

Following Jesus

Philippians 2:17-30

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

“Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did”

1 John 2:6, NIV

One can't help but read the above statement and wonder if it is truly possible to live one's life worthy of the Gospel message (1:27)? Is Paul really suggesting that it is possible to throw off the chains of sin that so easily entangle and become blameless and pure children of God (1:14)? While Paul believed this was possible for the “crooked” generation of his day surely, he was not suggesting that we as modern-day Christians can dethrone the “god of self,” give up our love for the things of this world and focus on Jesus alone? After all, whom amongst us does not struggle to find even a glimmer of truth amongst the sea of competing beliefs that forever surround us? Without clearly seeing the footsteps of Jesus how can one ever truly follow them? While we are painfully aware that our “normal” Christian walk is far from meeting God's expectation for us, is not the goal of imitating He who emptied Himself, never committed a sin, and sacrificed His life for the many so lofty a goal that it depresses those who are trying run the race to win crowns that are at best a blur and at worst seen as unattainable? In the following sermon we are going to examine the lives of Jesus, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus in order to prove that it is not only possible, but a given for those who lead Spirit filled lives to follow in the steps of their Master!

Christ – The Ultimate Example and Enabler of Holiness

Following the footsteps of Jesus is no easy task! Is it possible to get the Gospel message to penetrate the calloused hearts of the deaf, blind and foolish of this world (Matthew 13:15)



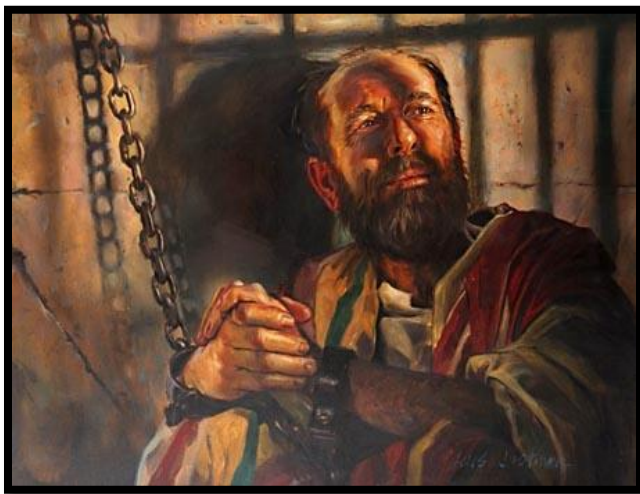
when the only way to accomplish this is through imitating the miracles of Paul (1 Corinthians 2:4) or Jesus so that this unbelieving generation might see God's rule over both things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16)? How can one truly know God's will or the truth concerning Him when the competing voices of this age have deafened and influenced us to the extent that all that can be heard is “woe to you hypocrites!” Surely those who are sinking fast in the quicksand of “self-absorption” are unlikely to ever become foreigners of this world (Hebrews 11:13-15), living sacrifices (Romans 12:1) fully devoted to paying any cost to serve the Creator and

sustainer of all life? Is it possible to get the courage to be like Jesus and spread the Gospel even in the face of persecution from the pretenders and nonbelievers of the faith? Yes, we can wear the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) on our hearts and minds¹ but not through our own might but through the power of the Spirit whom raised Christ physically and us spiritual from the dead (Romans 8:11). Through the Spirit death to self-absorption can be a reality and our minds can be transformed to not only know but obey the truth concerning God (1 John 5:3) and through the very same Spirit YES we can even perform miracles greater than Jesus did while on this earth (John 14:12-14)! The remainder of this sermon is going to examine the roles of Apostle Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus as leader, coworker and helper to demonstrate that anyone can imitate Jesus when they are willing to seek and obey His voice!

Apostle Paul – the Leader Role

¹⁷But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Imagine sitting in a prison not knowing if you would live or die and then telling the church that their faith was “substantial and valuable enough” to rejoice and declare that you had run the race well!² Even though Paul was warned that he would suffer greatly for the name of Christ I wonder if he had any idea that he would be flogged, five times receive from the Jews



forty lashes minus one, beaten with rods, pelted with stones, three times shipwrecked and constantly in danger of losing his life from bandits, fellow Jews and Gentiles (2 Corinthians 11:16-33)? And yet instead of letting his dire circumstances crush his soul (2 Corinthians 4:8-12) or make him bitter he chose to expend every ounce of energy he had³ left to rejoice in the faith of the Philippians, even in the face of his likely martyrdom.⁴ Paul did not rejoice in “the act of martyrdom itself, but in the possibility of being one with Christ in *being pouring out* as Christ *emptied*

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, [*Morning and Evening: Daily Readings*](#) (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1896).

