

## Examples of Christlikeness (Part 2) -- Philippians 2:25-30

### *Introduction and Outline*

- Scripture reading: Philippians 2:1-30
- In a society that pursues fame and fortune, and a culture that believes in the survival of the fittest, people honor and admire those who exalt themselves and fight for their own success. People who make sacrifices to humbly serve others usually don't get much favor from the world. But this is what the Lord requires of Christians. (2:1-4)
- We need examples of humility and self-sacrifice. Verses 5-11 give us the ultimate example we should imitate—Christ; verses 17-18 are Paul's example of imitating Christ; verses 19-24 are Timothy's example; and verses 25-30 are Epaphroditus' example. Paul is an apostle; Timothy is a church leader; but Epaphroditus is just an ordinary brother in the Lord—an example you can follow!

### Outline:

Topic: Examples of Christlikeness (Part 2)

1. The Person of Epaphroditus (v 25)
2. The Affection of Epaphroditus (vv 26-28)
3. The Devotion of Epaphroditus (vv 29-30)

### **The Person of Epaphroditus (v 25)**

- "Epaphroditus": The name originates in the idol worship of Greek mythology, reflecting a pagan cultural background of Epaphroditus. He grew up in an environment of idol worship, and his parents named him after an idol.

**1 Thessalonians 1:9** "...and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God."

- "My brother": not an empty spiritual jargon, but out of genuine, deep personal bond between Paul and Epaphroditus. Jesus says if anyone has left everything for His sake, he will receive a hundred times, even now in this present age, including the closest family relationships such as brothers, sisters, mothers, and children (Mark 10:29-30), for though it is said that "blood is thicker than water", for Christians, "Spirit is thicker than blood".

"Fellow worker": One step further than "brother". Not only are they brothers, but they work hard together for the Gospel.

- “fellow soldier” : We often say “co-workers”, but we don’t often say “fellow soldiers”. But the essence of church ministry is actually a spiritual war. Our work is not an easy, decent-looking job, but to fight for precious souls against the forces of Satan!

**2 Corinthians 10:3-5** “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

- “Your messenger”: He is the messenger of the church, sent on a mission to serve the needs of Paul in prison. It shows that he is a trusted brother in the church. He must’ve shown an example of godly character in his church life.
- “minister to my need”: The original reads "your minister, for my needs," emphasizing that Epaphroditus is a servant/minister of the church. He serves my needs as an act of serving you. He’s all about your needs and my needs. He does not seek his own needs at all.

### **The Affection of Epaphroditus (vv 26-28)**

- “because he was longing for you all”: This is the reason why Paul sent him back. Behind his faithful service is a loving heart. "Long for" is a strong emotion, even as newborn babies long for milk (1 Peter 2:2).

“And was distressed”: Another very emotional word. He was completely overwhelmed by sadness, to a point of almost passing out. It is used in Matthew 26:37 to describe the feeling of Jesus being "distressed" in the Garden of Gethsemane.

- “because you had heard that he was sick”: Not because of his own sickness, but because you had heard it, which must have made you so sad and concerned about him, and that made him so sad and concerned about you. He wasn’t thinking about himself but about you.

When was the last time you were worried because someone was worried about you? When was the last time you felt sorry for your brothers and sisters because they were sorry for you? You may not have been seriously ill, but more serious than physical sickness is the sickness of the soul, and more worrisome than sickness is sin! When you follow your selfish desires and live in sin, do you ever think about the worries you may bring to your brothers and sisters? If you care enough about your brothers and sisters, you will not sin carelessly just to satisfy your own selfish desires without even thinking about how much sorrow it will bring to the brothers and sisters who love you.

- “sick”: The original text is "weak", which is not necessarily caused by illnesses, but can also refer to physical weakness caused by hard work, suffering, or various other reasons. Maybe he contracted some kind of disease; or maybe it was weakness caused by the long hard trip or

natural hazards or human dangers such as religious or political persecution, etc. These are the dangers missionaries often face.

- “God had mercy on him”: Paul doesn’t say “God healed him”, for he wants to emphasize God's mercy, not His healing power. The meaning of mercy is that one can’t bear to see others suffer and makes every effort to help them out of their suffering.

**Theological footnote:** It's often said: "Grace is receiving the gift you don't deserve; mercy is not receiving the punishment you do deserve." This is true, but it’s a man-centered way to understand it. Grace and mercy are attributes of God, and the focus is not on what people get, but on what kind of God He is! Grace is God’s willingness to give, and mercy is God’s heart of compassion. They are the essence of God’s character.

Healing shows God's mercy. Every time you get sick and recover instead of dropping dead, it is all because of God’s grace and mercy. Furthermore, your every heartbeat and every breath is because of God's grace and mercy, which you don't deserve at all.

- “but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow”: Paul saw God's abundant mercy in healing Epaphroditus. There is enough for Paul to be sorrowful, and the death of Epaphroditus would certainly add to it. But his sorrow would be very different from that of unbelievers in the face of death (cf. 1:21-26; 1 Thessalonians. 4:13-14; 2 Corinthians. 6:10).
- “Therefore, I have sent him all the more eagerly”: “All the more” implies a comparison, more eagerly than in verse 25. There, the reason why Paul wanted to send him back is “because he was longing for you all and was distressed”, and here, the reason for sending him back more eagerly is that he saw God’s mercy, “so that when you see him again you may rejoice”. Not just the joy of their brother being well, but the joy of seeing God’s mercy and knowing God more deeply through experiencing! Knowing God is the source of eternal joy for Christians!
- “I may be less concerned about you”: my joy is bound tightly to your joy. When you are concerned for him, I am concerned for you. When you rejoice to see him, I’ll have joy too. So much sincere brotherly love is shown in this one little incident!

**Philippians 2:4** “do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

### **The Devotion of Epaphroditus (vv 29-30)**

- “came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life”: Epaphroditus is so devoted to serving the Lord that he is willing to risk his own life. He’s not concerned about his own life. His mind is set on finishing the work entrusted to him.

"Risking" literally means "tossing", like throwing dice, and it is a metaphor for risking something for a certain goal. Epaphroditus risked his life to serve. His suffering wasn’t a surprise. He had counted the cost: the danger of a long journey, the danger of religious

persecution, plus, he went to serve a prisoner who was regarded as a public threat to the society.

Serving Christ always involves risk and cost, and the Lord Jesus wants us to count the cost to see if we are really willing to follow Him. Some people only serve the Lord when there is no risk. If it has any potential to hurt my property, health, or safety, may the Lord send someone else.

- “to complete what was deficient in your service to me”: The deficiency is not due to obligation but out of your love for me, that you want to serve me more generously (cf. 4:10).

What Epaphroditus risked his life to do was to accomplish your ministry, to meet my needs, and to do the work of Christ. He is concerned about the things of you, of me, and of Christ. Who is he not concerned about at all? Himself. He doesn't even care about his life. His service, his love, and his devotion are examples for you and me to follow.