

"Paul's Letter to the Philippians — 'Epaphroditus: The Fourth Witness of the Mind of Christ is Compelling'"

Review:

Some key verses we have already considered here in this chapter are these:

Phil. 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . . ***This is a very great exhortation indeed and immediately leads here in this letter to the Philippians to some very practical applications. If we have the mind of Christ, we will also be strongly motivated to fulfill these additional principles:***

Phil. 2:12-16

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**

13 **For it is God which worketh** in you both to will and to do of [his] good pleasure.

14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

15 **That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;**

16 **Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.**

Then Last Time:

- ***Our Rejoicing Together is Always Appropriate (verses 17-18)***
- ***But Our Joy On This Earth Is Often Challenged (verse 19)***
- ***Timothy's Witness of Self-Sacrifice is to be Ours Also (verses 20-22)***
- ***So Take Every Opportunity for Fellowship with the Brethren (verses 23-24)***
- ***Our Rejoicing Together is Always Appropriate Even Though Often Challenged by Circumstances (verses 17-19):***

Phil. 2:17-19

17 Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

18 For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.

- ***Paul's expectation and hope was for the glory of God to be displayed in him! This was stated before in this letter in chapter 1 and verse 20: That "... Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death."***
- ***So Paul's joy was mingled with sorrows and many burdens and that was for him to be expected! We should assume the same, shouldn't we? But how many actually do. The opposite is being taught in so many places today that many are not aware of Paul's teachings in this regard at all. So very sad this is since his message of "grace abounding" in any and all the circumstances of life is not widely known today.***
- ***The bottom line is that sorrows will always be with us but the joy of the Lord SHOULD be dominant and that is the apostle's message here.***
- ***Therefore, the apostle concludes that Timothy's Example of Self-Sacrifice is to be Ours As Well (verses 20-22):***

Phil. 2:20-22

20 For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.

21 For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

22 But **ye know** the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

- ***And let's not miss the apostle's reference to Timothy here as an example for the believers. His great sacrifice on for Paul in Rome was just what they would have expected since they knew his sacrificial life among them all there in Philippi. He surely also had the "mind" of our Lord Jesus as they were also encouraged to know for themselves.***
- ***So Take Every Opportunity for Fellowship with the Brethren (verses 23-24):***

Phil. 2:23-24

23 Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.

24 But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.

- ***So his confidence was that the expected delay in sending Timothy to them (due to uncertainty concerning his own imprisonment and***

Caesar's ruling) would be met with a double portion of blessing as he hoped to come himself for shared and mutual fellowship. We do not know if that hope was met or not. But his confidence would be met in many case.

Today's Scripture:

Phil. 2:25-30

25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

26 For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.

27 For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

28 I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.

29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation:

30 Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

Today's Outline (And this is all about Epaphroditus, the Fourth Witness!):

- ***The Fourth Witness: His Identity and Qualifications Revealed (verse 25)***
- ***The Fourth Witness: His Deep Concern Highlighted (verses 26-27)***
- ***The Fourth Witness: His Unique Value Explained (verse 28)***
- ***The Fourth Witness: His Witness Promoted (verses 29-30)***

I. The Fourth Witness: His Identity and Qualifications Revealed (verse 25):

- ***[READ] Phil. 2:25*** “Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants”:
 - “brother”: ***A brother in the faith.***
 - “companion”: ***A co-worker, meaning in the service of the Lord.***
 - “fellow soldier”: ***Literally a “co” or “fellow” “soldier” in the fullest sense. This is often used exactly of that, warfare in the military sense.***
 - “but your messenger”: ***Your “apostle” or “sent one”, literally!***
 - “he that ministered to my wants”: ***“Wants” here but translated “needs” elsewhere, as in Phil. 4:19*** “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

2 Tim. 2:3-4

3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of [this] life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

- ***The “fourth witness”: Take note that we have already considered three “witnesss” here in this letter to the Philippians believers, Christ himself, Paul, and Timothy. This is the fourth and the last. And expect that this one might be especially meaningful for the Philippian church, for Epaphroditus was their own, and dearly beloved.***

II. The Fourth Witness: His Deep Concern Highlighted (verses 26-27):

- ***[READ] Phil. 2:26-27*** “For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow”:
 - ***This is not explained, only stated to be a fact. A letter to the Philippians had revealed what had happened to Epaphroditus. This is a very strong statement of how these things work (a feedback loop, maybe several layers)***
 - ***See also verse 30 here:*** “Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me”. ***There are several possibilities here:***
 - ***Epaphroditus was sent from Philippi with the gift of support that had been promised to Paul apparently some time before. He nearly had sacrificed his life in doing this, either in travel, which was always dangerous, or after arriving in Rome. Perhaps he had been arrested, we do not know.***
 - ***But verse 30 seems to demand the former interpretation, that he had worked himself “sick” to provide what Paul needed. This was over and above what the gift was because as it turned out the Philippian’s gift was not enough to meet Paul’s needs and he had worked to complete the gift or to make up***

what was lacking. Remember what the conditions in ancient prisons were usually like.