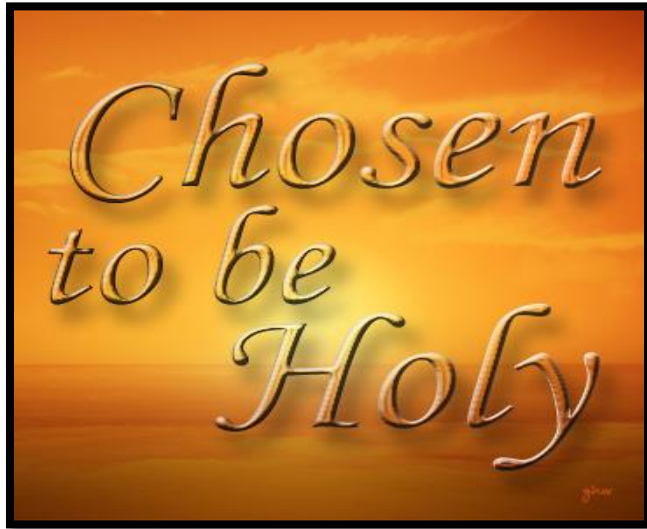
² James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 154.

³ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 187.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 154.

himself to be obedient unto death on a cross.”⁵ This should not come as a surprise considering his prior words in the opening of his letter : “to live is Christ and to die is gain” (1:21-26).

While we are not all called to be missionaries or leaders as fierce in service as Apostle Paul, do we not share the same calling to faithfully listen and obey God’s will for our lives? With just a glimpse of God’s love, wisdom, understanding, holiness and the compassion of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross;⁶ one can easily be overwhelmed by such lofty standards



and become content to live a comfortable and fruitless life! And yet in midst of living one’s selfish life Apostle Peter’s words ring loud and true: “do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance but just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do” (1:14-16)! While one cannot live a sinless life (1 John 1:10) one can certainly live a righteous one with the help of the Holy Spirit. Apostle Paul certainly did not deny himself and take up all those sacrificial crosses of servanthood without divine help! Based on his human effort alone the best Paul could accomplish was to become the chief of all sinners (1

Timothy 1:15) and Pharisees (Philippians 3:5) but the moment he made Jesus his Lord the fruits of the Spirit poured out in an abundance as he stored riches and crowns in heaven (1 Corinthians 9:25). While not everyone is called to have an official leadership position (1 Corinthians 12) all are called to influence others by living holy lives. To not believe this is possible is to deny the sovereign power of God to rule over all things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16)!

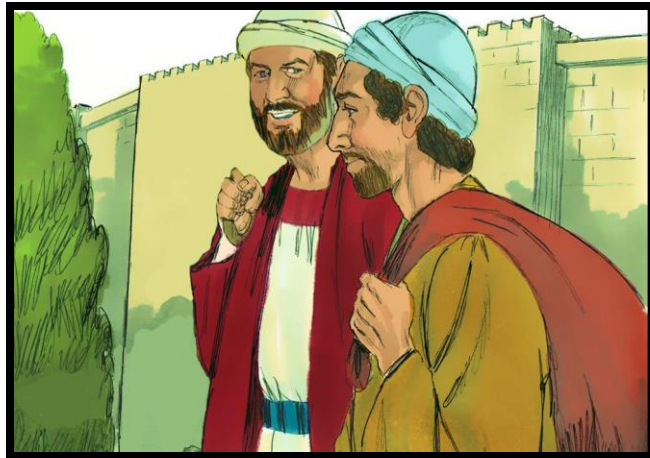
Timothy – the Co-Worker Role

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.

⁵ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 188.

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 153.

