

Philippians

Lesson 5

Chapter 2:19-3:11

Leader Guide

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Lesson 5

Philippians 2:19-30, 3:1-11

Timothy and Epaphroditus

Prayers

Introduction

Epaphroditus and Timothy were fellow workers with Paul. Epaphroditus was a pastor or elder of the Philippian church and was sent to minister to Paul's needs when the Philippian church learned of his imprisonment. Timothy accompanied Paul and Silas on their missionary journey through Asia Minor and Greece when the Philippian church was founded. After Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and imprisonment in Rome, Timothy joined Paul to care for his needs.

Paul described Timothy as his dear son and had great confidence in him. He mentored him, encouraging him to be a man of God, pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, and be bold in his teaching and proclamation of Christ despite his youth. Paul's instructions to Timothy on worship, corporate prayer, and qualifications for leadership continue to guide the church today. Paul sent Timothy to confront false doctrines in Ephesus and Corinth, preach and teach in Philippi and Thessalonica, carry news of Paul to the churches, and bring back news of the churches to Paul. Church tradition holds that Timothy was stoned in Ephesus for preaching the gospel in AD80.

In the second part of his letter, verses 3:1-11, Paul considers the **BIG** question – the meaning of his life. Writing from prison and facing suffering and death, he looked back on his life and how he lost everything he once valued - his education, faultless in religion, and high position as a Pharisee. Now he considered them all "rubbish" compared to knowing Christ, having a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, and having the assurance of eternal life.

Read Philippians 2:19-30, Timothy and Epaphroditus

Phil 2:19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

Phil 2:20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.

Phil 2:21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Phil 2:22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Phil 2:23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.

Phil 2:24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

Phil 2:25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

Phil 2:26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.

Phil 2:27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.

Phil 2:28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.

Phil 2:29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him,

Phil 2:30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Discuss

1. What are the attributes of a disciple, modeled by Timothy and Epaphroditus?
 - a. Verse 2:20 **takes a genuine interest in the welfare of others**
 - b. Verse 2:21 **Looks out for the interests of the ministry of Jesus**
 - c. Verse 2:22 **Serves alongside - tested and experienced**
 - d. Verse 25 **also serves alongside as a brother**
 - e. Verse 25 **takes care of the needs of his partner**
 - f. Verse 26 **Sensitive to the feelings of others**
 - g. Verse 29 **Willing to risk his life for others**
2. Paul mentions Epaphras was sick and almost died (verse 2:26-30). Paul had the apostolic gifts of healing (Acts 19:11-12) and even healed the dead (Acts 20:9-10). What does Epaphras' sickness indicate about faith healing?

Paul would naturally have prayed and laid his hands on Epaphras to heal him, but he doesn't mention that was how Epaphras recovered from his illness. Paul gave God the glory for healing Epaphras and sparing him "sorrow upon sorrow." Ultimately, all healing is in God's hands. We don't know why some are healed, and others die. Epaphras is a vivid example of why we look to God for healing and do not need to search for the right person to pray just the right prayer for our loved one.

3. What are some of the strengths of having a partner in mission?

Jesus sent out his disciples in groups of two or more, and Paul typically traveled with at least one other person, setting the example for mission partners. Wisdom is found in understanding diverse viewpoints. Proverbs 15:22 summarizes the wisdom in numbers by saying, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Other reasons for partnerships include safety and protection, encouragement, and sharing the burden. Paul frequently left his coworkers behind or sent them ahead to preach and teach as he worked on other tasks. Silas, who accompanied both Paul and Peter, was a skilled writer and helped Peter write his letters.

4. Your mission shapes your yearnings and anchors your hopes in God's promises. How is God shaping your mission? Do you have a partner to encourage and help you in your mission?

Answers Vary

Read Philippians 3:1-11, No Confidence in the Flesh

Phil 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

Phil 3:2 Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.

Phil 3:3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

Phil 3:4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:

Phil 3:5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

Phil 3:6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

Phil 3:7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

Phil 3:8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

Phil 3:9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Phil 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Phil 3:11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

5. Who would have thought that a simple act like circumcision would be such a major issue to compel Paul to address his opponents as evildoers and mutilators of the flesh! After all, circumcision had been practiced since the time of Abraham and was a sign of God’s covenant with his people. Even today, it is a routine practice in the hospital when a male child is born. Refer to the following passages to understand the difference between the importance of *the act* of circumcision and *the issue* behind the practice of circumcision that made it so important for Paul to address?
 - a. Acts 16:3, Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

The actual act of circumcision meant little to Paul. He circumcised Timothy, a Gentile, as an adult because he wanted to bring Timothy with him to preach to Jewish communities and did not want circumcision to be a barrier to the gospel. This was not a contradiction in Paul’s thinking but an example to “never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Romans 14:13).

- b. Acts 15:1, “But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Being accommodating on unimportant issues is a good practice, but compromising the gospel's message is not. The *issue* behind the *act* of circumcision was whether God’s grace would save people through faith in Christ or if people would be saved through Jewish law, then by Christ. The issue of salvation by faith in Christ alone was settled in 49AD at the Council of Jerusalem with Paul and the apostles. Some – the mutilators of the flesh - persisted in teaching salvation by observing the Law of Moses. Paul was writing his letter from prison in Rome at least ten years after the Council of Jerusalem.

6. Can you think of ways you sometimes think your salvation comes from what you do rather than from God’s grace through Christ?

I am sure a Pharisee is hiding in the back of my mind, which takes me on the roller coaster ride of thinking salvation is by obedience to the law. I feel condemned when I sin and never quite good enough, even if I have a good day. This is not living the life of freedom in Christ promised in the gospel. At the core of this thought is the inability to fully embrace the truth that Christ is my all in all. He is my righteousness; I need nothing more.

7. In verses 3:8-11, Paul reflects on his past, present, and future.
- How does Paul view his past, verses 3:4-7?

Paul could have boasted in his Jewish heritage – circumcision, he could trace his family to the tribe of Benjamin, a zealous Pharisee, faultlessly righteous and legalistic. All this led him to persecute the church, and now he counted his past as rubbish.

- What was Paul's purpose while living in the present, verses 3:8-9?

Paul called knowing Christ surpassing greatness. He lived with the hope of being righteous by being united with Christ through faith.

- What was Paul's hope for the future, verses 3:10-11?

Paul regarded his suffering and impending death as fellowship with Christ, and his hope was in the resurrection to eternal life.

8. Re-read Paul's words in verses 8-11.

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, ¹⁰ the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

These are some of the most profound verses anywhere in scripture and invite us to reflect on how they apply to our lives. Consider the following:

- What have you left behind as a child of God through faith in Jesus? Or, what do you need to leave behind in your life as a child of God through faith in Jesus?

Answers Vary

- What purpose is Christ giving your life in the present?

Answers vary.

- Are we trying to earn our worth like Private Ryan, who was told (in the movie) to earn his life after being saved by Army Rangers?

My heart groans every time I hear Tom Hanks in the movie Saving Private Ryan tell Private Ryan to “earn it;” earn his life to make up for those who lost their lives saving him. We have all been redeemed by the life and blood of someone else - Jesus. There is no way to live our lives and repay his sacrifice for our life. An essential teaching in the Bible is that we can never earn our salvation by being “good enough” because we are all sinners. This fundamental truth is not a type of Christian self-deprecating philosophy; it is so we can be free of our sin and guilt by looking to Christ for our salvation. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name [Jesus Christ] under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Closing prayer