

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. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 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. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 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. 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. ²⁹ So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

At the time of writing this letter, Paul was in Rome, either in prison or house arrest awaiting a hearing in front of the emperor, who was probably Nero. Nero had no time for Christians. Getting justice from Nero was unlikely, and tradition has it, that Paul was beheaded during Nero's reign (AD 54 to 68). Paul needed the support of the church as he had no means of earning a living making tents in Rome while a prisoner. He had Timothy and Epaphroditus, both of whom brought money from churches they belonged to in Greece. There was no banking system, so gifts of gold and silver would have to be taken physically from Greece to Rome, a journey in comparative security, but there were always robbers along the Roman roads preying on travellers without large escorts.

Both Timothy and Epaphroditus were Greek converts, and disciples of Paul, but Philippi was a Roman colony where its citizens were Roman citizens and Latin was more spoken than Greek. There wasn't a synagogue in Philippi as there weren't many Jews there.

That's the background.

Now we should ask why Paul has put in the middle of his letter on spiritual matters, this eulogy of two of his disciples. Normally Paul thanks his helpers at the end of his letters, and he doesn't usually say a lot about them either. The previous verses 12 to 18 which we looked at last week relate to encouraging the Philippians in their walk with Jesus. These verses 19 to 30 give actual examples of what disciples should be like: selfless, humble, and full of love. Here are two men who walked the walk, and didn't just talk the talk. The Philippians knew both of them.

Timothy has been on travels with Paul in Asia Minor (what is now Turkey), so he knew what hardships might be faced, as well as what joy might be had as people

came to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Epaphroditus may have been less well travelled and fell ill on his journey, but happily was on his way home with this letter.

Timothy, as we know from his name “Fear God” was humble and possibly somewhat timid. A lot of apparently timid people on the outside are quite different on the inside. Being fearful of offending others or putting oneself forward can be a positive virtue. Paul certainly has a soft spot for Timothy because he sees himself as a father and Timothy his obedient and loving son who puts his father’s interest above his own in recognition of Paul’s gifts as an apostle who teaches, who heals, who loves and who is selfless in his submission to the Lord Jesus. Reading the letters of Paul, one gets the feeling that Paul is so keen on spreading the Gospel that we don’t really see much of what he was actually like... which is as it should be: “not I, but Christ in me” is what we see of him. If we were to meet Paul socially, what would we talk about if we were already Christians? The finer points of tent making? The supply problems of getting good canvas and ropes? The advantages of being a Roman citizen? After I became a born again Christian following a meeting where an evangelist called Bob Gordon preached, he came to St Andrew’s a couple of years later for an elders’ day. What did we talk about after dinner? Old cars, as we had both had had a few Rovers, which had rusted but were remembered with much fondness for their comfort, reserve petrol tanks and quirky suspension! That side of Bob Gordon, now long gone to the Lord, appeared nowhere in his books or teaching. I digress. But here in the middle of the letter, we see Paul speak lovingly of two disciples worthy of honour by the Philippians when they come back to Philippi.

The trust Paul has in Timothy is such that he says: *²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.*

There is regret that Timothy is leaving but the care he has shown Paul, Paul knows he will provide to those in Philippi. Timothy won’t be like other people who look out for their own interests, rather than the interests of Jesus. That is a dig at some who have joined the church to advance their own interests as we saw in chapter one. Already some 25 years after the death of Jesus, what happens today in churches and has happened for centuries, is that the church was seen as a vehicle for ambition, self aggrandisement, power and wealth. Reading between the lines Paul is saying that Timothy isn’t one of these troublemakers, and will be someone experienced, even though young, in ending

any bickering and division, because of his concern for unity among the church members. But he cannot let him go until he knows how his own case is coming along, though he promises it will be soon, as Paul hopes himself to be released to come over to Philippi soon. This didn't happen.

