

6. Learning How God Works Through Other Christians

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand how to let God complete His will in our lives and through our lives. We saw that Christ carried out the will of the Father and that the Father has called Christ Lord. We also saw that the Lord works in each of our lives as Christians to equip us to carry out His will and learn to share the Gospel with those who have not placed their faith in Christ. In our topic today, we are going to see how Paul shared with the Philippians the way that God was working through the lives of other Christians.

Philippians 2:19-21 says, “But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.” First, Paul began by talking about the way that the Lord had worked in the life of Timothy. Timothy had traveled with Paul to many different cities. As a result, he knew many of the Christians in those cities. In addition, we see that Timothy had developed a love like Paul for these Christians. Paul said that he would soon send Timothy to Philippi so that Timothy could give him a report about the way that the Lord was working in the lives of the Philippian Christians.

We learn several things about the character of Timothy. The word that is translated “like-minded” in this verse means *having the same soul or one-souled*. The soul is the mind, emotions and will. As a result, Paul was saying that Timothy had the same thoughts, emotions and desires for the Philippians that Paul had. 1 Corinthians 4:17 says, “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” Paul knew the concern that Timothy had for the Christians in every city. Paul knew that Timothy had a genuine concern for these Christians.

In contrast, Paul said that others had a different attitude. Paul said that many were seeking things that would benefit themselves instead of the things that would further the work of the Lord. Paul later wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:15, “This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.” Here, we see two individuals mentioned who were more concerned about protecting their own lives than they were about serving the Lord. Since Paul uses the word “all”, it means that there were also others who had left Paul to protect their own lives.

Philippians 2:22-24 goes on to describe Timothy further when it says, “But you know his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.” Paul said that the Philippians knew the proven character of Timothy. The word that is translated “proven character” means *one whose character had been tested and had stood the test*. Paul explained in Romans 5:3-4 how such proven character develops when those verses say, “And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Here, we see that godly character is developed through tribulation and perseverance. Endurance through very difficult problems is

one of the key things that the Lord uses in our lives to develop proven character.

In addition to proven character, Paul said that Timothy had also served with him in the Gospel as a son does with a father. In 1 Timothy 1:2 Paul wrote, “To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, *and* peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.” In 1 Corinthians 4:17 quoted in the third paragraph, we see that Paul calls Timothy his beloved and faithful son in the Lord. In 2 Timothy 1:2 (KJV), Paul calls him “my dearly beloved son”. Paul knew that he could always count on his spiritual son, Timothy. They had faithfully served the Lord together for many years.

Paul also said that he hoped to send Timothy in the near future as soon as he knew what was going to happen in his own life. Paul had appealed his case to the Roman emperor. As a result, Acts 28:30-31 says, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” Paul knew that the Roman emperor would soon make a decision on his appeal. At that time, Paul expected to be released and then he planned to send Timothy to Philippi to visit the Christians in that city. Paul also hoped that once he was released by the Roman emperor, he would also be able to come to Philippi to visit the Christians there one more time and encourage them in their faith.

However, Paul also had another concern. The church at Philippi had sent Epaphroditus to Rome to help Paul while he was imprisoned. While there, Epaphroditus had become very sick. As a result, Paul had sent him to take this letter to Philippi. Philippians 2:25-28 says, “Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.” Here, we see that the Lord had worked through the life of Epaphroditus and he had been a great help to Paul for a period of time.

Paul teaches us a great lesson about leadership by the titles that he gave to Epaphroditus. Paul called him my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier. Here, we see that Paul followed the example of Christ and he had helped Epaphroditus become a full partner in ministry. In John 20:17, Christ told Mary, “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”’” In John 15:15, Christ had changed the status of the disciples from servants to friends; here, he calls them his brethren. In the same way, Paul now called Epaphroditus his brother or partner.

Paul also called Epaphroditus his fellow worker. Twelve different times, Paul uses the word translated “fellow worker” to describe those who ministered with him. One example is found in Romans 16:3, where we read, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.” This was a couple that had ministered with Paul in Corinth, then in Ephesus and who had gone to Rome where they started a church in their house. Paul also used the word “fellow soldier” to

describe Epaphroditus. Paul used both of these words in Philemon 1:1-2 where we read, “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy *our* brother, To Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.” Paul was continually recognizing others as full partners in ministry.

The church at Philippi had sent Epaphroditus to Rome to help Paul with the various needs that he had. Philippians 4:18 tells us, “Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” Epaphroditus had originally brought a money gift from the Philippians and then had stayed to assist and help Paul. However, while in Rome he had become very sick. In fact, he had nearly died.

Paul said that God had shown mercy both to Epaphroditus and to Paul by causing him to recover from his illness. Paul recognized that he was longing for his fellow Christians in Philippi and became distressed when they heard that he was sick. As a result, that was the reason that Paul decided to send him back to Philippi with this letter after he recovered. Paul said that it would have greatly increased his sorrow if Epaphroditus had died while he was in Rome. As a result, Paul wanted to send him back to Philippi so that the Christians in Philippi would be able to see how God had shown mercy to both of them. As a result, Paul quickly sent him back to Philippi once he had fully recovered. He knew this would bring great joy to the Philippians when they saw how the Lord had worked in the life of Epaphroditus.

As a result, Paul also said in Philippians 2:29-30, “Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.” Here, we see that Paul told how the church at Philippi should respond to Epaphroditus and others like him. The word that is translated “receive” means *to accept and take to yourself*. The word is used in Romans 16:1-2, where we read, “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.” Here, we see that we are to accept and take to ourselves those who have ministered faithfully for the Lord in other places. They were to receive Epaphroditus back with great joy.

The word that is translated “esteem” means *to hold in honor*. We are also to honor and respect those who have faithfully served the Lord. Here, we are reminded that Epaphroditus nearly died in order to serve the Lord faithfully. That happened because he had chosen to faithfully serve the Lord by assisting Paul. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to serve the Lord faithfully because the Lord wants to work through their lives also. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how God works through other Christians.