

Breaking away from selfishness

Philippians 2:19-30

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In these verses Paul continues to call those in the church in Philippi to humble themselves as Christ did. In this way they will live in unity and reflect the light of Christ to the dark world around them.

Paul first gave Christ as the ultimate example of humility. Now he continued by giving two other examples. Join me as we look at Philippians 2:19-30.

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

Paul starts out stating that his hope is in the Lord Jesus. Paul does not describe Jesus as the son of a carpenter, or Jesus of Nazareth, or even Jesus the good teacher, but Lord Jesus.

In that day, many, especially in Philippi, were committed to Caesar as Lord, who had ultimate power and who demanded complete allegiance from all who lived in the Roman Empire, but in this phrase Paul is proclaiming that it is Jesus who has his full allegiance. It is Jesus who is Lord over all.

When we think of the word Lord, it affects us in two different ways. The first is the truth that Jesus is Lord of all. As Paul had just written in verses 10-11, Jesus has been given, *“the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

The second way of relating to the Lordship of Christ is not just as the sovereign Lord who rules over all things, but as the Lord who rules over our individual lives. That does not mean that we are perfect, but that does mean that we have placed our lives under His control. We have been bought with a price and He is now our master, teacher, and Lord. He now has dominion over our lives. We are His. We may falter and at times fail, but it will occur while being under the

care and Lordship of Christ. As we continue to walk under His Lordship, He will continue to make more and more areas of our lives into His likeness and bring them under the Lordship of Christ. The light of Christ will shine more deeply into our dark places until we are made fully His.

As we look at today's text, Lordship is where we must begin. Can we join with Paul in his belief that Jesus is sovereign Lord over all and our personal Lord as well? If Christ is not the Lord of our lives, we will always struggle in the Christian life. Every truth in scripture or every call to obedience will be up for debate because we have not yet confirmed Jesus as Lord. The work of the Spirit will be hindered on every front if our allegiance is not yet to Christ. Although increasing Lordship is the path of the Christian life, even in our moments of disobedience may we never forget our place in relation to Lord Jesus. May we bow our hearts in confession and repentance and allow Him to continue to work out His Lordship over our lives.

The sovereign Lordship of Christ is the basis of Paul's hope. In today's world we put our hope in many things: money, job, intelligence, ability, experience, government... But in recent days we have been reminded that nothing and no one in this world is lord overall. Even our best efforts have come up short against the covid virus, and even as we watch the images of the lava advancing from the volcano in the Canary Islands, no one is talking of how to stop the volcano or even the lava. It would be pointless. There are some things that are just so far beyond us, but not beyond the almighty Lordship of Christ who is truly above all things. Even as friends, parents or employees, we often make promises that will probably happen, but in this uncertain world, since we are not ultimately in control of every factor, our best promise can be nothing more than a probability.

We can't control car accidents, heart attacks, train workers going on strike, an economic crisis, or even the weather. While putting our hope in those around us is not bad, we must realize that the only true hope we have in this world is Lord Jesus.

In Philippians 2:13, we are told that ***"it is God who works in us to will and to act according to His purposes."*** This word "work" is only used to describe the working of God and it has the meaning of a work that cannot be denied. It is a work that will always accomplish its desired end. Nothing will stop His purposes in this world. Paul's hope, his complete confidence was in the Lord Jesus.

We often speak as if we are certain of what will happen, when we have no guarantee of tomorrow. It might help if we would return to a phrase that used to be more common. It is the phrase, "God willing." It would probably serve as a good reminder if we began to use it again. For example, one would ask a young man, "What are your plans for the future?" He could respond, "God willing, I hope to finish university and find a good job here in Madrid." Or someone comments about finding an apartment, "God willing, we hope to find a place to live by the end of the month." It is acknowledging the fact that even though we have our own plans or desires, our world is uncertain and God alone is our sure hope.

It is Paul's hope that, "God willing", he would be able to send Timothy to visit the church in Philippi soon. Paul had given Jesus as our first example of humility, and now he gave us two more. Timothy was the first example of humility that Paul presented in these verses.

It is likely that Paul met Timothy on Paul's first missionary journey, when Timothy was in his late teens or early twenties. We know from scripture that Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. He had been taught the Jewish scriptures from childhood, and this had prepared him to receive the gospel that Paul preached (2 Timothy 3:15). His faith was preceded by the faith of his mother and grandmother. Even at this young age Timothy's faith had been nurtured, had matured and had been noticed by the elders of the church. Timothy joined Paul on later missionary journeys.

In verse 20, Paul told how there was, *"no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for their welfare."* In contrast to others, Timothy's own interests had been put to death and he now lived for the interests of Christ.