III. The Fourth Witness: His Unique Value Explained (verse 28):

- ***[READ] Phil. 2:28*** “I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful”:
- ***Verse 2 should be remembered here:*** “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind.”
For this to be honored it was necessary that this verse here, verse 28 be received correctly. What does this mean?
 - ***In this way Paul illustrates the kind of joy required. The focus was now on their joy which required likemindedness with Paul (and with Christ and, we may add, Timothy). All four witnesses come to play here now as the focus is on them.***
 - ***“Joy”:*** Found 5 times here in this letter — his is the goal of it all. All of life, due to the abundant grace of God though our Lord Jesus Christ, is to be joyful indeed, even during our many times of sacrifice and suffering. Even then.
 - ***“Minded”, “likeminded”:*** 11 times in this letter — this is the most important focus in the letter. It dominates the entire teaching here.
 - ***So it is the joy of the Lord which requires his “mind” as already explained. With this mind the Philippians would still have joy even though their dearly beloved one Epaphroditus had suffered greatly. For hadn’t Christ himself suffered for them? And what about Paul? And Timothy? And now Epaphroditus himself. It was to be expected:***
 - ***Phil. 1:29-30***
29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;
30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear [to be] in me.
 - ***2 Tim. 3:12*** - “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”)

- ***Do not fail to take note of the marvelous “reciprocation” illustrated here:*** “I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful”. ***This must have been so humbling to these Philippians. My sorrow now is for your joy later and your joy then will be mine as well. And so the one is used by the Lord for the sake of the other. This all began, as the apostle here writes, with the Lord himself in heaven’s glory, as we have seen.***
 - ***Christ’s example of self-sacrifice — the greatest of all. His mind-set in leaving heaven’s glory is our example indeed.***
 - ***But Christ’s sacrifice and story will be met with joy fully in God’s good timing and was met with joy in his glorious resurrection (“the joy set before him”, Heb. 12:2, So was Paul’s (see chapter 2 and verses 17 & 18). His witness to abounding joy in service is to be our example. And so we are to follow or imitate him, are we not?***
 - ***Paul’s response to Christ’s great sacrifice was his own great sacrifice for the church. This is the second witness to Christ’s mindset, you will recall). The mind of Christ was at the heart of all of that, of course, and that is the message of this letter.***
 - ***Timothy’s sacrifices (the third witness) are also highlighted here since they were also great indeed.***
 - ***And now we see the fourth witness to the mind of Christ, the sacrifices of Epaphroditus highlighted here. Epaphroditus nearly died for Paul’s benefit and for the benefit of the Philippians believers.***
 - ***But though verses 26-28 indicate a complication to the self-sacrifice of Epaphroditus as far as the Philippians are concerned, Paul writes here that it will be well in the end — if the Philippians response to this letter as he hopes.***
 - ***What about us? Well, what about us? How will we respond?***

For each these witnesses all of life was seen as a part of the work of God with really no exceptions. It was all therefore to be “enjoyed”, whether good or ill (from our so limited

perspective). Are we overwhelmed by the world and our many enemies or are we victorious over them? These are large and important questions indeed, are they not?

- *Consider the witness of Christ. Consider Paul. Consider Timothy. And, now consider Epaphroditus. Does it make a difference?*

IV. The Fourth Witness: His Witness Promoted (verses 29-30):

- **[READ] Phil. 2:29-30** “Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation. Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me”:
 - **“all gladness”:** Joy! Guilt could dominate. Paul suggests in these kind, loving, and powerful words that it must not. Joy unspeakable and full of glory is what the Lord would have instead.
 - **“reputation”:** Dear, precious, of high value. So be it!
- **The words found here in verse 30 have caused some confusion among commentators though:** “Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me”:
 - **What might this be referring to: There are several possibilities:**
 - **The witness of Epaphroditus for the Philippians specifically but also for us is simply this: He had the mind of Christ regarding others and was willing to sacrifice everything dear for their sake.**
 - **The facts must not be ignored or minimized. Paul here does underscore the central item underlying all of this: the promise made by the Philippine believers and their fulfillment of that promise. They had somehow failed but that failure was overshadowed but God’s abundant grace and his working in each of them. He ends this section with this exhortation, that they would honor their own as dear and precious and not let their failure**

and guilt cloud that fact that God's grace had overcome their failure and sin.

Conclusions and Application:

- ***Finally, today, by way of exhortation, Paul teaches in this letter how we are to live life on the higher plane as illustrated here by these four witnesses.***

Well, are we? Is all of life seen in that light? Do we see even our challenges as part of the work of God under grace and therefore as the sufficiency of God's grace working itself out? Do we?

[READ] Phil. 4:18-19

18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things [which were sent] from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.