reconciled us to himself through the blood of Jesus. In Christ we really can have a living relationship with God! That’s the primary purpose of the church.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, that famous former preacher of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia whose sermons were broadcast nationally on CBS radio, once mulled over what would happen if Satan took over the city of Philadelphia. This is what he said,

All the bars would be closed, pornography banished, and pristine streets would be filled with tidy pedestrians who smiled at each other. There would be no swearing. The children would say, “Yes sir” and “No ma’am,” and the churches would be full every Sunday... where Christ is not preached. There is a great difference between moralism and the gospel. We must remember that Christ came first not to make bad people good, but dead people live. If we forget that our Christianity will turn out to be Christless. (Tullian Tchividjian)

Second, as parents and grandparents it is *our* primary responsibility to disciple our children. If your child is clueless about the Bible and the core teachings of the Christian faith then it is primarily the fault of the parent, not the church. Timothy had two important women in his life, Lois and Eunice, who taught him the scriptures. Are you, are we, really nurturing our children in the faith?

But back to Timothy. Paul picked him up on his second missionary journey in the book of Acts, and while on that trip he asked Timothy to make huge sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. Paul asked Timothy to get circumcised.

On the surface this sounds puzzling because Paul always spoke so forcefully against requiring circumcision as a necessary act in order to become a Christian.

In short, Paul believed that circumcision represented the works of the law and also that it had been replaced by baptism as the sign for being in God's family. Even in this letter Paul calls those who insist on circumcision as a requirement to be "mutilators of the flesh."

So why did Paul ask Timothy to do something he didn't believe was necessary any longer?

He did it because Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father was Gentile.

The fact that his father was Gentile explains why he was *not* circumcised (*Gentiles did not practice circumcision*), but since his mother was Jewish Paul wanted him to do it.

Why? Because he thought Timothy could *not* be saved without it? No.

Paul asked him to do it because he knew that as he and Timothy traveled around it was likely that other Jewish people would accuse Paul of trying to undermine the law of God in the OT. In short, someone might say to Paul, "You break the law of Moses because your Jewish friend Timothy is not circumcised." Paul wanted to cut that kind of argument off so that it would not even be an issue. He had a gospel to preach and the less distractions he had the better.

So when Paul says in this text that Timothy has "proved himself" in the work of the gospel and that he has placed the interests of Jesus Christ and the gospel above his own, he really means it. Timothy was willing to make a great personal sacrifice for the cause of Christ.

So Paul writes the church in this section of the letter to in effect say this: Dear Philippians, when the time is right I am sending young Timothy back to you for your encouragement, and when I do I want you to look to this man who has sacrificed so much for the cause of Christ and the benefit of others. Look to this man who has known the scriptures from infancy. Look to this man who was circumcised when he didn't have to be, and look to this man who has faithfully preached the gospel in Ephesus, both in season and out of season, even when things were not good. Look to him who is always looking out not for himself, but for number one- Jesus Christ and his interests. (v21)

Epaphroditus- The One Who Risked His Life for Christ and Paul

Next, Paul speaks of Epaphroditus.

Unlike young Timothy, we know very little about this man. In fact, everything that we know about Epaphroditus comes to us from the book of Philippians.

He was a Philippian who was sent by the church to comfort Paul who was in prison in Rome at that time.

Our text today refers to him both as a “messenger” and as the one who had been sent to “take care of Paul’s needs.” (v.25)

The fact that Eapaprhoditus was a “messenger” meant that in addition to giving Paul verbal encouragement he also carried with him a letter from the church written to encourage Paul while he awaited his trial.

As the one who had been sent to “take care of his needs” meant that Epaprhoditus also carried with him material gifts from the church, perhaps clothing and money, to in order to help Paul while in prison.

For Paul Epaprhoditus was a site for sore eyes and while in Rome he and Paul became close as brothers in Christ. In our text today we see evidence of this in the way that Paul spoke so fondly of Epaprhoditus. In v. 25 he calls him a “brother,” a “fellow worker,” and a “soldier” for the Lord.

We also learn from this letter that while in Rome Epaprhoditus became sick and almost died. (v. 26-27)

The Philippians had gotten wind of this and Paul was now ready to send Epaprhoditus back home to them so they might be relieved of their stress. Paul then tells the church that when Epaprhoditus gets back home they are to “welcome him in the Lord with great joy” and they are to “honor him” because Epaprhoditus almost died “for the work of Christ.”

So what we see here in the life of Epaprhoditus is the same thing that we saw in the life of Timothy. We see a man who was not looking out for his own self-interests, but one who was always looking out for number one-Jesus Christ and his interests, and Paul is now exhorting this church to look to these two men as prime examples of what it looks like to live one’s life with great humility and personal sacrifice, all for the sake of Jesus Christ in this world.

Conclusion- Looking Out for Number One

Jesus Christ is supposed to be number one in our lives.

Paul tells us in this letter that “Jesus is Lord” and that no one will escape having to make that confession. Those who make him the first priority in their lives, above all else, will make that confession, and so will those who place Christ at the bottom of their priority lists have to make that confession, but Paul wants this church to make Christ and his interests first in their lives, so that their confession will be in line with their actions.

God wants the same thing from us today. He wants us to look out for number one and number one is not ourselves, but it is Jesus and his interests in the world.

When we do this our lives will mirror the lives of young Timothy and Epaphroditus in that we too will have a heart for Christ and the gospel, a heart for other people, and a willingness to humble ourselves enough to put the interests of Jesus and the needs of others above our own.

We will not find satisfaction any other way because this is the purpose for which God created us.

The world is looking out for its own interests, not the interests of Jesus Christ, but you good Christian, you have been called to a different way of life.

You have been called by God, just as Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus were called, to look out for number one.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.