Timothy had matured in his faith from self-centered to Christ-centered. The parallel is drawn with the previous verse. To be genuinely concerned for the welfare of others was seen as an extension of seeking the interest of Christ. It was similar to the Great Commandment. When Christ was asked what was the greatest commandment, He responded, love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul and your mind, and love your neighbors as yourself (Matthew 22:34-40). As one delighted in the vertical love of God, she would receive new, Christ-centered desires that would overflow into a horizontal love for others. That is what we see happening in Timothy's life. As one nurtures the seed of Christ that now lives within them, it will bring a harvest of love for others around them.

Paul tells how Timothy had proven his worth and like a son with a father had served with Paul in the gospel.

William Barclay, in his commentary on Philippians 2:19-24, gives this precious description of Timothy:

Paul could speak of him as his child in the Lord (1Cor.4:17). He was with Paul in Philippi (Ac.16); he was with him in Thessalonica and Berea (Ac.17:1-14); he was with him in Corinth and in Ephesus (Ac.18:5; Ac.19:21-22); and he was with him in prison in Rome (Col.1:1; Php. 1:1). He was associated with Paul in the writing of no fewer than five of his letters--1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians and Philippians; and when Paul wrote to Rome Timothy was joined with him in sending greetings (Rom.16:21).

Timothy's great use was that, whenever Paul wished for information from some Church or wished to send advice or encouragement or rebuke and could not go himself, it was he whom he sent. So Timothy was sent to Thessalonica (1Th.3:6); to Corinth (1Cor.4:17; 1Cor.16:10-11); to Philippi. In the end Timothy, too, was a prisoner for Christ's sake (Heb.13:23).

Timothy's great value was that he was always willing to go anywhere; and in his hands a message was as safe as if Paul had delivered it himself. Others might be consumed with selfish ambition; but Timothy's one desire was to serve Paul and Jesus Christ. He is the patron saint of all those who are quite content with the second place, so long as they can serve.

Paul's hope was to send Timothy to Philippi soon. Paul also hoped to be able to go to Philippi as well. Paul then turned his attention to Epaphroditus as another example of humility:

²⁵ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

We need to remember that the Apostle Paul wrote these words from a prison in Rome.

In that time in history, if you were in a Roman prison, your needs were not met by the prison system. You were dependent on friends or family to meet your most basic needs. Paul was a Roman citizen, so his house arrest was likely better than a dungeon where a slave might have been, but nonetheless he still was dependent on others to meet his daily needs such as food and essential care.

The church in Philippi had heard of Paul's needs and had responded by gathering their money and sending it to Paul. It was delivered by this man named Epaphroditus. He was from the church in Philippi and he had traveled over 1,200 km to bring the financial support for Paul and to update Paul on the condition of the church in Philippi.

Paul used several words to describe Epaphroditus. Brother, worker, soldier, messenger, and "minister to my need". Epaphroditus had come and served Paul, almost to the point of death, but God had mercy on him and spared his life. Even now, instead of worrying about himself, Epaphroditus was concerned for those back home who were "worried sick" about him.

This is Paul's next example of humility. Epaphroditus was the physical expression of the Philippian church's love and concern for Paul. He, like Timothy, and like Christ, had put the needs of others before his own. He had been willing to serve God, by serving Paul, even to the point of possible death.

It is worth noting that Epaphroditus' name had a pagan origin. It literally meant "belonging to Aphrodite". Aphrodite was an ancient Greek goddess. Because of his name, it is very likely that Epaphroditus had come from a pagan background and now had been transformed by the gospel. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*** That had truly happened in the life of Epaphroditus.

The Philippians would rejoice in seeing that Epaphroditus was well, and Paul was making sure they would be even more joyful once they heard of Epaphroditus' faithfulness in carrying out his assignment. Epaphroditus had risked his life in delivering the money to Paul and serving Paul in prison.

This phrase “risked his life”, *paraboleuesthai*, was a gambling term. It communicated risking or betting it all.

In the times of the Early Church there was a group of men and women called the *Parabolani*. It meant “the Gamblers”. They were Christians who were committed to caring for the sick and burying the dead, especially if the disease or cause of death was contagious.

