

Paul's letter to the Philippians



Models of selfless service

Philippians 2:12-30



Steve Lewis

www.SpiritAndTruth.org

2:12 ~ Work out your salvation

- “**so then**” (*hōste*) ~ “consequently,” in light of Christ’s example of selfless sacrifice for others here is what you should do.
- The Philippians had a consistent history of “**obeying**” (*hupakouō*) whether Paul was present or not, so he expected obedience to this command, too.
- “**work out** your salvation” (*katergazomai*, ^{present tense} imperative) ~ They are to constantly put their faith into practice so that others will see the results in the fruit of their lives. This aspect of “**salvation**” (*sanctification*) involves growing spiritually and being conformed to the character of Christ (Rom 8:29).
- “**fear** (*phobos*) and **trembling** (*tromos*)” ~ reverential respect for a holy God, with a sense of concern or anxiety about measuring up to God’s standards, given our current condition as fallen human beings.

2:13 ~ God's work within the believer

- God is fully aware of our fallen condition and has provided help. He Himself is “**at work**” (*energeō*) within believers. Their obedience is the result of sensitivity to the leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit as He works from within to help them be conformed to the character of Christ.
- “**to will**” (*thelō*) ~ to choose, desire, prefer, or be inclined toward. This pictures a believer's newfound sensitivity to the leading and insight that the Holy Spirit provides.
- “**to work**” (*energeō*) ~ pictures their ability to work in tandem or in cooperation with God's “**work**” within them.
- The Holy Spirit is within (even if we do not *feel* Him). We must believe what God says by acknowledging His presence and cooperating with Him by choosing to follow His leading.

2:14-15a ~ Examples of selfish behavior

- Because God Himself provides the desire and power to live in a way that pleases Him, believers can cooperate with Him by facing each situation without “**grumbling**” (*goggusmos*) ~ muttering or talking in hushed tones to complain or express sullen discontent, or “**disputing**” (*dialogismos*) ~ outspoken public argument with a desire to triumph over others in verbal combat. Paul condemns these behaviors as expressions of “**selfish ambition**” (1:17), “**selfishness**,” and “**empty conceit**” (2:3).
- Grumbling or disputing will bring blame and reproach upon believers. But God desires that believers are viewed as “**blameless**” (*amemptos*, “without defect”), “**innocent**” (*akeraios*, “unmixed with evil”), and “**above reproach**” (*amōmos*, “without blemish or fault”).

2:15b-16 ~ Believers' behavior should be visibly different

- Even though we have no control over the perceptions of others, we should live in a way that any reasonable onlooker would view a believer's character as Christ-like. Believers live **"in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,"** so any righteous behavior should be plainly obvious. Against this dark background, believers are meant **"to continually shine"** (*phainō*, ^{present}_{tense}) **"as lights in the world,"** being different from those in the sin-darkened domain. **"holding fast"** (*epechō*) ~ keeping a firm grasp on the **"word of life,"** consisting of the truths of God's Word.
- Paul is thinking ahead to **"the day of Christ"** when he will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). Their behavior will prove that he **"did not run in vain nor toil in vain"** in his commission from Jesus.

2:17-18 ~ Paul's own example of selfless service

- Paul briefly mentioned his own example of selfless service to the Philippians.
- **“poured out as a drink offering”** ~ illustration from the Old Testament (Gen 35:14; Num 15:1-10). Viewing the Philippians as an offering to God, Paul is willing to have his life serve as the drink offering that completes their sacrifice.
- Even if his court case resulted in his execution for the sake of the gospel, he will **“rejoice and share my joy with you all.”** He also urges them to **“rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.”**



2:19 ~ Timothy's example of selfless service (19-24)

- This is the same “**hope**” or “earnest expectation” that Paul expressed in 1:20-26. Paul had made a plan, but he always held his plans in open hands to allow for God’s leading.
- He would send Timothy to Philippi “**shortly**” (*tacheōs*) ~ he will give an idea of the timing of Timothy’s visit in 2:23.
- Paul’s purpose for sending Timothy was “**so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.**” Paul hoped to have his spirits lifted (*eupsucheō*) when he “**learned**” (*ginōskō*, ^{aorist}_{tense}) or gained definite knowledge, literally of “the [things] concerning you.” There were several times when Paul wanted to know the true state of affairs in a particular church, and he routinely sent his trusted associate Timothy to find out.

2:20 ~ Timothy's natural concern for others

- Paul had “**no one else**” like Timothy. His specific combination of qualities and attributes was absolutely unique and valuable to Paul.
- “**kindred spirit**” (*isopsuchos*) ~ a rare word, literally, “equality of soul.” Timothy’s soul could be characterized as being almost the equal of Paul’s own, and that was a rare quality indeed.
- Timothy had a natural capacity to be concerned for the welfare of others. “**genuinely**” (*gnēsiōs*) ~ describes Timothy’s legitimate or sincere concern for the other person. His “**concern**” (*merimnaō*) consisted of heart-felt interest, bordering on anxiety or worry at times. Timothy’s unselfish focus on other people appears to be a God-given tendency that made him exceptionally effective in ministry.