Paul testifies that Timothy served with him in the work of the Gospel. The word served literally translated is "slaved". Serving is often paid and limited in time: slaving is unpaid and unlimited in time spent being of service. That kind of diligence shows what character Timothy has – and reading the two letters Paul wrote to him, we can see how worthy of his calling Paul felt Timothy was. As a historical aside, he is believed to have followed John as bishop of Ephesus, never married and was beaten to death aged 80.

That's Timothy.

Now Epaphroditus, about which we know much less.

I read that his name means "charming", but the literal Greek is "upon Aphrodite". Aphrodite was the goddess of love, whose name means foamy because she was born out of the foamy sea. The name became connected to loveliness and charm, but to have this name means his parents dedicated him to the goddess of love. Like Epaphras, it was a common name. You may think I'm making much of what the name of someone means. Quite often we are what we are named: that can favour some and disadvantage others. I'm Peter – the rock, and my brother is John – God is gracious and he's more gracious than I am.

Paul writes *"²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. "*

The credentials are set out – brother, co-worker, soldier (for Christ), messenger and carer or minister. Paul recognises he is homesick and wants to relieve the anxiety the Philippians had for his welfare. He may also be recovering from his illness and needs to go home, yet while in Rome he must have helped Paul with the things that needed doing daily and spreading the Gospel to the palace guard who guarded Paul.

The church in Philippi entrusted Epaphrodite with the gold and silver he had to carry personally with him on his journey to Rome. On the way he fell ill and almost died and God in His mercy kept him alive and the money was not lost but able to reach Paul to keep Paul alive! Reluctantly Paul is sending him home and

telling the Philippians that he deserves honour and risked his life for his brother in Christ, Paul, an apostle in chains. Greater love has no man than he give his life, or is willing to give his life for another.

On John Wesley's monument in Westminster Abbey, these words are found, 'God buries His workmen, but He carries on His work.'

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3, *"I planted the seed, Apollos watered, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants, nor he who waters, is anything, but only God who makes things grow."*

John chapter 5, Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth. My Father is always at His work to this very day. And I, too, am working."* And so Jesus is at work every day.

You cannot advance the Kingdom of Heaven without some risk. You have to be willing even to die. Jesus said in John 12, *"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, [if it's willing to risk] it will bear many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it. But the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* That's risk. You have to be willing to say goodbye to some valuable things in this world in order to advance the kingdom

Timothy and Epaphroditus served others: why because they had: **a caring heart, excellent character, were willing to suffer hardship and showed concern for others.**

We see God's heart most clearly in that he sends his best for us, coming himself in the person of the Son, come in the flesh, to live and die and rise again for our salvation. As John puts it, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life."** When it comes to the heart of God, we see it most clearly in Jesus Christ, given for us so that we might have eternal life with Him. This is the gospel Paul has been preaching, the gospel that saves sinners and brings unshakeable hope. Repent and believe in Jesus Christ and have everlasting life. It the gospel of the gift of Jesus, Jesus crucified and raised for our salvation. God's best given for us. However, God's desire is also for the church to live in light of Jesus. The Lord gives us the immense gift of His Word, but He also sends people to us, people who will, through their life, show us what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus. Just like Paul sent Timothy and Epaphroditus, when God desires us to grow in our discipleship to Jesus, He often sends people who will live out that discipleship before us so we can know better what it looks like to follow Jesus.

To sum up, what points can we take home from these verses.

1 As Christians we should be living examples to others of what it is to be a disciple. We all know we fall short, but should make every effort to be as Christlike as we can.

2 As Christians we should be selfless and willing to put the interests of others above our own. That can be hard and thankless, but nonetheless, if we truly love one another, we will go the extra mile.

3 As Christians in obedience to God, we may have to go on journeys we wouldn't otherwise have chosen for ourselves. They may be short or long journeys: physical or spiritual, but always travelling towards the goal set before us by Jesus. (Philippians 3:14 *I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.*)

Let's pray

Bullet points

Historical background – Rome Nero Philippi Roman colony Timothy & Epaphroditus both Greeks

Timothy – with Paul, name meaning, selfless, a son to Paul

Epaphroditus – name risked his life

Both examples of disciples that people knew were on the right path

Gospel message

What would be said about us?