Paul had great praise for the young man Timothy whom often accompanied him on missionary journeys.⁷ What impressed Paul the most about Timothy was that their union in



Christ unified them in heart and purpose⁸ to serve as true shepherds of the flock, caring and protecting the church at Philippi.⁹ Timothy was able to have the same mind and same kindred spirit as Paul because his focus was not on his self-interest but on obeying the will of Jesus Christ!¹⁰ So close was Paul with Timothy that he was seen as a “valid member of his family,”¹¹ his very own son! So, when Paul became concerned for the welfare of the church at Philippi, he could think of no one better suited to shepherd the flock. His “genuine

concern” did not contradict his later command to “not be anxious about anything” (4:6) but was merely a reflection of his desire to keep them focused on and under the protection of Christ.¹² Once Timothy had shepherded them, he was to return to Paul and cheer him up with the anticipated good news of their faithful living.¹³



If we are to fulfill the command to “live as Jesus did” our focus must shift from serving the false “god of self” to the true and only God, our Creator! “Our churches are filled with commotion and emotion but there is little devotion, that is, devotion to Christ.”¹⁴ To successfully serve inside of God’s kingdom is not a function of effort but of obedience. The ruler of the kingdom of air (Ephesians 2:2) knows the evil desires of our hearts can be used to keep us focused and in

⁷ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 154.

⁸ F. F. Bruce, [*Philippians*](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 91.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 154.

¹⁰ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 194.

¹¹ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 194.

¹² G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 195.

¹³ Ben Witherington III, [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 173.

¹⁴ Roger Ellsworth, [*Opening up Philippians*](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 50.

love with the things of this world (James 1:14). The more money, fame and power one strives to obtain the less time and commitment left to serve the one, true Master, Jesus Christ. God will not accept divided loyalty (1 John 2:15-17) of those who cling to their hearts of stone, He demands that we fulfill the summary of all His commands to love Him and one another (Matthew 22:37-39). God placed eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11) so that we might be constantly reminded that our freedom and independence was given not to indulge in temporary pleasures of sin (1 Corinthians 6:12) but to keep our focus on faithfully serving Him in a kingdom that will never end! We are to consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3) by putting aside our jealousies, misunderstandings, diversities and rebellions and become unified in mind and purpose to love, build up in the faith and point each other to do the will of He whom bought us at a price (1 Corinthians 6:19)! What an honor it is to be co-workers of Christ, washing the feet of those He sends our way!

Epaphroditus – the Helper Role

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 honor 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.

Paul also informed the church at Philippi that he was going to send Epaphroditus to



comfort them. While his name suggests his family were likely “followers of the cult of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and fertility;”¹⁵ that was the past and to Paul he was now a brother, co-worker and fellow soldier who helped spread the Gospel message and attend to his material needs. Since Rome did not provide for the basic needs of their prisoners Paul relied on people like Epaphroditus to physically survive!¹⁶

¹⁵ John Gillman, “[Epaphroditus \(Person\)](#),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 533.

¹⁶ Ben Witherington III, [Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 174.

Either during his trip to Rome¹⁷ or while taking care of Paul's needs in prison¹⁸ Epaphroditus became so ill that Paul became concerned that he was going to die. Paul rejoiced that God cured him for if He had not then Paul would have experienced "sorrow upon sorrow."¹⁹ Since all Epaphroditus could think about when he was ill was the welfare of his brothers and sisters at Philippi,²⁰ Paul informed the church he was sending him to them so that they might see that he is better and not worry. For having a "spirit of laying aside his own comfort for the cause of Christ"²¹ Paul commanded the church to honor Epaphroditus and others with the same spirit.

If the church is to walk in the footsteps of Christ, every member must fulfil their Spirit-given role. To the church of Corinth Paul stated a profound truth: Christians have been baptized by one Spirit to form one unified but diversified body. A church that flourishes is one whose



members know and use their Spirit-given gifts to perform the divine role(s) assigned to them. Since everyone cannot be a preacher, teacher, miracle worker, healer, helper or one who talks in tongues; seek to run the race well by fulfilling the divine role God has assigned to you. Just because the field is ripe and the workers few does not grant anyone the right to fulfill any role other than the one God has given to them. When faced with a shortage of workers the church is to "ask the Lord of the harvest to send them workers" whom are most likely sitting comfortably in their seats. Honor those who know and work in their gifting (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13) so that no one

single role will be coveted and sought for without the Spirit's leading. And above all if the church truly wants to follow Jesus then her members must learn to stop being so preoccupied with their own security and safety²² and courageously risk everything to please the Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19) and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2)!

¹⁷ John Gillman, "[Epaphroditus \(Person\)](#)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 533.

¹⁸ Roger Ellsworth, [Opening up Philippians](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 52.

¹⁹ Ben Witherington III, [Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 176.

²⁰ Roger Ellsworth, [Opening up Philippians](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 53.

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²² G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 209.