2:21-22 ~ Timothy's proven trustworthiness

- Apparently Timothy was the only one of Paul's trusted companions who was available to travel to Philippi in order to achieve Paul's objective for learning the true spiritual status of the church.
- Beyond his inner circle of trusted ministry co-workers, Paul had to say, **"they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus."**
- The Philippians **"know"** (*ginōskō*) Timothy because he had been present from the beginning when they first heard the gospel. They know his **"proven worth"** (*dokimē*) ~ to be approved only after rigorous testing and evaluation.
- Timothy faithfully **"served"** (*douleuō*) alongside Paul in the ministry of the gospel, as a son with his father.

2:23-24 ~ The timing of Timothy's mission

- Paul was waiting to see how things would turn out for him after the verdict in his legal case (1:19-26).
- **“as soon as I see”** (*aphoraō*) ~ to fix the eyes on something or to see the outcome of something. After he knew the outcome of his case, he intended to send Timothy to them **“immediately”** (*exautēs*) ~ “from that hour” or right away. Instead of sending Timothy to deliver this letter, he will only send Timothy when he knows the final decision in his case.
- Paul **“trusts”** (*peithō*) or is convinced that he himself might also be able to visit them afterward. Paul was still trusting in the Lord that he would be acquitted and then travel to Philippi **“shortly.”**

2:25 ~ Epaphroditus' example of selfless service (25-30)

- Paul's decision to return Epaphroditus to them was primarily out of concern for them and their needs, rather than his own.
- **"brother"** ~ members together in the family of God.
- **"fellow worker"** (*sunergos*) ~ Paul considered Epaphroditus to be a co-laborer and companion in ministry, rather than simply viewing him as a courier from Philippi.
- **"fellow soldier"** (*sustratiōtēs*) ~ a military term picturing someone who fought side by side in conflicts, labors, or combat for the cause of Christ. The implication is that Epaphroditus was actively engaged with Paul in advancing the gospel during his time in Rome.
- **"your messenger and minister to my need"** ~ the Philippians intended for Epaphroditus to assist Paul with his needs in ministry.

2:26-27 ~ Paul's reason for sending Epaphroditus home

- **“he was longing”** (*epipotheō*) ~ an intensified form of the Greek word *potheō* which means to yearn for or desire greatly. Epaphroditus was **“distressed”** (*adēmoneō*) ~ troubled, dispirited, full of sorrow, or in extreme anguish, because the Philippians had heard that he was sick.
- **“sick to the point of death”** (*paraplēsios*) ~ “directly alongside” or very near death. His illness was so severe that Paul regarded his recovery as an act of God ~ **“God had mercy on him.”** God may have providentially arranged for doctor Luke to be in Rome so that he could attend to Epaphroditus during his illness (Col 4:10).
- **“but also on me”** ~ His recovery also spared Paul from **“sorrow upon sorrow.”** This phrase pictures wave upon wave of sorrow.

2:28 ~ Paul's decision for his return

- **“Therefore”** ~ as a result of all of these circumstances, Paul was sending Epaphroditus home. Paul used the phrase **“all the more eagerly”** (*spoudaioterōs*) which typically means more speedily or sooner than otherwise planned. The Philippians may have intended for Epaphroditus to remain with Paul for a longer period of time. They may have expressed subtle disappointment in him for not completing his original assignment. But here Paul took full responsibility for sending him home.
- Their reunion would cause the Philippians to **“rejoice”** (*chairō*), and it would relieve Paul's own anxiety. **“less concerned”** (*alupoteros*) ~ “free from sorrow” corresponds to his mention of **“sorrow”** in 2:27. Returning Epaphroditus to them would result in one less concern for Paul.

2:29-30 ~ Paul's command for welcoming him home

- Paul gave the Philippians a command for how to welcome him. Because of his example of selfless service on their behalf, they were to joyfully **“receive,”** accept, and respect Epaphroditus in the Lord. **“high regard”** (*entimos*) ~ “honored, prized, precious, esteemed, or valued.” Paul wanted to ensure that Epaphroditus returned home with a glowing testimonial of his service for Christ.
- This is nothing more than is due to someone who was **“risking his life”** and **“came close to death for the work of Christ.”** Epaphroditus was doing work that they could not do themselves. **“deficient”** (*husterēma*) ~ literally, “what is left behind” or what remains to be done. Epaphroditus became an example of regarding the needs of others as more important than his own (2:3).