

THREE ROLE MODELS TO IMITATE

2¹⁴Do all things without grumbling and arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a perverse and depraved generation, among whom you shine like stars in the universe, ¹⁶firmly holding the word of life—[and so be] a source of glory for me on the day of Christ, [showing] that I did not run in vain and I did not labor in vain. ¹⁷But if I am poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and offering of your faith, I rejoice—and I rejoice with you all. ¹⁸Likewise, you, too, rejoice, and rejoice with me.

¹⁹I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I, too, may be encouraged when I learn about your state of affairs. ²⁰I have no one else with a heart like him; he will have a genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹All [the others] seek their own interests, not the interests of Jesus Christ. ²²But you know his proven worth, that he served with me for the gospel as a son [serves] his father. ²³Therefore I hope to send him as soon as I know [the outcome of] my [present] situation. ²⁴And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will also come soon.

²⁵But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, who is also your messenger and the one whom you sent to minister to my needs. ²⁶[I am sending him back] since he yearned for all of you and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. ²⁷Indeed, he was sick at the point of death; but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I should not bear sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸Therefore, I have sent him with great urgency, so that, upon seeing him again, you may rejoice and I also may have less sorrow. ²⁹So then, receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold such men in high esteem, ³⁰because for the sake of the work of Christ he came near to death, risking his life in order to supply what was lacking in your ministry to me. (Phil. 2:14-30)

Introduction

He had a reputation for overly aggressive play on the basketball court. He was known for vocally abusing opposing players and officials. He was among the league leaders in having technical fouls assessed against him. With those credentials it was quite appropriate for NBA superstar Charles Barkley to look into the T.V. camera and announce to the world: "I am not a role model." (*Our Daily Bread*, 9/3/94)

In contrast to the many non-role models whose outrageous antics are broadcast by the T.V. media and whose sometimes bizarre life-styles are reported by the news media, we have presented to us here in Philippians chapter two three role models who are worthy of our consideration and imitation. Here before us we have three lives in which the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ is seen. Let us consider these three godly role models; and by the grace of God, let us imitate their examples of Christian living.

I. Imitate Paul in His Willingness to Sacrifice Himself for His Covenant Children (vs. 14-18)

In verse 16 the Apostle Paul refers to his “running” and “laboring;” his strenuous exertion on behalf of these Philippian Christians who were his spiritual children. He put his heart and soul into seeking their spiritual welfare; indeed, he placed their spiritual welfare above his own personal desire. Although he personally desired to depart this present life and be with Christ, he was confident that by continuing on in this life he could still have a fruitful ministry to the church, therefore, he testified, *“Being confident of this, I know that I will remain and continue to remain with you all for your progress and joy in the faith”* (Phil. 1:25.) Do you have the same attitude towards your own (spiritual) children and the same commitment to their spiritual well being as had the Apostle Paul? Consider what he writes to the Corinthian church: *“what I want is not your possessions but you; after all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well”* (2 Cor. 12:14b-15.) Do you have the same desire for your (spiritual) children as had the Apostle Paul for his spiritual children, as he testifies to the Galatian Christians: *“My little children—with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you”* (Gal. 4:19.) Paul here mixes his metaphors, describing himself as undergoing labor pains *“until Christ is formed”* in these Galatian Christians; in other words, until they are conformed to the image of Christ their Savior. Are you willing to confront them with the truth when the occasion requires, as did the Apostle Paul? *“Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?”* (Gal. 4:16.) Even at the risk of losing their favor, Paul was willing to confront these Galatian Christians with the truth when they were seriously straying from the faith of the gospel.

In verse 17 Paul reports the very real possibility of having his life poured out as a libation on behalf of his spiritual children. The imagery is that of a priest preparing a sacrifice upon the altar by pouring out a libation of wine upon the sacrifice itself or around the base of the altar. The “sacrifice” is the Philippians’ faith and the “libation” is the apostle’s own blood. The meaning of the imagery is this: Paul is anticipating the prospect of having to pour out his own life for the sake of these spiritual children and their well-being; and he is more than willing to do so, he even rejoices in the prospect of doing so. What greater investment of his life could he make than to sacrifice it for the spiritual benefit and well being of his spiritual children? What greater investment can we make? What greater service to Christ could be rendered than the giving of our lives for the sake of our (spiritual) children and the furtherance of their salvation? Consider a contemporary example of such sacrificial love:

Dad was a part time pastor without pay. Money was scarce. He cut meat at a grocery store to put food on the table for his family of seven.

There was no money for luxuries, such as a 500-mile trip to Montreal just to watch a daughter sail for Europe to sing with her college choral group. But there he was, down at the ship terminal on the morning of our departure.

I had seen him coming through the crowd. His topcoat was wrinkled, and his eyes were red from an overnight ride on a Greyhound bus. But I knew he was thrilled to be there. I don't remember ever having felt so loved.

I knew that as soon as our ship sailed he would return to the bus station for another eight-hour ride home. There would be no sightseeing, no shopping spree, no dinner out. He had come for his daughter even when he couldn't afford it.