One example was in Carthage, in A.D. 252. Pontius, the deacon, described the panic that seized the people:

“There broke out a dreadful plague, as the excessive destruction of a hateful disease invaded every house in turn among the trembling population. Every day numberless people were suddenly attacked and died in their own homes. Everyone was shuddering, running away, trying to avoid the contagion, even wickedly exposing their own dear ones, as if by pushing out the person who was dying of the plague they could keep death out of the house. No one thought of anything except his own selfish interest. No one helped anyone else the way they would have wanted for themselves. Over the whole city lay not just the bodies of the dead, but the rotting carcasses no one had the courage to take away.”¹

In response to the desperate need “Cyprian, a bishop in Carthage, spoke to “the people assembled together in one place,” urging “the benefits of mercy,” and that “there was nothing wonderful in our cherishing our own people only with the needed attentions of love, ... [that the Christian] overcoming evil with good, and showing mercy like the divine mercy, loved even his enemies, [and] would pray for the salvation of those that persecute him, as the Lord admonishes and exhorts.” God sends sunshine and showers not only to His own people, said Cyprian, but to all. Should not the children of the Father do the same? And so they did. It is likely that some of the Christians themselves contracted the plague and died. But the work went on. No one in Carthage had ever seen anything like this outreach of compassion, caring for people who cared nothing for them, and in some cases for their persecutors. Cyprian had transformed the church from a community of the suffering into a band of helpers, a “convoy of hope.” It showed the world what true Christianity is like, and it must have attracted many to the faith as the church grew in the coming years.”²

Following the example of Christ, Epaphroditus, too, had risked his life and gambled it all, on behalf of others.

In this second chapter of Philippians, we now have seen the humble examples of Christ, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Let’s take a moment to look back through what we have read:

- a. Do nothing from selfish ambition.
- b. Count others more significant than yourselves.
- c. Look out for the interests of others.
- d. Empty oneself, by taking the form of a servant.
- e. Humble oneself by becoming obedient.

¹ <http://imm.edu/blog/cyprian-of-carthage-finding-purpose-in-the-plague>, read October 8, 2021.

² <http://imm.edu/blog/cyprian-of-carthage-finding-purpose-in-the-plague>, read October 8, 2021.

- f. Genuinely be concerned for the welfare of others.
- g. Seek the interests of Christ.
- h. Be willing to sacrifice and risk for the good of others.

Over and again we see this idea of serving the needs of others. But how can we break away from the selfishness that seeks to lord over our lives?

We first must understand the truth. As Christians, selfishness is no longer necessary. In the beginning mankind and God were bound together. Adam and Eve had needs, but they walked closely with God, and in Him all their needs were met. It was perfect.

In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned against God, that relationship was broken. Sin now separated mankind from God. God was now out of reach and mankind was now forced to meet their own needs. Mankind had gone from a life of abundance to now a life of scarcity. They had gone from a life of holiness to now a life of sinfulness.

Those are the two powers that bind one to selfishness. The desperation to meet one's own needs, and an inner fallen nature that enslaves one to sin. But in Christ, both of those have been broken.

All who have turned from their sin and believed in Jesus Christ have been reconciled to God . . . the One who meets our needs. It's like the street child who is finally adopted and never again will go hungry. It's the lamb who got lost and is finally found by the Good Shepherd. With him the lamb will be able to lie down in the green pastures, be led beside the still waters, and will restore his soul. He will walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil. His rod and his staff will comfort him. The safety of the lamb is found in the restored relationship and nearness to the Shepherd. The desperation, the life of scarcity, is finished.

There is no longer a need to hoard, compete, impress, misrepresent, lie, gossip, cheat, covet, or bear false witness. Our needs have been met in Christ. He is our Provider, our Defender, our Stronghold, our Savior. He is our Advocate, our Bridegroom, our Deliverer, our Great High Priest, our Hope. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He is Immanuel, God with us, who will never leave us or forsake us.

We now live a life of abundance where Philippians 4:9 is our confidence, ***“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”***

As our needs are met in Christ Jesus we no longer have to scavenge to survive. We are no longer like the orphan in the street who must fight against every other kid to get that last piece of bread. Others are no longer the enemy. Our needs are now met in Christ so we can genuinely care about the welfare of others.

In addition to this, our sinful heart has been made new. Christ now lives in us. As we draw near to Him and experience the extravagance of His love, the natural result will be to share His love with others. That is a spiritual fact. The fuller we are of Christ, the more it will overflow to others. As we abide in Him, our lives will bear much fruit (John 15:5).

At times it is difficult to break free from selfishness, even though it is no longer necessary. It has become a habit, a way of life. If this is the case, we need to intentionally turn back to Christ. We need to make it a point of prayer and confession.

Will you take some time to evaluate your relationship with Christ? What is keeping you from the riches that are found in Christ Jesus? What do you need to remove from your life or add to your life to make your relationship with Christ better? What is keeping you from God's best? Cry out to God, asking Him to make the truths that we have discussed today the reality of your life.

Discussion questions:

1. What from this sermon did you find interesting?
2. Where do you think most people put their hope?
3. In your opinion, why do you think we are selfish?
4. How did Adam and Eve's sin affect our selfishness?
5. How does our being reconciled to God through Christ remove our need for selfishness?
6. What do you think you need to remember from this sermon? What do you think God wants you to do in response to this?
7. Is there anything we can do to help?