Other fathers could have come. They could have hopped a plane, booked a hotel room, enjoyed the outing. But it seemed that the one who could afford it least gave the most. (*POWER*, 11/19/89)

Let us imitate the Apostle Paul in his willingness to sacrifice himself for his covenant children. The Apostle John writes, "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth*" (3 Jn. 4.) Is this your greatest joy? The Apostle Paul exhorts Christian fathers, "*fathers ... raise [your children] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*" (Eph. 6:4.) Is this your objective and your present ministry? The Apostle Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians of the kind of life he lived before them:

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we conducted ourselves among you who believe. ¹¹You know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹²encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls us into his kingdom and glory. (1 Thess. 2:10-12)

Can the same be said of our lives?

II. Imitate Timothy in His Genuine Commitment to His Christian Brethren (vs. 19-24)

In verse 19 Paul informs the church of his intention to send Timothy to them as his personal envoy, as was his custom. He would send Timothy with the mission of establishing the church: "*We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow-worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith*" (1 Thess. 3:2.) Paul would send Timothy to the churches in order that he might report back on the condition of the church:

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. ⁷Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. (1 Thess. 3:6-7)

The reason Paul has selected Timothy for this work is because Timothy *“will have a genuine concern for your welfare.”* The Greek word (μεριμνάω) here translated, “to be concerned about,” in Matthew 6:25 is translated, “to be anxious.” Timothy had a very deep and personal love for these Christian brethren and a caring involvement in their spiritual lives. Also, the word translate, “genuine” (γνησίως), originally meant, “related by birth;” hence, the meaning is “natural” or “authentic,” as opposed to superficial—such was Timothy’s concern for his Christian brethren. Timothy’s concern for and commitment to fellow Christians is in contrast to the many who *“seek their own interests, not the interests of Jesus Christ;”* (i.e.; they put their own interests and concerns foremost in their thinking and decision-making.)

The apostle reminds the Philippians that Timothy is a man of proven character (vs. 22.) Timothy had accompanied Paul and Silas on their initial visit to Philippi (Acts 16) and had demonstrated himself faithful in the face of opposition and persecution.

Let us imitate Timothy in his genuine commitment to his Christian brethren. Let us do so by standing beside those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. The writer to the Hebrews reminds the Hebrew Christians of their willingness to stand beside those fellow believers who suffered persecution for their commitment to Christ, may we do the same when the occasion requires:

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ³³Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. (Heb. 10:32-34)

Let us imitate Timothy in his genuine commitment to his Christian brethren by giving practical aid to those in need:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no compassion toward him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸My little children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:16-18)

Let us be like Timothy in his genuine commitment to his Christian brethren by demonstrating ourselves to be a true friend and brother. May we prove to be a true Christian friend who exhibits commitment: *“A friend loves at all times; and a brother is born for adversity”* (Prov. 17:17.) May we be a true Christian friend who maintains confidentiality: *“He who goes around as a tale-bearer reveals secrets; but he who has a faithful spirit conceals a matter”* (Prov. 11:13.) May we be a true

Christian friend who, when necessary, speaks the truth in love: *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend”* (Prov. 27:6a.)

III. Imitate Epaphroditus in Rendering Service that is Worthy of Honor (vs. 25-30)

Epaphroditus was a member of the Philippian church whom they had sent out to minister to Paul on their behalf.

He had brought their financial gift to Paul, as the apostle acknowledges: *“I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the things you sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God”* (Phil. 4:18.) After delivering the Philippian church’s gift, he had continued to remain with Paul at Rome to minister to him.

But Paul now finds it necessary to send Epaphroditus back to the Philippians, because *“he yearned for all of you and was distressed”* (vs. 26.) Epaphroditus had become deathly sick while ministering to Paul in his Roman prison. Word of his illness had reached the church back at Philippi, causing great concern for their brother’s condition. The message got back to Epaphroditus at Rome that his Christian brethren back in Philippi were concerned about him, and this in turn caused him to become *“distressed”* about them. The Greek word (ἀκηδεμονέω) translated, *“distressed,”* is the same word used in Matthew 26:37 to describe our Lord’s state of mind and heart in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced the cross of Calvary: *“He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and distressed (ἀκηδεμονέω).”* That word is now applied to Epaphroditus to describe his state of mind as he learns of the Philippians’ concern for him.

Paul exhorts the Philippian church, *“receive [Epaphroditus] in the Lord with all joy, and hold such men in high esteem, ³⁰because for the sake of the work of Christ he came near to death, risking his life”* (vs. 29-30.) The Greek word (παρὰβολεύομαι) translated, “to risk,” was literally a term associated with gambling, meaning here that Epaphroditus put his life at stake for the sake of his ministry to Paul.

Let us imitate Epaphroditus in rendering service that is worthy of honor: by being trustworthy and completely dependable, (as seen from the fact that the Philippian church entrusted their financial gift for Paul into the hands of Epaphroditus); by displaying a servant’s heart; by exhibiting self-forgetting love and concern; and by taking risks for the sake of Christ and His cause.

Conclusion

Here in Philippians chapter two there is set before us three godly role models. We are here confronted with the three-fold challenge: 1) to be willing to sacrifice ourselves for our covenant and spiritual children; 2) to be genuinely committed to our brethren in Christ; and 3) to be someone who is worthy of the church's honor. By the grace of Christ our Savior, and for His glory, let us imitate these three examples of true Christian living.